

PLANTING AND RESEEDING: THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

Harry Targ

Naomi Klein, in her fascinating book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, argued that over decades free market capitalists and empire builders organized themselves to be ready when the opportunity to seize power, after a shock, occurred.

Progressives need to organize for the future when a shock could compel masses of people to join the struggle for their liberation. In the meantime, they must keep at it; plant the seeds and reseed as much as energy and spirits allow. This is what Lafayette area activists were doing this month.

For example, a panel discussion “Rebuilding Our Future and Empowering Voters,” sponsored by Yes We Can Tippecanoe, which began as the local Obama campaign group, was held at the Tippecanoe County Public Library, Lafayette, Indiana, Sunday September 18. Speakers representing the Indiana State legislature, the labor movement, Common Cause Indiana, area teachers, and the local Democratic Party shared their concerns for Indiana’s future.

Sheila Klinker, state representative from District 27, who joined the five-week legislative walkout last spring to forestall Indiana’s passage of draconian educational bills, spoke first. She said that despite efforts by the Democratic minority in the legislature, the legislature passed bills that significantly increased funding for school vouchers, established so-called scholarships for home schooling, authorized public funds in the form of vouchers for religious schools, promoted the contracting of private corporations to run schools, decided to evaluate teacher performance through standardized test scores of students, and cut state budgets significantly for education at both the K-12 and higher education levels.

Earl Cox, Community Services Liaison, AFL-CIO and a member of the United Auto Workers, pointed out that the Indiana legislature, now controlled by Republicans, plans to reintroduce so-called Right-to-Work legislation in the 2012 legislative session in January. Right-To-Work laws allow workers in unionized work places to acquire all the benefits of being in a union without becoming a member of that union. This, coupled with attacks on public employees, is designed to destroy the labor movement in Indiana.

Julia Vaughn, Policy Director, Common Cause Indiana, reported that the state was once among the more progressive states in terms of ease of voter registration. She suggested that policy changes initiated over the last several years contributed to a declining voter turnout; in 2010 Indiana was ranked 48 among 50 states. Limiting voter registration sites and increasing voter identification requirements particularly target poor and working people, she said. With the addition of 600 Republican state legislators in 2010 around the country, numerous states have initiated similar efforts to reduce voter participation.

Bruce Hall, special education teacher, Lafayette School Corporation, told of the self-sacrifice of teachers, particularly special education teachers like himself who serve the needs of differently abled young people. He asked who was going to care for the young as public education funding is eliminated.

Organizers were disappointed that only 25 Greater Lafayette residents attended this informative panel. However, they reported that probably many progressives were at parallel important events in the community including the annual Hunger Hike and the opening of a newly constructed Habitat for Humanity house.

Five days earlier, 60 students and community members attended a panel entitled "September 11: Ten Years Later," sponsored by Purdue University's Committee on Peace Studies, the Purdue chapter of Amnesty International, the Lafayette Area Peace Coalition, the Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Church, and the Lafayette Friends Meeting. Berenice Carroll, former Director of Women's Studies at Purdue, spoke about the deleterious impacts of ten years of war on women. She also reported that repeated national surveys suggest that the American people oppose the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. She referred to a recent book by Naomi Wolf, *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*, alerting the danger of a shift toward fascism in the United States.

Harry Targ, Coordinator of the Purdue Committee on Peace Studies, argued that the impacts of 9/11 have to be seen in the context of two long-term struggles in the United States: one about whether the United States should be an imperial power and the other whether the U.S. government should serve the needs of the vast majority of people or primarily financial and corporate interests. He asserted that 9/11 provided the environment, what Naomi Klein called a "shock," that made it easier for those advocating renewed empire and austerity policies at home to get their way. He referred to data indicating that the impacts of war on the U.S. economy, particularly on the working class, have been profoundly negative.

Jacob Hernandez, President of Purdue's Amnesty International chapter, concentrated his remarks on the dubious advances in the promotion of human rights in Afghanistan and Iraq since 9/11 and the threats to civil rights within the United States. He read major points from the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, arguing that those rights need to be defended in the face of growing challenges.

Earlier, on September 7, 2011, the new local chapter of "Rebuild the American Dream" met. Nine activists, representing labor, peace, environmental, and civil rights groups, discussed how it might build its coalition. It was agreed that a name needed to be chosen for the group and literature needed to be prepared. Also it was suggested that efforts to learn about other Rebuild the American Dream groups was necessary. In addition, providing voter information was put on the agenda for discussion. It was suggested that the group might model itself as an activist coalition on Central Indiana's Jobs with Justice. Finally, members decided to organize an October 14 rally outside the office of Fourth District Congressman Todd Rokita, to protest his opposition to taxing the rich, job creation, funding Planned Parenthood, and virtually every progressive program that involves government support. The coalition will meet again September 28.

These activities (as well as distribution of 3,000 copies of *The Lafayette Independent* the area's new progressive newspaper) represent modest but timely efforts by progressives in North Central Indiana to educate and organize a movement for progressive change. It is fair to assume that similar activities have been occurring in thousands of cities and towns all across the United States.