

The *Public i*, a project of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, is an independent, collectively-run, community-oriented publication that provides a forum for topics underreported and voices underrepresented in the dominant media. All contributors to the paper are volunteers. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to submit articles or story ideas to the editorial collective. We prefer, but do not necessarily restrict ourselves to, articles on issues of local impact written by authors with local ties.

#### EDITORS/FACILITATORS:

Sandra Ahten  
Sarah Boyer  
Lisa Chason  
Darrin Drda  
Belden Fields  
Meghan Krausch  
Paul Mueth  
Maggie Quirk  
Bijan Warner

#### THE PUBLIC I

Urbana-Champaign IMC  
218 West Main St., Urbana, IL, 61801  
217-344-8820

#### email:

imc-print@publici.ucimc.org

#### Websites:

http://publici.ucimc.org  
www.ucimc.org

## Get Involved with the Public i

You don't need a degree in journalism to be a citizen journalist. We are all experts in something, and we have the ability to share our information and knowledge with others. The *Public i* is always looking for writers and story ideas. We invite you to submit ideas or proposals during our weekly meetings (Thursdays at 5:30pm at the UCIMC), to post a story to the web site (<http://www.ucimc.org>), or to contact one of the editors.

- Become a citizen journalist; write a news story or opinion piece.
- Make a tax-deductible contribution.
- Help distribute the public i around the Champaign-Urbana area.
- Help with fund-raisers.
- Join the editorial board.

## OCTOBER EVENTS

### IMC SHOWS

WEDNESDAY, OCT 1

**Beth Amsel**  
**Maggie Simpson**  
**Kate Hathaway**  
**Kevin Elliott**

Folk/Acoustic. 8pm.

SATURDAY, OCT 4

**James O'Brien with**  
**MJ Walker and TBA**

Folk/Acoustic. 8pm.

SATURDAY, OCT 25

**A New Music Festival**  
Experimental/Improvisational. Details below.

FRIDAY, OCT 31

**Skeleton Dance**

All shows at  
Channing-Murray,  
1209 W. Oregon, U.

### MIDDLE ROOM GALLERY

@ The UC-IMC presents an exhibition of midwest **COMIC AND SEQUENTIAL ART**.

Opening October 6th, the show will highlight several vital and talented artists working in the "comics" medium, whether in comic books, zines, newspapers or websites. Join us for the **Opening reception Saturday October 11th from 7-9pm.**

PAULINE OLIVEROS FOUNDATION  
MIDWEST AND IMC PRESENT:

## Urbana Champaign's Improvisers Summit

at the Channing-Murray Foundation

October 25, 2003, 8pm

\$5 - \$15 suggested donation

All proceeds will benefit POFMidwest and IMC.

For more information contact pofmidwest@pofinc.org or phone 217-649-1662.

## Visualizing the Global

COMPUTER MODELING, ECOLOGY, POLITICS - A SILICON, CARBON, & CULTURE INITIATIVE

Thursday October 16th, 6:00-8:30pm

Beckman Institute Auditorium  
Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology, UIUC  
405 North Mathews Avenue  
Urbana, IL 61801 USA  
contact: John Wedge (wedge@uiuc.edu)  
John Martirano (martiran@ncsa.uiuc.edu)

## Sustaining Contributors

The *Public i* wishes to express its deep appreciation to the following sustaining contributors for their financial and material support:

**SocialistForum:** An Open Discussion and Action Group, *Meets 3rd Saturdays of the month, 3-5 pm, at IMC, 218 W. Main St. (U)*

**World Harvest International and Gourmet Foods**  
519 E. University, Champaign

**The AFL-CIO of Champaign County**

**The Union of Professional Employees (UPE)**

**Home of Gourmet Chinese and Thai Eat-in or Carry-out Restaurant**  
604 E. Daniel, Champaign; 344-7483

**The Natural Gourmet**  
2225 S. Neil, Champaign; 355-6365

**United Car Center: Quality Cars, Wholesale Prices**  
606 E. University, Champaign; 352-7870

**The Social Equity Group, Financial West**  
*Socially Responsible Investing*

**Illini Quality Used Auto Sales**  
308 W. University, Urbana; 367-5044

**That's Rentertainment**  
516 E. John, Champaign; 384-0977

**Caffe Paradiso**  
801 S. Lincoln, Urbana; 384-6066

**Staff of OJC Technologies**  
[www.ojctech.com](http://www.ojctech.com)  
278-3933 115 W. Main, Urbana

**National Fish Therapeutic Massage**  
113 N. Race, Urbana, 239-3400

The *Public i* would also like to extend thanks to the following individual sustainers:

**David Green and Harriet Bursztyn**

If you or your organization would like to become a sustaining contributor to the *Public i*, or would like more information, please call 344-7265, or email [imc-print@ucimc.org](mailto:imc-print@ucimc.org).

Published by the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center

October 2003 • V3 #8

## Postcards from Baghdad



A Champaign man visits his birthplace in Iraq...Page 4



Defending Public Education  
Belden Fields  
Page 1



An Homage to GirlZone  
Rebecca Crist  
Page 3



The Cancun WTO Protests  
Meredith Kruse  
Page 6

# The PUBLIC



## Defending Public Education

October 2003 • V3 #8

by Belden Fields



In the last issue of the *Public i* there were two articles critical of public education. One advocated home schooling, the other no schooling. I will argue that no schooling is always bad for a young person, and that home schooling at best can be justified in certain unique circumstances but is a poor choice as a general rule. I am a curious person to write such an article. I went through the public education system in Chicago, first Stephen K. Hayt Elementary School and then Nicholas Senn High School both on Chicago's North Side. Through the entire experience, I dreaded going to school every morning. In elementary school, I was nauseated in the morning at the thought of trotting off to school and often arrived having rid myself of my breakfast.

The last day of summer vacation was the gloomiest day of my life. My mother often reflected that, given such dread, it was strange that I would go on to a public university (the U of I) to take my B.A., pursue graduate studies, and then assume a teaching career. As a youngster, I would certainly have opted for home schooling or no schooling if given the option. I thank my lucky stars that I was not given that option. I would have chosen badly because I would not have known any better.

Formal public education used to be a scarce resource in our society and still is a scarce resource in many parts of the world. In our early society children had to work at a very young age and were given no choice as to their occupation. In many impoverished societies impressed child labor is still a huge problem. Despite the fact that both the 1948 U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stipulate that compulsory elementary education is a fundamental right of all children, that right is not granted to many of the children in this world. It took political struggle to gain it in the United States and it is an enormous struggle to try to actualize it in less affluent countries. The elite elements of those societies in which child labor is exploited have no interest in promoting it, and the desperately poor families require the labor of their young children in order to survive. It is curious that the abolition of this right finds resonance in the affluent U.S. (I have not heard it in Europe) among middle-class parents who have given up on public education as a matter of principle.

I do not want to get into the debate over whether public institutional or parochial institutional education is the better choice. That is a different issue and I am fine with parents and pupils choosing parochial education so long as it is not at the expense of the taxpayer through state subsidies. Institutional parochial education can serve some but not all of the positive functions of public education.

Public education is an important mechanism for upward mobility in a class-divided society such as our own. Many parents are simply not equipped to educate their children. Most low-income and single parents have to work so long, often in more than one job, that they do not have the time to educate their children. At the very top of the economic and social hierarchy, super-wealthy patrician families like the Bushes send their kids to private prep schools to prepare them for the Ivy League or other elite private universities like Stanford or Duke. What are the non-affluent to do if we were to abolish public education? The general argument against public education has some very severe class and racial implica-

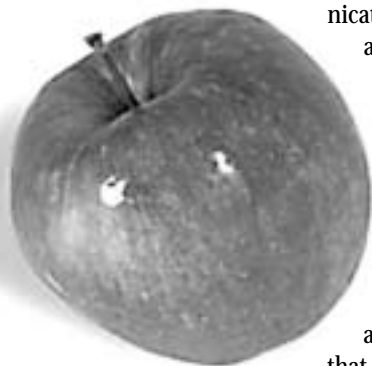
tions. There would be drastic unintended consequences if public education were to be abolished. Neither of my parents had a B.A. For all my angst about school, I am sure that I would have never have enjoyed the fulfilling experience of being a professor at a major university if I had not been given the experience (albeit against my will even though it was my right) of public education.

Public education gives the child her first experience in moving outside of the particularistic confines of the family. The family is a unit that is above all devoted to the self-interest of its members. It develops tight bonds of partiality between parents and children. When the child enters a school, she learns that there are people outside of her particular family who have interests, needs, and ideas that are different from those of her family. The parochial school by definition is less expansive of the child's horizons than the secular public school, but it still offers a wider horizon than no schooling or no schooling outside of the home. In school, the child is confronted with difference and hopefully learns to be respectful of those differences. The child learns how to communicate with others outside of the family. Respect for difference and the ability to communicate with others who are different and not family members are absolutely crucial attributes for a democratic society and polity. They are also consistent with teaching the child to be a critical and questioning citizen.

A related function of the school is to foster a communicative process between peers on the one hand and teachers and students on the other. This involves two conceptions, equality and respect. In public education, students see that their class peers are entitled to the same consideration that they are. In the family, they see this with their siblings, if they have them. In school, they learn to become less narcissistic because they see that others to whom they are not related merit the same treatment that they do. On the other hand, they learn that they are not equal in an important sense to their

teachers. They come to understand that there is an intellectual world out there that the teacher has a better hold of than they do and that under certain circumstances it is appropriate and in their own interest to take advantage of that. There is thus a double educational process going on in the classroom, egalitarian learning among student peers and authoritative learning from the teacher. Some would argue that the latter is just a manifestation of raw power. I respond that the good teacher genuinely cares for his pupils and earns their respect through demonstrating that care while stimulating the child's intellectual curiosity and learning. Of course power is involved, but when not abused it is not a dominating, damaging power. In the case of a good teacher, it is a symbiotic power in which the power of the teacher is used to empower the pupils.

Additionally, public education entails accountability in a way that home schooling does not. Since the learning progress of the pupil is assessed by people outside of the particularistic family, those responsible for the education of the child are in a position to less partially assess her progress. Despite the overemphasis on testing in the Bush Administration's mandated guidelines, testing is but one of several ways of assessing a pupil's progress. There are more holistic ways that most teachers employ as well. But in many states, there is virtually no accountability outside of the family that home schools. If the family is satisfied with the learning of the daughter or son, that's fine. And under conditions of no schooling as it was described by Gina Cassidy in last month's



*Public i*, the child is accountable to herself. In both instances, home or no schooling, none of the above advantages of public education would apply. This assumes that only the family, and not the society as a whole, has an interest in the education of children.

I do not deny that in practice there are serious problems in public education in the United States today. Some have to do with unequal or inadequate funding, some with racial and class segregation because of housing patterns, some with the difficulty of attracting superior teachers because of the shamelessly low pay accorded to teachers, some with the lack of involvement of parents and community members with their children and in the schools. These issues need to be addressed at all levels of government and in local communities. In Urbana, some teachers and community members created a movement called the Project for Educational Democracy (PED) that addressed the issue of parental and community involvement in school decision-making.\* Whether it be the Urbana's PED or the Small School Movement in Chicago, there are movements that recognize the imperfections of public education and attempt to address them.

In certain exceptional cases, such as threat of serious physical or psychological harm, I can understand why parents might remove their children from schools. But I do not believe that the interest of the child or the society is served by turning this into a general principle. On the other hand, I think that it is a general principle in a democratic society that all of us have an obligation to be attentive to our public schools and to become involved in supporting and improving them whether we have children in them or not.

\*For an in-depth study of the Urbana PED, see A. Belden Fields and Walter Feinberg, *Education and Democratic Theory: Finding a Place for Community Participation in Public School Reform*, State University of New York Press, 2001.

### How to build a house

by Paul Kotheimer

First, clear-cut (or napalm) one square mile of real estate.  
Kill every plant.  
Throw trees in chipper.  
Next, bring in bulldozers and push the gray dirt flat.  
Burn lots of gasoline.

Fell old-growth timber somewhere in Oregon.  
Ship to Japan for milling.  
Ship to Brazil for treatment with illegal chemicals.  
Ship to site.

Import copper.  
Import sheetrock.  
Import concrete.  
Import fiberglass.  
Import asphalt.  
Import aluminum.  
Import polyvinyl chloride.

Undermine builders' unions.  
Lay out curlicue streets and cul-de-sacs.  
Install identical garage door openers.  
Plant grass and topiary.  
Treat plants with poisons.

Import vehicles and their humans.  
Add power lines, churches, chain-link fences, strip malls, and car dealerships, to taste.

## COMMUNITY FORUM

## Challenging "Unschooling"

by Margaret Kosal

The September issue of the Public i included an article by Gina Cassidy entitled "Children's Liberation" which argued against compulsory public education, advocating instead a system of "no schooling" or "deschooling" in which children are free to pursue their own educational interests (perhaps with the guidance and support of their parents). Before Gina's article went to press, however, it was posted to the Public i listserve for peer review. One member of our editorial collective, Margaret Kosal, took issue with the article, arguing that it contained factual inaccuracies and was propagandistic. This sparked a brief debate among the collective, and in the end we decided to print the article with only minor edits, provided that Margaret's criticisms be aired separately. Therefore, in the interest of providing a counterpoint to the "Children's Liberation" article, a collation of Margaret's points are printed below.

Beyond the conclusions ... most of it is unsubstantiated propaganda. The most egregious errors are the claims with regard to the historical "freethinkers" [the article cites George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford as having "little or no formal schooling"]. They were (1) privileged upper class landed gentry who were schooled formally by tutors often employing rote memorization techniques or (2) were schooled in formal school settings of exactly the kind the author cri-

tiques, e.g., Einstein, who valued formal education enough to go all the way through to a PhD from the University of Zurich (which he got at age 26, same as I did - so can I compare myself to Einstein -NOT!), and stayed within the formal University system his entire life! That's the easiest one to pull apart off the top of my head!

[The author] spuriously neglects/selectively neglects to mention the vast numbers of historical and current free thinkers who have been or are educated in the formal school system. Just because something is counter to the status quo, the US government, or the Catholic Church does NOT make it true or worth publishing!

One can critique the current US educational system on a number of levels:

Does "unschooling" work for some? YES! Does everyone have a difficult time in the school system or [fail to] figure out how to play the game or use resources to one's own advantage as some do? NO. Should "unschooling" be made more available? I'm not sure - those who seek it out and seek out the resources are most likely those who may function adequately in an unschooling environment.

Compulsory education made available free by the state for all boys \*and girls\* is one characteristic which people around the planet DO admire about the US! Prior to US compulsory education, only rich, white, Judeo-Christian boys were educated. Where did the rest of the under-16 population spend their

work day? Revoking public education is not going to produce some utopian (or economically privileged) un-schooled society but rather a source of cheap, exploitable labor. See Amnesty International for reports of "torturous" [labor and long] hours to which children around the world are subjected!

The article posted has an unstated undercurrent of economic and social privilege.

Such ideas may be worth considering, possibly with some deep and thoughtful analysis. Perhaps then [they] may be worth advocating. (Is anyone familiar with the Montessori system, started by a woman over a century ago.)

In my opinion, Sevilla's article [a review of The Teenage Liberation Handbook, which similarly advocates unschooling or self-schooling] is worthwhile because she owns the material as her own and her experience. She is living the unschooling program. [Gina Cassidy's] article is littered with inaccuracies and portends to reveal the wisdom that is crushed in her conspiracy theory of public education!

How many of us "survived" the public education system? How many of the founders and active members of the UC-IMC and the IMC movement came out of the public school system? Are we ALL statistical anomalies? How large of a group can still be considered a statistical anomaly?

Blaming the public education system for a host of negative effects is not a solution.

Edited by Darrin Drda and Lisa Chason

## Leave No Public School Standing

By Gene Vanderport



Gene Vanderport a long-time local political activist working in the education labor movement. He is currently a staff representative based in Urbana for the Illinois Education Association (IEA).

This article reflects his own thoughts and are not necessarily those of IEA.

YOU HAVE TO HAND IT TO the Bush administration. They have a remarkable ability to seize the agenda from Democrats and progressives and force the rest of us to dance to their tune, at least in the short run. I'm talking specifically about the "No Child Left Behind" reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The public education "reform" embodied in "No Child" is truly powerful and is wreaking havoc across the nation.

There is a remarkable consistency in Bush policy-making and I'm struck with parallels to the administration's Iraq gambit. Take a look. Start with a catchy title you can't argue with: "Operation Iraqi Freedom" [changed from Operation Iraqi Liberation (OIL) for obvious reasons]. Or "No Child Left Behind." How could anybody oppose this? The alternative is "Leave Children Behind?" The Iraq war has bipartisan support; so did "No Child" with Democrats like Ted Kennedy (!) leading the charge. There is a clearly defined enemy: Iraq's Saddam / public education's teachers unions. There are "shock and awe" strategies: precision bombing on a massive scale. In public education it's the cut-off of federal monies, takeover of local systems and reconstitution, i.e. the forced transfer of teachers in "low performing" schools. The policies are similarly flawed in their working assumptions. The Iraqis will meet us with open arms and flowers and all of public education's problems will be solved with the Best Test—a one-size-fits-all measure of student achievement. Both policies have hidden agendas. In Iraq it's regional, political and economic

hegemony. It's where the oil is. With "No Child" it is preparing the ground for full-scale privatization of education, i.e., vouchers. The way you prepare the ground is to get people used to the "choice" charade. If your school fails, you get to go to another one.

It's not the purpose of this article to repeat the critical analysis of "No Child." As in their foreign policy, the Bush initiatives are short-lived. Iraq is a quagmire and "No Child" flaws are becoming dramatically clear to all who care to look. Here are a few headlines: As opposed to the war machine with its 87 billion cash dollar infusion, the "No Child" budget is cut at the same time this federal law is imposed on a desperately cash starved system. Also, Federal dollars represent only seven to ten percent of public education money and states and local sources are in serious shape. The resources just are not there. In New York City some 200,000 kids qualified for movement to other schools. However, only 1,000 vacancies were available! The tutoring program that was to accompany the transition was cut due to budget constraints. The "No Child" requirement of having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom is great. But what happens to this concept when dollars are cut for professional development, recertification and mentoring. Now add to this list the notion that a standard test is the mechanism for determining progress, despite the conclusions of serious researchers and practitioners.

I could go on, but my real purpose is to issue a call for action. There is no doubt that public education needs help. And as in Bush's foreign policy, I'm afraid that for his administration there is no mistake not worth repeating (i.e., is Iran next?). The case in point is that with the administration's initiative a voucher program is in place in the District of Columbia, again with bipartisan support. It is time to change direction and retake the agenda to "fix" public education.

Make no mistake about the fix. "Failed public education" is not one word. As Reg Weaver, the president of the National Education Association, says, 85% of rich people

send their kids to public schools. Those public schools have qualified, well-paid teachers, up-to-date resources, decent buildings, parental involvement, and accountability. Serious reform means leveling up. You can't level up unless you tackle the funding mechanism that plagues Illinois, where \$15,000 is spent per year on a child in Naperville and \$5,000 on a child in Iroquois County. In other words, most of the real reform will occur at the state and local levels. And to make those reforms work, it will take a broad coalition of education unions, parents, administrators, and citizens generally. That is a struggle for the long haul.

But an immediate starting point is to remake unfunded and unworkable federal standards that now hinder any progress at the state and local levels. There is such a proposal and it's House Bill 3049. Congressman Ted

Strickland (D-Ohio) has proposed this bill that would do the following:

- End reliance on a single test
- Give schools credit for improving student achievement in reasonable time frames.
- Create workable ways to measure skills and progress of students with disabilities and limited English
- Public school choice and supplemental services would be targeted specifically for those students in subgroups that have failed to improve

This bill, plus efforts to fully and adequately fund the now unfunded provisions, would go a long way to fix a very flawed policy.

The need and opportunity are before us. It's time to rein in the chaos, build the political coalition, and truly give public education the resources it needs to succeed for every child.





# IMCFest Raises Over \$1,500 for the UC-IMC

by Meghan Krausch

IMCFEST, LAST MONTH'S ALL DAY BENEFIT at the Canopy Club (produced by the IMC's booking group) was a resounding success. With the help of twelve bands, two feature films, one filmmaker, a 'zine slam, lots of volunteers, and an enthusiastically supportive community, we were able to raise \$1,687 for the IMC! One thousand dollars of this money will go toward the IMC's Capital Campaign; of the rest, a portion will go to the IMC's Video Group for its contributions to the event, and the remainder will be reserved to support future Booking Group projects.

The Capital Campaign, as many people may know, has become increasingly urgent since the closure of the IMC's shows space, which was a major source of revenue. In order for the IMC to be the community resource it has the potential to become, we need a space where we can put on all-ages non-smoking concerts, have enough room to display all the books and magazines in our library, and have adequate space to produce media.

The Capital Campaign's goal is to reach \$100,000 by the end of the year in order to purchase a permanent home for the Independent Media Center. We are well on our way with \$42,000 in the bank, but we are looking toward the community (including *Public i* readers) to help us reach our goal. In order to make

your tax deductible contribution to the Capital Campaign, go to <http://capital.ucimc.org>, or send your check to Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, ATTN: Treasurer/Capital Campaign, 218 W. Main St., Suite 110, Urbana, IL 61801-2725, made out to UCIMC with Capital Campaign in the memo line.

In part due to the overwhelming success of IMCFest, the IMC Booking Group plans to use its share of the IMCFest money to produce a similar all day affair, this time at the Channing-Murray Foundation and open to folks of all ages. This concert is scheduled for November 15, and will be coordinated by several of our underage volunteers.

And looking even further into the future, the Booking Group has plans to make IMCFest a semi-annual event, with the possibility of another event in the Spring and one next summer. The funds from last month's IMCFest will help make all of this possible, and will allow us to rent space to put on smaller shows as often as we possibly can. Thanks to everyone who attended the festival, everyone who stayed all day to help (some people volunteered for more than twelve hours!), everyone who paid a \$50 entrance fee (we saw you), and to all the businesses in town that generously offered their services to help us make our crazy idea a success.



Clockwise from upper left: IMCsta Paul Kotheimer talks to the crowd about the IMC. Missing the Point make their appearance on the IMCFest main stage. Local folk artist G. Lee performs on the acoustic stage. The Invisible performing on the main stage.

## The Legacy of GirlZone

by Rebecca Crist



After four years as a volunteer with GirlZone, Rebecca Crist can change the oil in her car, create a zine in under two hours, defend herself, light a grill without lighter fluid, tap dance, write a grant application, tune a guitar, edit digital video, talk to strangers, and usually find a way to address a group of people without resorting to "you guys."

She cannot ollie on a skateboard. Yet.

CHLOE DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO RIDE A SKATEBOARD.

Dragged to a GirlZone skateboarding workshop by her mother, Chloe had no real intention of learning to skate. A half hour later, though, she was swooshing down the ramps, seated, on her borrowed board. By the end of the workshop, she was asking her mother to buy her a board for her birthday.

As a GirlZone volunteer, I saw that sort of transformation happen over and over. Girls came to these workshops disinclined to step onto a skateboard, to breakdance, to speak on the radio—to do anything that might make them look foolish, or awkward, or just not good at something, no matter how much they wanted to try it. And universally they left feeling confident, capable, and involved.

That was no accident, and that was not simply a result of saying "let's meet at the skate park/dance studio/radio station." GirlZone workshops were very thoughtfully planned to best engage girls in active participation—something a lot of girls don't encounter in their schools, or even their homes.

Research has shown that girls drop out of their own lives around adolescence, and the fact is that we let them do it. We teach them to play soccer in P.E., but we don't force them to actually make an effort to contact the ball. We give them bikes, but don't give them a bike repair toolkit. We give them computers, and load them down with word games and Cosmo makeover software. Girls are disjointed and unhappy, and instead of putting them on the spot and forcing their participation, we let them disappear.

If I sound histrionic, picture the basketball courts at Hessel Park, or Phillips Rec Center, or any neighborhood schoolyard. No locks, no entrance fees, no limitations to access—and almost uniformly, no girls. Imagine being that trio of beginning girls who want to play basketball; imagine asking the group of guys who play every day if you can

use the court for an hour. The issue for girls in this town—and any town—isn't just the right to use; it's the culture that says Sure, you can be here, as long as you stay out of the way.

GirlZone was specifically designed to combat this culture that lets girls be passive participants in their own lives. Developed eight years ago as part of Aimee Rickman's graduate work in educational psychology, GirlZone ran monthly workshops for girls ages 7 to 16, covering everything from auto repair to knitting. But far more important than just providing access to oil pans and knitting needles, GirlZone was meticulously and thoughtfully designed to encourage and enable—and even enforce—girls' engagement. In everything from the language we used to the spaces in which we held our workshops, GirlZone was a planned environment built to affirm girls' own pre-installed capabilities.

We required workshop facilitators to go through training, covering everything from ways to break up cliques to how to speak to girls to show you appreciate their input. We discussed the best ways to address the sliding fee scale so that no girl had to feel guilty or embarrassed, and so that no girl was ever turned away for lack of funds. We stressed the importance of trying new things ourselves, of keeping in mind how it feels to be vulnerable and clumsy when you want to be cool and competent. We talked about why it's important that parents not be allowed to watch the workshops, why we avoid saying "you guys," and why we never allow anyone to say "girls rule, boys drool."

To me, those seemed like great ideas; maybe that's because I saw them at work. I know some of our policies were difficult for others to swallow. We made no effort to hide the fact that we were a feminist organization, which was sometimes misconstrued in ways that had nothing to do with equality. We were unapologetically girl-based, non-sectarian, and open to all sorts of people.

GirlZone prided itself on being based in this community. We held meetings and workshops in local businesses, we tapped local talent to teach workshops, we worked with local girls. Eventually, we hoped, the community would take some of that back and provide girls opportunities without GirlZone steering things along.

GirlZone was also entirely volunteer-run. Even at its busiest moments, GirlZone was run by Aimee and a small phalanx of unpaid women and men volunteering their free time, after work and around classes. And more than that, GirlZone was basically unfunded. The only major local

funding organization, the United Way, turned us down. The small grants we did get were designated for programs only, rather than for staff or space.

And that, partly, is why GirlZone had to close. After eight years, GirlZone was still an unpaid full-time job for Aimee Rickman. After eight years, GirlZone was an organization that everyone was glad to have around, but that not many were willing to support with money, or space, or equipment. Our attempts to collaborate with various local city and nonprofit youth organizations had consistently fallen through or been rebuffed. We were forever fending off criticism for not taking on more, or not being diverse enough, or not focused enough, and, constantly, for not being "...and BoyZone."

Most heartbreakingly, though, by keeping GirlZone open, we were showing girls that their interests weren't worth a paid staff, unlike, say, greyhounds' or lizards'. And we were showing this town that it didn't have to pick up the slack, that we'd be happy to beg and borrow and pay out of pocket with our time and our money to serve their girls.

Two years ago, the Champaign Park District opened a dazzling new skate park. It's bright and smooth and free. And it's very much dominated by boys, to the point that a boy, maybe ten years old, asked Aimee and me—both in our late twenties—to take our skateboards and get out of the way so he could have the area. And we did it. We resented it, we dissected it, we thought up what we should have said, and we're still not sure why we gave up the space, but we did it, because that's the way things are. The skate park is a beautiful gift to the young people of C-U, but just because the gate is open doesn't make it, in any practical sense, accessible to everyone. But we paid for that park, just like we pay for the basketball courts and the ball diamonds and the swimming pools, and it's our duty to say we want the parks and the youth groups to make sure that everybody really does get a chance to play.

If it's true that you don't know what you've got until it's gone, maybe GirlZone's shuttering will inspire more people to look at the playgrounds, the skate parks, the open mics, the battles of the bands, and say "where are the girls?" I hope so. Wow, do I hope so. But even more, I hope that next time you look at the skate park, you'll see Chloe out there with the board that she eventually did get for her birthday, showing her girlfriends how well she can ollie. Go to it, people. GirlZone's gone; now you go make this whole dang town the zone for girls.



# A Visit to Baghdad

Interview by Lisa Chason

Photos by Mohammed al-Heeti



*Mohammad al-Heeti, owner and manager of the popular World Harvest international food store at 519 E. University Avenue in Champaign, was born in Heet, Iraq, a small and very old city on the Euphrates River, west of Baghdad. This past June he went to Iraq with his 20-year old daughter Roaa to visit family. They stayed mostly in Heet but also visited Baghdad twice, and went to Ramadi and Falluja, where his wife is from. This interview took place on September 18.*

.....

**We understand that the US forces have wanted to control everything, out of their fear for the Saddam and Baathist loyalists. They dissolved the Iraqi army, fired all the police and many government workers and sent them all home with nothing to do. Now unemployment is at 60 percent.**

Yes, and arms are everywhere. You can buy them anywhere. The bases were left unattended. Now people are selling hand grenades, automatic weapons. In this way they can make some extra money. Children also are selling them. In the vegetable market, meat market, there are also weapons. It takes no effort to find them. This is new to Iraqi society. There was never such a situation before.

**Why do people buy them? For protection?**

Yes – security is zero. You need something at home to protect yourself. And also out of curiosity. They are very cheap. Items worth hundreds of dollars – you can buy for a few dollars. It's a horrible atmosphere.

**The Americans chose to dismiss everyone. Couldn't they just have removed the people at the top?**

But you see they had no plan for after the war. Winning the war – this is their achievement. No other power can stop them – especially from the air. What comes after that? They don't know the people, the culture. They had been given the wrong impression – that when you would topple the regime in Iraq the Iraqi people would dance in the streets – come with flowers and open arms. That was bad advice. Unfortunately they didn't give it enough thought – that was the major mistake they committed. That's one of the reasons they face all these problems. They could have much better systems for how to deal with the Iraqi people if they were really sincere. They said it was to free the people from Saddam, but if that was their real intention then they would have thought about how to deal with the people afterwards. Most of their thinking was about oil. So when you go to Iraq you see the few buildings concerned with the oil industry – these are undamaged. It is very clear to everyone there they didn't calculate cleverly how to manage Iraq.

Not everyone in the police or military or working for the government was loyal to Saddam. Only a very small percentage was willing to fight next to him. Unfortunately, they didn't think about this properly.

**The costs for continuing the occupation are so enormous now. Do you think the revenue the US administration expects to get back from the oil makes it worth it for them to stay this course?**

It is not only dollars and cents. It is that whoever will control that region will control the whole world. Look now at Europe, especially France and Germany, versus the US. If they control the oil of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and small nations such as Qatar – anyone who will have their hands on all of that oil, they will manipulate the whole world.

They say that the last barrel of oil that will come from the ground will come from Iraq. Iraq has the second largest reserves after Saudi Arabia. When the US went there they thought it would be easy. Bring in our troops, then install new people who will help us because we freed them. Their calculation was absolutely wrong. They thought people were so weak after 12 years of sanctions.

Iraqis had the 1991 war. They remember this every night. The horrible conditions they went through. Then after that they had twelve years of embargo which took one and a half million of their people. They believe really



A defaced Saddam monument and anti-American graffiti reflect the prevailing attitude in Baghdad.



strongly that the party responsible for this tragedy is the US and Saddam Hussein's regime. They feel they were partners in this tragedy. They don't separate the two. So as much as they hated that regime they hate the policy of the US government toward them. Expecting them to welcome you when you participated in killing one million and a half – it would take a lot of work and effort to prove to them that you didn't do it to them. And to try to prove that would be a lie.

**The United Nations – their headquarters was the target of the August bombing in Baghdad. And they were a major part of the apparatus that imposed sanctions for twelve years. How is the UN regarded at this point and is it reasonable to expect the UN to be able to play a constructive role now?**

The people of Iraq consider the UN to be in the hands of the US. And whenever there is resistance in the UN like what happened in the war in March – you see the US will dump the UN and go and do whatever they want to do. So they look at the UN the same way they look at the US. In the last twelve years the US used the UN to impose the sanctions – they worked together to kill that million and a half. And many agents who worked with the UN – they admitted they were spies for the US. Like Scott Ritter – he was a UN weapons inspector – in his lectures and publications he admitted he was working for the US. So when the people in Iraq



An Iraqi boy selling guns

look at the US and the UN they see two sides of the same coin. To the Iraqis an occupation is an occupation – no matter if they are Russian, American, Turkish, Arab, Muslims – to them an occupation is an occupation. So whoever participates in that, they are helping the US in their occupation. They will not differentiate between Americans and British and Polish – to them it's occupation.

**We are hearing reports about ethnic tensions among the Sunnis, Shia and Kurds. Some say if the US would leave now civil war would break out. Have their historically been divisions among these groups and do you believe civil war would occur?**

This same slogan was used by Saddam Hussein himself. If I leave you, there will be a civil war. Now Saddam is gone. There is no civil war. At a time when there is no police force, no secret service – it is actually the opposite. Everybody sees on Arab satellite TV the unity. There has

not been one incident of religious killing. The killing which is taking place is either for theft or retaliation or family feuds or it is among Baath party members. Even after the tragedy which took al-Hakim [Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, top Shiite cleric who held a seat on the US-created Iraqi Governing Council, killed in a bomb attack in August] in Najaf, when everybody thought that then civil war would start – it didn't happen. Again the opposite has been proven. The people got together – and there are a lot of very, very smart people among the Sunni, the Shia, the Kurds. They get together very frequently, almost every week, just to keep the country together as before. And they are very successful. So the issue of ethnic fighting or civil war after the US would leave – this is the same slogan used by Saddam Hussein, now being used by the US. And another point. There has never been a civil war in Iraq. There has been war between the government and ethnic groups – but not among the people themselves. It was the government against the Kurdish people – not the people themselves. The people are very close to each other. They are neighbors, they marry each other.

Saddam's regime was not Sunni or Islamic – he was against anybody who would dare to be against him. Saddam killed his sons-in-law, his nephews, his relatives. He was born into a Sunni family but he was secular; he didn't differentiate among any ethnic groups. He killed more people, especially the thinkers, the scholars – he killed more from the so-called "Sunni triangle" than from the rest of the country. The Baath party was Arab nationalist. Before British colonization, the military was more made up of Sunni. He opened the military to the Shia more than before. Saddam said no difference anymore – we are Arab, anyone can get into the military. Many of his assistants were Shia or Kurds or Christian. Only thing that mattered was how loyal you were to him and to his party – the only criteria.

**So you don't believe that if the US pulls out the situation will deteriorate?**

I don't think so. If the US would really trust the Iraqis, would give them the power to run their own affairs, their own country – there are enough people in Iraq who could do this well. But the longer the US stays in Iraq, the more enemies it will create inside Iraq. Now even mainstream media here is showing it. So if they leave, trust the



The ruins of a governmental building (left) and an Iraqi home

Iraqis, develop a good relationship with the people of Iraq – the Iraqis would love to have a better relationship with the West, with the US.

#### What is the extent of the resistance?

It is everywhere – north, south, center, east, west. Nowadays they don't allow the reporters to cover any of it. That's part of blocking the information coming to this country. This is very serious.

#### Are foreigners involved?

Well, the borders are all completely open. All you have to do is show your passport and you can go through the checkpoint. Iraq has long borders with Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia – and anybody can enter. This was a big mistake when they dissolved the government forces – now the borders are open to anyone. It happened to me – I didn't have to get out of my car, I wasn't asked anything, they didn't even stamp my passport. Very strange. And now it is too late if they want to seal the borders.

**Of the \$87 billion Bush has requested 15 to 20 billion is considered money for reconstruction, and from other countries very little is coming in. So there continues to be plenty of money for the military but not for reconstruction...**

It's funny – the second largest oil reserves in the world. Why do they need money for reconstruction? Iraqi people themselves have said so many times we are rich enough to control our own economy, we have enough money to rebuild. The US destroyed it twice – in '91, in the name of the liberation of Kuwait, and in 2003, in the name of the liberation of the Iraqi people – they literally destroyed the economy. And then they are talking about raising money to rebuild that country. The country has enough money. That's what Iraqis are saying – there are tens of billions of dollars in Iraqi frozen assets all over the world. And if the oil were allowed to be sold – they wouldn't have to collect one dollar from anywhere else on this earth. But they have a hidden agenda – they consider the oil as their oil – and the moment they start talking about the "privatization of oil" then you feel something wrong is going on. And who is going to own it? The Iraqis, or the American companies? That's

the point that is really bothering every Iraqi. The oil of Iraq is going to be privatized – and who's going to own it? So we need to ask them "why are you collecting money, and for what?" For your troops, you need money. To rebuild Iraq, Iraq would have enough money from the oil revenue if you let it go to the Iraqis. So it's very obvious.

**What do you think of the recent French proposal that a provisional government should be established in Iraq in a month, a draft constitution by the end of the year and elections by next spring?**

Definitely the Iraqis need some help from outside. But they need sincere help, that puts the interest of the Iraqis first. It doesn't matter who it comes from. Then get out of there and in one year the Iraqis can fix everything. But unfortunately even France is looking out for their own interests. They are negotiating what is the benefit of participating in this process. The Russians too are looking how to get their piece of cake. Any time you see a country that opposes the US, then you see them shifting little by little because you don't see what is going on behind the scenes. All of a sudden the smooth talk starts coming from the US – how can you trust any of them? All the reasons that have been used to wage this war have been proven false.

**So you don't feel more solidarity coming from Europe?**

If the US controls the Middle East's oil fields, they will control the whole world. Europe just doesn't want the US to control it all.

Near a bombing site, An Iraqi man sifts through trash for recyclable metals.



**All the money that's been spent on US military operations – for that money they could have been making business deals. They could have bought control, why did they have to intervene militarily...**

That's true. But what can you do about people who can only think in a military way? Look at Cheney and Rumsfeld – they would never think of a peaceful way. They only know how to wage war. And of course there is Israel. Sharon has said that Iraq and now Iran and Syria – that these regimes have to be changed. I don't think that Hosni Mubarrak of Egypt is any less corrupt – the regime of Jordan, of Iran, of Saudi Arabia – they are all corrupt. Even their position against Israel – it is only propaganda. Unless we really solve the issue of the Palestinian people, by giving them their homeland, this situation will go on.

**Your feelings about the immediate situation?**

I think they will do the following: The US is under huge pressure inside Iraq. Their military people are suffering a lot. They are very nervous. And they need somebody to protect their back. So the US will take troops from other nations to protect the back of the American military in Iraq. The Americans will do whatever they want to do with the oil and with other natural resources, and they will hold the sensitive areas, the oil reserves, and they will put the troops from other countries in the cities where they will take the heat of the resistance – that is what Iraqis believe. So the US will stay in the sensitive

areas, making the oil flow and protecting the oil, and the troops from other countries and the peace keepers.... Let's get to the point – there is no civil war. So why do they need peace keepers? That's only necessary if there is fighting among the people. The only fighting is going on against the occupiers. When they talk about security it is not the security of the Iraqis. They are talking about the security of the American troops. The work that is going on is to find a middle ground between the US and France and the UN, and some other countries – Turkey, India – and convince them to go to Iraq. So we'll get more of the same for quite a while.

**I've heard you say that Americans are not aware of how bad it is for the troops there.**

As much as I feel for the Iraqis I feel for the American troops there. They are fathers and sons and daughters and sisters. They are under very terrible conditions. I could see them in this heat and dust – with this big equipment, and tanks – they are nervous. When they are stationed at a checkpoint they have to be ready 24 hours, because it's a guerilla war, it's not a military facing a military. The US government is not telling the American people what is going on. Reporters are no longer allowed to go. The Americans say either you have to say it in our way or you cannot report. Just today one of the American military leaders said the Arab news services are not showing the positive things we are doing for the Iraqis, they show only the negative things, so now we are going to prevent them from covering stories. So now they will start screening them. And it is not like what Fox News shows – swimming in swimming pools, eating hot meals. It was supposed to be a few months and now they're talking a year and more.

**Anything else you want to say?**

Hopefully the politicians of this country will wake up one day and try to find a middle ground solution for both countries, have a better relationship with the Iraqi people. There's been enough killing for the Iraqis, and for the Americans of course – and hopefully one day we'll find a flight leaving Chicago airport going to Baghdad airport, and vice versa. But we need wise people to do that...



# Reports from the WTO Protests in Cancun, Mexico

By Meredith Kruse



attended the protests and posted these reports to the UC-IMC newswire ([www.ucimc.org](http://www.ucimc.org))

On the weekend of September 10, activists from around the world converged in Cancun to demonstrate against the World Trade Organization, which was holding its annual meeting. Local activist Meredith Kruse

## GREETINGS FROM CANCUN (SEPTEMBER 8)

I just arrived in Cancun last night and the contrasts between the rich and poor here were immediate and stark. This morning, while WTO officials met in barricaded plush hotels, campesinos and indigenous rights groups met in an open gym under outdoor tents. With over six hours of singing, chanting, flag waving and powerful speeches, small farmers from around the world demanded an end to the WTO, World Bank, and neo-liberal economics, shouting, "Globalize the Struggle, Globalize the Hope," "The Country Side Cannot Take Anymore!"

I wonder if you all are getting any news of what is happening down here in Cancun? What, if anything, are the newspapers reporting? I am sure you are hearing very little of the amazing organizing, popular forums, and alternative proposals being put forth by indigenous groups, campesino organizations, women's groups and unions. If anything, you are probably hearing about the threat of violence, or promises for success by WTO trade representatives.

The headlines of a local paper here today said Al Queda is suspected of planning an incident soon in Cancun...hah!

I recommend checking the IMC sites and turning to the alternative press. There is a swell of resistance here. Some of the disputed issues surround Agriculture and the unfair "dumping" of subsidized US corn into the Mexican Market, plus controversial discussions over intellectual property rights (TRIPS), investment, patents and more.

While the official WTO meetings are held behind closed doors, there are a host of alternative economic forums occurring around the city, which are free and open to the public.

One such forum was "Via Campesina," which took place all morning in a open gym and under an outdoor tent. Ironically, this gathering of small farmers from around the world took place in the shadow of a towering Wal-Mart store connected to a Sam's Club complex. While campesinos spoke of their inability to endure further oppression, tourists whisked by to shop in air-conditioned megastores.

Those attending "Via Campesina" came from throughout Mexico, Central America, South America, South Africa, Korea, Thailand, Europe, Asia, Canada and the United States. Their message was clear: in contrast to corporate-driven economic globalization, we must globalize the struggle for environmental justice, food security, health, education and human rights. We must globalize hope.

Comments were directed to George Bush, telling him to stop looking for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq because the weapons of destruction can be found in his own house. They are the weapons of the FTAA, WTO and Plan Puebla Panama, which wreak economic devastation and suffering on the world.

Other alternative economic forums throughout the week are focusing on Biodiver-

sity, Fishing, an International Women's Forum, Fair Trade, Solidarity with Cuba, Alternatives to FTAA, PPP, WTO, and CAFTA and much much more.

Students are supposed to be arriving from Mexico City, but no one knows if they will be allowed through by security forces. Between 5,000-10,000 security forces are in town. This includes local police plus the Mexican Army. Organizers say they expect around 15,000 protesters.

Major marches are to take place on the 10th, when campesinos plan to march to the WTO meeting site, and another demo is planned when (if) the Mexican students arrive.

There is an IMC office set up here, as well as a convergence center and much creative organizing for direct action is happening out of these sites. So we will see.

Although the language of global economics may be intimidating or difficult to understand, do not let this deter you from becoming involved. We can see through the jargon expoused by those in power. Saying that free trade equals freedom is a farce, and the effects of NAFTA on those living in Mexico, the US, and Canada have made it clear that neo liberal economics does nothing to help the poor.

Those inside the WTO meetings are deciding how to make the world over in their image, to benefit a very few at the expense of the majority, while destroying the environment in the process. This really affects us all, and their ideas do not have to be accepted. Plenty of alternatives are being proposed from the grassroots; we just don't hear about them! How many people in the US know there is a huge movement throughout Latin America against these policies?

I urge us all to keep this week of WTO protests and alternative forums in perspective. The WTO is only one piece of a larger oppressive structure that includes Plan Puebla Panama, CAFTA, the World Bank, Interamerican Development Bank and all the bilateral trade agreements the US is making country by country, which encroach on the rights of people to decide their future and structure their lives in a just way.

Best wishes to everyone. I hope you are able to access accurate coverage about what is going on in Cancun this weekend. If not, call your media outlets and ask why not!

## SEPTEMBER 10TH, CANCUN

This morning we got up early, ate as nutritious a breakfast as we could (knowing it would be a long time until we could eat again) and left our hotel for the center of Cancun.

On our way to the bus station we were all stopped by the police to have our bags searched. This had not happened before, and I wondered if it was because my friend Carrie was with us. She has many piercings, tattoos and black clothes, and is unfairly targeted because of her looks, as hysteria has been fanned in the local press about violent anarchists. We must be clear: the violence is already present, WTO policies are another form of war, those opposing the WTO are fighting for life, hope and basic human dignity.

Coming into the center of town, we headed for the Convergence Center, the Medical Post, and then the IMC site. All of these locations have been created by volunteer activists, many

of whom arrived weeks before the WTO meetings began. On scarce resources they have done amazing work. A bunch of us borrowed paint and duct tape to finish banners and volunteered to help distribute water to protestors throughout the day. To distribute the water, we maneuvered a three-wheeled bike attached to a cart through traffic and masses of people. Protestors were definitely glad to see us after hours in the hot, hot, dehydrating sun.

We arrived at the starting point for the march, the Casa de la Cultura. Thousands of campesinos had come from all over the world and had been camping out in the park here for several days. They came not only from Mexico, but from Korea, Africa, Canada, the US, and many more places. Small farmers come because they know their lives are at stake. One of the biggest issues at the WTO is eliminating the subsidies that rich countries like the US give to their farmers to drop prices (this is how cheap US corn is "dumped" into Mexico, undercutting local farmers prices and causing massive poverty and desperation).

After a couple hours of speeches at the meeting point, people began to line up for the march to the gates of the WTO. Many tall, wire fences were put up in our path, but we tried to get as close as we could. Protestors included

Zapatistas from Chiapas, small farmers from Korea, a marching band from Seattle, students from Mexico City, members of the FLMN, unions, indigenous groups, and more. As we started, one group put down a huge US flag for all the marchers to walk over. Dirt, and more dirt, covered the flag. Soon after the march was underway, a

group of us were called to help carry a huge Chinese dragon made in honor of the Mayan god of water who is upset about the privatization of water. The huge 30-foot moving replica of this god takes four people to hold the head, and nine of us spread out below the body, making slithering motions, circles, and waves.

The beginning of the march was beautiful. It's hard to describe participating in one of these events...reclaiming the streets, disrupting social space, speaking truth to power, and honoring life, creativity, and hope. Several bands played, people literally danced in the streets...a very festive procession of people - people with so much experience and knowledge and truth to share about how to create a globally-just world, but who are excluded and marginalized and pushed further and further down. Yet they rise again resisting, resisting, resisting...

About an hour into the march the feeling began to change, tensions rose as the crowd of thousands approached the first fence barrier. The fence stretched for miles across the road leading to the WTO conference center, but we really were nowhere close. Many other barriers had been set up, we were kept so far away.

As the group gathered at the fence, a protestor demanded to be let through, some started pulling at the fence, others started throwing things into the line of police. There were hundreds of police in full riot gear with shields, sticks, tear gas and helmets.

I did not learn this until later, but very early, at this point in the march, the leader of a small group of farmers from Korea climbed the fence and stabbed himself in the heart.

All we could see at the back of the march was the rushing in of an ambulance with its

sirens blaring. We did not know why it was coming into the mass of protestors.

As of tonight, we do not know the condition of this brave man. He was taken to the hospital in critical condition, and he may die.

He stabbed himself in the heart. He stabbed himself in the heart.

Others were injured as well. When a protestor was hurt, people would call for the volunteer medics, who would rush into the crowd to pull out the wounded person and then treat him or her on the street.

Our group continued to distribute water and make a return trip to the medic station for more water and supplies, while protestors continued chanting, singing and drumming. A ceremony was held for the Korean farmer.

A section of the fence was torn down. Protestors had been pulling and pulling for hours, and a huge section finally fell. Riot police were immediately at the opening, where confrontations between police and protestors were violent.

Unfortunately, this was the focus of the news coverage I saw tonight: the moments of violence, not the hours of marching or the messages for justice and against the WTO.

After a full day in the streets, we regrouped under some shade trees. We were all speechless for a long time, thinking about the Korean farmer. How much to you have to suffer to do this to yourself? What risks are you willing to take when there is nothing left to lose? When will the world wake up about the desperate plight of the majority of its citizens? When will the WTO be held accountable? Hopefully its meetings will be derailed this weekend, I hope...

After a while, we realized we had not eaten anything since breakfast. We decided it was important to find food and try to make it back into the hotel zone before it was too late. Since the barriers were still up, we took the long hour-long route through the hotel district. I had not seen the full hotel district before. It was disgusting. After all I had just seen, I sunk in my seat at the sights of opulence that passed by my window: towering Hilton hotels, shopping malls five stories tall, US chain restaurants, bars to hold all the spring breakers in their weeks of drunkenness, fancy cars, more things than anyone needs.

Onto the bus came rich tourists, participants in the WTO negotiations, and then local residents of Cancun getting off their shifts as maids and security guards at the hotels. And on came a father and son who sang and played guitar. As they ended, the young boy took off his hat and walked through the bus asking for pesos.

We got back to the hotel and heard that inside the WTO, members of the NGOs had stood up and disrupted the meeting by chanting "vergüenza" or "shame" before walking out. The TV on in the hotel carried scenes from the protests.

My head is still banging and my mind scattered. I do not know how to make sense of anything anymore. I wanted to write this to you all so you would know what I saw on the streets of Cancun today. The contrasts were stark - they symbolize the contrasts of the world. I guess it is just too seldom that we witness these contrasts colliding, but really they do, everyday, and we are all playing some part.

As I finish this message I hear the woman next to me talking to her friend, suddenly she turns to me and says, "We just got news that the Korean farmer has died."

**The WTO is only one piece of a larger structure ... which encroaches on the rights of people to decide their future and structure their lives in a just way.**

**LaBoR/eCoNoMiCs**



# Strike yields travel advisories at downtown Chicago hotel

By Ricky Baldwin



IF YOU'RE PLANNING A TRIP TO CHICAGO any time soon, you may run across warnings about too-good-to-be-true rates at one hotel on Michigan Avenue overlooking Grant Park. Accommodations at the 580-room hotel are renting at winter prices – \$99 a night, compared to twice that in a comparable downtown hotel – or rather, the rooms are not renting, for the most part. All because the hotel tried to squeeze sixty cents out of the folks that clean the rooms and cook the food.

Hundreds of customers have turned away after they arrived and discovered a picket line in front of the hotel. Many more have walked out within the first hour after seeing the state of the hotel from the inside. Unknown and unknowable numbers have simply booked elsewhere when they heard the news. Big weddings and reunions, some worth as much as \$35,000, are canceling left and right. The hotel is estimated to have lost hundreds of thousands of dollars this summer.

And now three of the biggest Internet booking sites have posted travel advisories for the Congress Plaza Hotel, following a flood of customer complaints related to a summer-long strike by hotel employees.

**INSIDE THE HOTEL**

During the strike the hotel has kept going with a skeleton crew of replacement workers from area temp agencies – a practice that will be illegal in the State of Illinois when a new law takes effect in January. After that, employers will have to round up their own scabs.

But it isn't just about defending unions. "There are several reasons the customers would be upset," says Jennie Busch of Chicago Jobs with Justice (JWJ). "Obvious-

ly they have to make a decision about crossing a picket line, which is ideological. But also there are issues of service."

Busch, who works with Chicago JWJ's Day Laborer Organizing Committee, says the hotel is essentially "hiring professional strikebreakers." This practice, she says, prolongs the strike. And that's not all. Community groups like the Chicago Coalition of the Homeless and ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) are also concerned about the replacement workers, many of whom are very poor or even homeless. "It's risky for the temps," says Busch.

Temp workers sent in to break a strike normally face the possibility of many kinds of abuses ranging from wage and hour violations to health and safety hazards. In this case, says Busch, "especially cleanliness issues." Witness the customer complaints.

"A room service tray sat outside our door for nearly two days with leftover food rotting."

"Not well maintained. Escalators and elevators didn't work. It looks like a hotel that is about to be shut down."

"A dirty, stinking hotel with no customer service."

These are all from customers who booked online this summer, unaware that the workers at the Congress Plaza Hotel have been on strike since June 15. There has not been a strike at a downtown Chicago hotel in decades.

**OUT IN THE STREET**

The 130 workers belong to Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 1, a member-run union that last year stood up to and beat a hotel man-

agement association representing 27 downtown Chicago hotels. Local 1 threatened to strike then, but the hotels blinked first and agreed to raise wages to \$10.00 an hour.

But when the union contract at the Congress expired, its out-of-town owner – a wealthy clothing importer named Albert Nasser, whose Gelmart Industries supplies Wal-Mart among others – refused to keep pace with these increases. In May management cut pay by seven percent to \$8.21. The housekeepers, telephone operators, restaurant employees and others then voted, by a 90 percent margin, to strike until Nasser agreed to pay – even if it

meant forcing him to sell or shut down the hotel.

"It's like when Moses went against Pharaoh," says Sharon Williams, a phone operator for eight years at the Congress. "Pharaoh did everything he possibly could to them, and still

they won. And just like Moses, the workers at the Congress hotel will be out one day longer than the boss."

Other strikers seem to feel the same. Pickets have been up almost without a break straight through heat-stroke season, in pouring rain, in winds that seemed on the verge of tearing up trees by the roots. The one exception was when the union briefly called off the midnight shift, but the strikers soon insisted that the picket line must be active round the clock.

**ONE DAY LONGER**

Large rallies in support of the strikers have also punctuated the struggle all summer. On July 12, hundreds of religious leaders and other supporters re-enacted the biblical tale of the fall of Jericho, marching with strikers around the entire hotel

grounds seven times and finally blowing a trumpet. The walls did not come tumbling down.

On August 9, the mostly-immigrant strikers joined with about 1,000 supporters in an "Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride" at a nearby theater. After that event, supporters marched back to the hotel and around the block again.

Workers from the other 27 union hotels, the ones that got their deal last year, have been out in force to walk the line with the Congress strikers, as have supporters from other unions – Service Employees Industrial Union Local 1, UNITE! and others. Earlier in the summer there was a fair amount of media attention. Presidential candidates Carol Moseley-Braun, Dennis Kucinich and Howard Dean have been out to speak with strikers. But by August the media had moved on to other topics.

Then on Labor Day, unions and other community groups joined Local 1 in civil disobedience in front of the Congress. Hundreds turned out in a driving rain. Twenty linked arms and sat down in the middle of Michigan Avenue traffic and were arrested. Local TV, radio and newsprint were suddenly interested all over again. The strikers are hoping that the word will continue to spread and that the hotel's drooping clientele will sink even farther.

"It really boosted the strike," says HERE spokesperson Lars Negstad.

Still, no one expects the strike to be over any time soon. And being out of a job is hard on the workers, but the union has been helping them find part-time work at other hotels to supplement their strike pay.

"I'm not worried about it," says Williams. "I know that this is right, and I put my trust in Go The workers walking the line are a strong force."

For more customer complaints or to help out, see [www.congresshotelstrike.info](http://www.congresshotelstrike.info).

**There has not been a strike at a downtown Chicago hotel in decades.**

**Garden Poem**

By Meg Miner

The news reports don't say  
Why garden gnomes don't play  
Beneath suburban trees anymore.

But if I were a plastic goose  
I'd be looking at all the flags set loose  
Thinking of when there were lawn decorating  
jobs galore.

**Let the Eagle Soar**

"Let the eagle soar,  
Like she's never soared  
before.  
From rocky coast to  
golden shore,  
Let the mighty eagle soar.  
Soar with healing in her  
wings,  
As the land beneath her sings:  
'Only God, no other kings.'  
This country's far too young to die.  
We've still got a lot of climbing to do,  
And we can make it if we try.  
Built by toils and struggles  
God has led us through."



– U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft

**That's Life:**

THE POETRY OF DONALD RUMSFELD

**ON NATO**

You may think it's  
something  
I ought to know,  
But I happen not to.  
That's life.  
(July 9, 2003)

**ON DEMOCRACY**

People elected  
Those people to office.  
That's what they think,  
and  
That's life.  
(Feb. 20, 2003)

**ON REPORTERS**

If you do something,  
Somebody's not going  
To agree with it.  
That's life.  
(Feb. 19, 2003)

**ON PEOPLE**

They're going to have  
Some impact on  
What happens in that  
country  
And that's not wrong.  
That's life.  
(Nov. 16, 2001)

**ON THE BUDGET**

If you do anything,  
Someone's not going  
To like it and  
That's life.  
(May 7, 2002)

**ON CRITICISM**

It makes it complicated.  
Sometimes, it makes  
It difficult.  
That's life.  
(Sept. 11, 2003)

**ON LEAKS**

Look bumpy? Sure.  
But you pick up  
And go on.  
That's life.  
(May 17, 2002)

