

the Race, Poverty Environment



the national journal for social and environmental justice

Radio RP&E features podcasts of in-depth interviews and speeches from the movements for racial, economic, and gender justice. Stories with the Radio RP&E icon can be heard online at www.urbanhabitat.org/rpe/radio.

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Work

Regionalism



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Economic Development

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Globalization Comes Home

By B. Jesse Clarke,
Editor

As the U.S. draws closer to becoming a nation with people of color in the majority, it is also moving into an economic and social program of privatization, cuts in social programs and real wages, restrictions on unionization, a focus on investment in export industries, an emphasis on balanced budgets, and a re-valuation of its currency.

In most of the developing world, this program is called “structural adjustment.” It is a bitter remedy often prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund after economic speculation and the looting of national wealth by a narrow elite has driven a country into near or actual bankruptcy. While it’s ironic that the prescription is being written by the same Wall Street banks that conducted the looting in our country, this is the way the global North has treated the global South since World War II.

It’s increasingly apparent that Wall Street executives see the working population of the United States as some sort of “other,” very much as the colonial empires of the 20th century viewed the people of their colonies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East. This has always been true to some extent, but with the crash of the latest global pyramid scheme, it has become ever more critical for the top tier to reap more of their income at home.

That the future retirees who are most likely to lose their pensions are workers of color is no coincidence. This should not pit white workers against workers of color. On the contrary, just as effective public health policy rests on providing care for the most vulnerable communities, all workers should realize that those most poorly paid and facing the worst working conditions are most likely to win changes that will benefit us all.

A popular demonstration placard at rallies over the past few months has been: “Egypt can do it—so can we.” As the economic imperatives of globalization come home to the United States, a renewed commitment to democratic control and social solidarity is clearly required.

We do, indeed, need to look to the strategies and tactics of people in the developing world to shape our

response to the current crisis. But just as the demographic reality of empire lives in the population of the United States—with immigrants streaming here after being displaced from their home economies—so, too, do creative, committed, and enduring strategies for winning justice live within our communities.

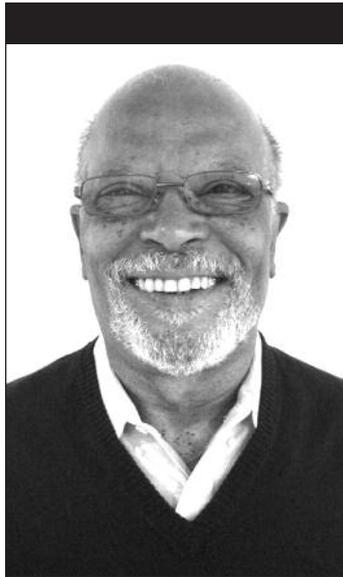
This issue of *RP&E* takes a crack at a very complex question: How can we live through structural adjustment and build sustainable, diverse cities? Some possible answers:

Low-wage workers are conducting national campaigns—combining job site organizing, government policy initiatives, and public education—to improve conditions for domestic workers, restaurant employees, and farmworkers.

Community-based organizations are restructuring their cities and reclaiming public space through community benefit agreements, economic development strategies rooted in ethnic arts and businesses, and transit-oriented development planning processes that actually include local residents.

Communities negatively impacted by the cap-and-trade system proposed by former Governor Schwarzenegger’s California Air Resources Board are challenging the prevailing wisdom about how to combat climate change—and a California judge has ruled in their favor.

Multiracial, multi-issue organizations capable of uniting constituencies for social justice action have never been more critical. Urban Habitat has long played this role regionally, and increasingly at the national scale. With that in mind, I am especially pleased to welcome new leadership to Urban Habitat in the person of Allen Fernandez Smith. He has committed to taking Urban Habitat to the next level—and we’re looking forward to the journey. ■



From the Board of Directors

By Joe Brooks,
Chairperson

As the Board Chair of Urban Habitat, I am pleased to welcome Allen Fernandez Smith as our new executive director. Al brings the vision, management skill, content expertise, and commitment to social justice, Urban Habitat needs to continue as a leading voice for regional equity. He understands the synergy of policy and action, the importance of building strategic alliances among non-traditional partners, and the interconnectedness of our ongoing fights for social, economic, and environmental justice.

Al's core values shine through when you meet him, as does his strong personal commitment to building power in low-income communities and communities of color. His engaging and direct communication style combined with his expertise in the areas of economic development, education, and leadership development resonates well with Urban Habitat's mission, goals, and strategies. We are excited to see how his fresh eyes and leadership will strengthen and guide the organization as we enter our third decade.

Al joins the organization as its program areas are logging significant accomplishments. Highlights of our recent work include:

The Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI), dedicated to increasing the representation of low-income people and people of color on public boards and commissions throughout the Bay Area, graduated its second class in January and has just closed the nominations for the third. BCLI alumni are now serving on local boards and commissions in San Francisco, Oakland, and Richmond.

The Transportation Justice program has helped spotlight the need for civil rights compliance by transit operators nationwide. Federal Transit Administration head, Peter Rogoff, recently wrote to agencies around the country, echoing some of the concerns raised by Urban Habitat and allies in their complaint against BART and the Metropolitan Transportation Commis-

sion over the Oakland Airport Connector project.

The lawsuit against Pleasanton's housing cap brought by Public Advocates on behalf of Urban Habitat and Pleasanton resident Sandra DeGregorio ended with a settlement that makes the city accountable for its fair share of regional housing needs. Urban Habitat's Land Use and Housing program continues to support allies on the ground in Pleasanton as they implement the settlement agreement, and work on affordable housing policies, programs, and organizing throughout the region.

The Richmond Equitable Development Initiative (REDI) has mobilized its coalition of grassroots partners for the latest phase in the development of Richmond's General Plan. They have testified at hearings and met one-on-one with city officials to ensure that the Plan addresses the needs of the city's low-income residents and residents of color. Their efforts have spurred language changes that introduce equity in several elements of the plan.

And *Race, Poverty & the Environment* is pioneering the use of multimedia communications at Urban Habitat with its podcast series, *Radio RP&E*. This new format enables *RP&E* to build stronger collaborations with other news producers and expand our reach to new audiences.

With these and other projects in full swing, we look forward to working with you, and with Al, in the months and years ahead. ■

Urban Habitat Welcomes Allen Fernandez Smith as New Executive Director



For just the third time in its 22-year history, Urban Habitat has a new executive director. Allen Fernandez Smith took over leadership on May 2, 2011. He succeeds Juliet Ellis, who left at the end of October 2010 to become the Assistant General Manager for External Affairs at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, and Carl Anthony, who co-founded the organization and led it for its first 12 years.

“I’m delighted to pass the torch to Allen Fernandez Smith,” Ellis said. “He will bring vision, practical experience, passion and commitment to an organization that is moving on the key issues of equity in the Bay Area and beyond.”

A Chicago native, Fernandez Smith graduated from the University of Illinois and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. After moving to the Bay Area, he coordinated the first-ever citywide initiative to improve San Francisco’s after-school programs, and served as a senior community development specialist in the San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Community Development.

“Fernandez Smith was our point person in Bayview Hunters Point, where he brought city agencies, community leaders, and business owners together to develop an economic strategy for the neighborhood,” said San Francisco Redevelopment Agency Executive Director Fred Blackwell. “With his ability to work with diverse partners on complicated issues, he’s well prepared to take Urban Habitat to the next level—and Urban Habitat is clearly ready to go there.”

Most recently, Fernandez Smith served as Executive Director of the California School-Age Consortium (CaSAC), a statewide nonprofit dedicated to advancing the professional development of youth workers across California. He guided the group through a successful strategic planning and reorganization process.

“It is rare to find someone with the combination of management skill and engagement in social justice work that Allen Fernandez Smith brings to the job,” said Urban Habitat Board Chair Joe Brooks. “Al is the right person at the right time.”

Fernandez Smith comes to Urban Habitat at a dynamic point in the organization’s evolution. Founded in 1989 by national environmental leaders Carl Anthony, Karl Linn, and David Brower, the organization has worked hard to popularize a regional perspective on issues of environmental and social equity and build power in communities of color through a combination of education, advocacy, research, and coalition building.

“I believe that effective public policy must be crafted with the authentic voice and experience of our communities. When that happens, policies are more responsive to community needs and can lead to lasting, systemic change,” Fernandez Smith said.

“I’m very excited for the opportunity to work at Urban Habitat and help advance our policy, advocacy, and organizing efforts. Building upon the organization’s collaborative spirit and partnerships, we will continue to take action on a wide range of social and environmental justice issues that face our low-income families and communities of color.”

Smith now lives in Oakland, California with his wife, Kay Fernandez Smith, deputy director at PolicyLink, and their children, Malcolm and Malaya. ■