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.

The opinions are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the IMC as a whole.

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THANK YOU! Urbana-Champaign Sustainers and Readers

From the Editors and Facilitators of the Public i

This is the 10th anniversary issue of the Public i and we want to thank all of those who have made this paper possible. These include the founders and sustainers of the Independent Media Center and the paper itself, all of the people who have worked on the production and distribution of the paper, all our authors, our readers, and the businesses and other organizations that have made space to distribute our papers in their establishments.

The IMC and the Public i were founded after a number of Champaign-Urbana community members attended the 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization’s meetings in Seattle. These folks came home convinced that the commercial media’s presentations were extremely solidified their conviction that what was needed in the US and abroad was media with international, national, and local foci that was independent of the dominant economic and political power structures.

What grew out of this conviction was powerful. To see the very first of our efforts, readers can visit the website, where they will find four dispatches from the events in Genoa. These stories appeared only on the web and were based on reports from IMC members who were part of the massive protests at the G8 meetings in Genoa, Italy in July of 2001 further solidified their conviction that what was needed in the US and abroad was media with international, national, and local foci that was independent of the dominant economic and political power structures.

We want to thank all of those who have made this paper possible: national and international politics, human rights, education, labor and economics, health care, the environment, the arts, food, sports, and issues of concern to people of color, women, youth, and the LGBT community. As might suggest in a universe community, there has been considerable turnover in the editor/facilitator group, but several of the original people have hung in with us.

We want to offer special thanks to our longstanding financial sustainer:

Continued on next page
Channel Surfing "UK Riot Porn"

By @lazyor

@lazyor is a "trouble-maker" and agitator exiled in the C-U area, and a practitioner of "thought-crime" and "Poetic Terrorism." (FT/ through an occasional publication called Automne.

While perusing the BBC coverage of the "Riots in the UK," I was horrified not by the destruction and burning, but by the attempts by the media and the state to portray what was happening as simply just "hoodlumism," a "race riot," and "wanton criminality." Not only are such media generated categories an attempt to control the impressions and emotions of the spectacle, but they are a clumsy attempt to garner public support and legitimize "the forces of Law and Order." Without acknowledging the context in which these events unfolded.

Imagine, if one can, if the media reports had described the events in England as "the expression of under-class rage in a time of austerity," or an "angry revolt of the dispossessed," or "a revolt by those who see no future in the sub-mission to the authority of the rapacious global market?" Essentially, a rebellion of "The Invisibles." Now that would be news! Of course such an acknowledgment of reality would probably result in a new legal social panic and a very real crisis of political and economic legitimacy.

Only once did I catch a glimpse of reality, when the BBC interviewed two teenage "Riot Girls" drinking their looted spoils on a street corner, and one interrupted the reporter's paternalistic analysis and admonition with: "We are finally showing the police and the rich that we can do what we want." This is a small statement from a 15-year-old girl who faces a life with no future.

Embedded in her statement is a signifier of a nascent class consciousness. In few words, she identifies not only her oppressors—the police who protect the privileges of the rich—but also her comrades. The "we" signified here is other disenchanted and "excluded" rioters with no future, who have been living under neo-liberal recession and "austerity" all their lives.

Of course, when one looks even more closely at the spectacle of the UK Riots, and the media's and state's attempts to manage the image of the crisis, the "official narrative" begins to fall apart, and there is more evidence of the basic "cognitive dissonance" that exists between their analysis and the everyday life of the "rioters.

Moreover, the images coming out of the UK dispels the aura that the rupture is a "race riot." The rioters are of every ethnic group that composes the face of poverty itself. They are not just Africans and Caribbean, there are a significant number of poor whites in the crowds. A sign of "class solidarity" that here transcends racialized divisions. Folks are cooperatively organized, often strategically targeting specific locations—the affluent neighborhoods and shopping districts of the rich—taking what they previously lacked and burning the rest while eluding the police. And they are also targeting police on the streets, in response.

That is why I contend that the depiction of the UK riots as "chaos" is little more than "image control" and public distraction. So, although it may not be a political revolt, it must be understood as a broader "socio-economic rebellion" by those with nothing left to lose.

There will be many analyses and critiques of the events in the UK, and how they fit into the current global crisis in the neo-liberal economy, some of which will be valid, most of which will only be intended to organize public consensus in support of the hegemony of the powers that be, in an effort to legitimize capital's authority over our lives.

Meanwhile, there will be references made to the Watts Riots of 1965 and the Rodney King Riots, where much could be understood if we question all the "official narratives." And although there are undoubtedly some fundamental parallels, there are many important differences that suggest an entirely new composition and collective consciousness at work in these events.

Residents Protest Outside of Housing Authority

Continued from page 1

The new BTW school will bring increased surveillance of their community. If the cars of friends or family members are missed, it is suspected they will be towed.

Outside of the housing authority, Neil spoke to the media. Asked what the residents are going to do in October when they are forced to move out, she said, "We're going to stay put."

Neil put the housing issue in the context of a failing economy. "Residents are willing to work, but there are no jobs. Or they are service jobs. You can work at McDonalds, but maybe you are only given ten hours a week."

Contrary to common assumptions about public housing residents, this is the story of Tanya Richardson who showed up for the protest. She spent her lunch break to come down and stand with her neighbors. She works in a kitchen at a retirement center in Urbana. Living at Dorsey since 2006, she is the mother of five children and is happy with what she is going to do in the future. "It's stressful," she said.

Local African American landlord, Annuwan Neely, who rents to several Section 8 recipients, also showed up at the protest and talked to reporters. He noted that a decision by the housing authority board in June 2010 placed the payment standard to $200-300 under the market rate. If Landlords were turning away Section 8 recipients, he said, it was due to the lack of cooperation from the housing authority. "Their customer service is terrible," he said. Concerning the proposed changes, the housing authority has canceled its last four board meetings. The housing authority is "failing to have good communication."

"They promised us they would help us, not just give us a list."

In the days that followed, Bland visited Neel at her home and told her that the payment standard would be increased. The residents of Dunbar and Dorsey found out that public pressure works!

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Urbana Adopts a Soliciting Ordinance

By Belden Fields

After several meetings with active public participation, on August 1, the Urbana City Council adopted an ordinance banning “aggressive solicitation of money or other thing of value, including a request to purchase an item or service of little or any monetary value in circumstances where a reasonable person would understand that the purchase is in substance a donation.”

Aggressive solicitation was defined as “soliciting in a group of two or more persons or soliciting accompanied by any of the following actions: (1) Touching another person without that person’s consent; (2) Blocking the path of the person solicited or blocking the entrance to any building or vehicle; (3) Continuing to solicit or to request a donation from a person after that person has refused an earlier request; (4) Following or remaining alongside a person who walks away from the solicitor after being solicited; (5) Making any statement, gesture, or other communication that would cause a reasonable person to feel threatened into making a donation; or (6) Using profane or abusive language during the solicitation or following a refusal to make a donation.” Further, soliciting is prohibited with 20 feet of an ATM or entrance to a bank, other financial institution, or check cashing business. It is also prohibited on private property if the owner, tenant, or occupant has asked a person not to solicit or has posted a sign prohibiting solicitation. Mayor Prussing and council members assured the public that the police would issue tickets for the first offenses. Second infractions would carry a fine of $50 and subsequent offenses, $165.

At every meeting, a large majority of the attending public spoke against the ordinance. One area resident presented a petition against the ordinance with over 300 signatures. While this was not enough to stop the ordinance, it added leverage. A representative from the police department spoke against the ordinance. One area resident present would carry a fine of $50 and subsequent offenses, $165.

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Understanding the Phony Debt Crisis: Intergenerational Myths and Economic Realities

By David Green

Before discussing the inter-generational mythology that pertains to the phony debt crisis, three sets of preliminary comments are helpful, all gleaned from standard liberal-left economic discourse.

First, as nations develop technologically and become more productive and richer on a per capita basis, governments (if provoked by popular movements) can afford to assume more social welfare functions. That’s one way that common people benefit from living in rich countries. That also means that governments in developed countries spend increasingly larger shares of GDP on things like infrastructure, education, health care, and pensions. Insofar as this is the case, Western European citizens in countries that spend a larger percentage of their GDP on government are publicly reaping the personal rewards of living in highly productive and rich countries. Insofar as the U.S. lags in this area, we remain a relatively backward-albeit also productive and rich-country. Given that other developed nations spend more on government but also less per capita on (efficient, socialized) health care and the (wasteful, destructive) military, the U.S. becomes even more backwards in relation to much of Europe.

Second, governments can go into debt for generally good or bad reasons. Good reasons are to create jobs during cyclical economic downturns, and to invest in infrastructure and thus increase productivity. Bad reasons are to fight wars and bail out financial speculators. Clearly, given current wars and bailouts, and the lack of a New Deal-type stimulus in the face of intractable unemployment, we are now experiencing the worst sort of deficit spending.

Third, even in light of “bad” annual deficits, the debt crisis is phony and politically manufactured. The measure of the overall size of the debt is the percentage of GDP that is spent on servicing that debt. According to economist Mark Weisbrot, the government is paying net interest of 1.4 percent of GDP on its public debt—“this is not a phony debt crisis.”

In the midst of the current phony debt crisis, a conventional theme of the mainstream media has been that of inter-generational conflict. First, the current generation of senior citizens, as recipients of Social Security and Medicare, is charged with consuming resources that should be spent on the young. Second, baby boomers are charged with squandering the ample resources bequeathed to them by their parents, and passing our national debt to their children and grandchildren.

But from a perspective that emphasizes the ever-increasing wealth of this country and its dispensation over time, these claims prove to be clearly baseless. Given this enormous wealth, fundamental problems including the national debt can be understood in terms of the distribution of that wealth and income, and the shortfall of taxes that are currently being paid, especially by corporations and the wealthy. The grain of truth that remains from debunking generational critiques reflects an expensive profit-driven health care system, not Medicare spending per se.

THE UNITED STATES GETS RICHER, BUT AMERICANS DON’T

The Federal Bureau of Economic Analysis currently uses 2005 “chained” dollars to generate apples-to-apples comparisons of our national and individual wealth over time. In these equivalent terms, our per capita gross domestic product (GDP) has increased from less than $16,000 in 1960 to over $52,000 in 2010. These are steady and real increases in goods and services produced per every resident by all American workers. One can think of each individual’s $43,000+ as divided into portions that represent collective expenditures, from personal consumption to all types and levels of public spending. During the past half-century, the percentage of GDP spent on all forms of public education (including college) at all levels of government increased from 3.9% in 1960 to 6.7% in 2010, according to the website usgovernmentspending.com. During that same period, according to the Congressional Budget Office, combined spending on Social Security and Medicare increased from 2.1% to 8.3% of GDP. Thus total public expenditures on the old and the young in these significant areas increased from 6% to 15% of GDP over 50 years. In light of increased real per capita GDP it’s clear that these increases on fundamental services have been well affordable.

In 1960, $934 of per capita GDP (in 2005 dollars) was spent on public education and Social Security (Medicare did not yet exist). After this expense, $14,710 was left for everything else. In 1980, $2,940 was spent on education, Social Security, and Medicare, with $22,690 remaining. Last year, the analogous figures were $6,369 and $36,148. Thus while over the past 50 years the percentage of GDP publicly spent on “dependents” in these major ways has nearly tripled, to 15%, the amount of gains in real wealth left over per individual increased by over $21,000, or 150%. That is primarily due, of course, to technological innovation and steady increases in the productivity of the labor force. The problem is that for four decades, this increase has accrued disproportionately to the top 20% of earners, and even more disproportionately to the top 10%, 1%, and 1%, many who respond by poor mouthing the country as a whole while demanding lower taxes.

This unjust appropriation of wealth contributes to the perception of a debt crisis, and to the exploitation of that phony crisis in order to further defund vital social spending while maintaining low tax rates on the wealthy and a large military. Meanwhile, “good debt” is not on the table, and sustained economic recovery is not in the immediate future.

ECONOMIC REALITIES

Thus three well-documented economic realities contribute to the current deficit, providing the opportunity for a phony “debt crisis.” First, long-term stagnant incomes for the vast majority of the population have decreased their contribution to federal income. Second, lowered and evaded taxes on the (increasingly) wealthy and corporations have decreased tax progressivity and halved the corporate contribution to federal income. Finally, the recession resulting from the housing bubble delivered an acute blow to both GDP growth and tax collection at all levels.

None of this has anything to do with inter-generational expenditure issues, the health problems of the elderly, or the profligate character of the baby boomers. If government spending raises issues other than costs driven by a private healthcare system, then these issues relate to our trillion-dollar military and wars, and to the myopic social costs of the increased and desperate poverty that is generated by this unequal distribution of wealth. A more equitable, fairly-taxed, and compassionate society can well afford the public costs of fundamental generational needs. Again, the very existence of these needs is characteristic of economic and technological progress; to fail to address them is both inhumane and pragmatically foolish.

UC2B aka Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband

Public Showcase of new equipment. Free and open to the public, Music, food and prizes.

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Join us for a hands-on demonstration of the fiber-optic network that will power fast connectivity for schools, community organizations, homes and businesses in Champaign-Urbana. The UC2B fiber-optic broadband network has received a 30 times speed boost since its inception two years ago. The new gigabit electronics equipment that is coming to Champaign-Urbana will be unveiled during a live demo.

Find out whether your school, workplace or home is eligible. Learn how fast broadband is changing our community. Join the movement.

Big Broadband

Join the movement.

Broadband is changing our community. Join the movement.
The Sound Before the Fury: The California Prison Hunger Strike

By Gregory Koger

Greg Koger is a social justice activist who, as a youth, spent over six years in solitary confinement in an Illinois prison.

Beginning on July 1, 2011, hundreds of prisoners of all races in California’s Pelican Bay SHU (“Security Housing Unit”) began a historic hunger strike to demand an end to the cruel and inhumane treatment that they suffer — including long-term solitary confinement, which constitutes torture under international law. The hunger strike rapidly spread to over 6,500 prisoners in over one-third of California’s prisons, making their heroic stand the most significant act of prisoner-led resistance in the U.S. in decades.

THE PRISONERS’ FIVE CORE DEMANDS:

1. End Group Punishment and Administrative Abuse — This is in response to prison officials’ punishment of all prisoners, regardless of race, that respect and appreciate nature’s varieties of vegetables. They even learned how to correctly play a djembe with Odd Music. Several of the students learned how to create scene boxes, various word sounds, and common household items, such as cheese graters, to produce poetic mini-plays with help from the School for Designing a Society. They also experimented with instruments and designed their own with Odd Music. Several of the students learned how to correctly play a djembe and two West African rhythms.

The laughs were contagious as the children learned how to create scene boxes, various word sounds, and common household items, such as cheese graters, to produce poetic mini-plays with help from the School for Designing a Society. They also experimented with instruments and designed their own with Odd Music. Several of the students learned how to correctly play a djembe and two West African rhythms.

Two historic anniversaries of prison resistance in the U.S. are nearly upon us. Comrade George Jackson, the foremost prisoner-educated revolutionary intellectual and theorist of the Black Panther Party, who inspired many on both sides of the prison walls with his transformation from an 18-year-old accused of a 570 gas station robbery and sentenced to one-year-to-life in California prison into a class-conscious communist revolutionary, was assassinated by prison guards on August 21, 1971.

And the righteous rebellion of prisoners at Attica Prison in New York three years later on September 9, 1971, who for four liberating days peacefully held the prison yard and demanded improvements in prison conditions, until the prison was stormed by New York State Police Troopers who indiscriminately opened fired, killing 29 prisoners and 10 prison guards, wounding 89 prisoners with gunfire, and injuring hundreds more prisoners in retaliation in the aftermath.

As L.D. Barkley, 21-year-old spokesperson for the Attica prisoners eloquently stated, “The entire incident that has erupted here at Attica is... the result of the unmotivated oppression wrought by the racist administration of this prison. We are men. We are not beasts, and we do not intend to be beaten and driven as such. What has happened here is but the sound before the fury of those who are oppressed.

Fifty years later, after an unprecedented explosion in racist mass incarceration and an unparalleled regime of pervasive solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, the hunger strikers in California have once again placed the heroic example of prisoners at the forefront of the struggle against oppression.

From August 1-12th we had two very amazing weeks of creativity, discovery and hard work!

The children would start most mornings “Community Gardening” at Randolph St and Beardsly Ave. They spent time pruning, tilling the soil, and planting various varieties of vegetables. They even learned how to create scene boxes, various word sounds, and common household items, such as cheese graters, to produce poetic mini-plays with help from the School for Designing a Society. They also experimented with instruments and designed their own with Odd Music. Several of the students learned how to correctly play a djembe and two West African rhythms.

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Ten Years of Indypendent Media: An Oral History of the Public i

The Public i commemorates ten years of publication by interviewing some of those who have worked on the newspaper along the way.

DARRIN DRDA

Darrin Drda is a former Champaign-Urbana resident who now lives in San Rafael, California with his wife, Annabelle. He is the author of the forthcoming book The Four Global Truths: Awakening to the Peril and Promise of Our Times (www.thefourglobaltruths.com).

As far as I can recall, I first became involved with the Public i in the summer of 2001. I had been approached several months before that by Sascha Meinrath, who, along with Sarah Kanouse, Danielle Chynoweth, Paul Riesmann, Mike Lehman, Zach Miller, and a handful of other key figures, was busy securing and reading a space for the newly-formed IMC. It was important, Sascha told me, that in addition to having a space, the IMC needed to tell the community that Indymedia had come to town and intended to stay. A monthly newspaper was the obvious choice, and I was immediately drawn to the charge. Having worked as a freelance writer and editor weekly for the Octopus (later the CU Cityview, which somehow became The Buzz), I was at least qualified to work a computer and make it churn out legible pieces of paper. On top of that, I was down on the revolution. I can’t say that I was eager to work long hours for no pay, but I seemed to be on the right track.

I vaguely recall a brainstorming meeting at the then-new IMC location (next to Siam Terrace on Main Street) during which I proposed a couple names and flag designs for the for the as-yet-unmanifest IMC publication. The clear winner among them was the Public i, although my favorite at the time was actually H forth. Shortly thereafter, I set about designing the Quark template for our new radical rag, and weekly meetings of the new working group began. The early crew was always relatively small, surprising given the apparent man to help lead the charge. Having worked on the Daily Independent newspaper briefly and a handful of other key figures, was busy securing and reading a space for the Public i, even if hazy, are fond ones.

I quickly realized the importance of this movement and the need for a way to be in the pulse of what was going on in the community. I found that some stories could actually effect change in people’s lives. I was moved by this and by the power of what was going on in the community 3. My name was recognized. I loved that level of attention. I also really learned how not to put up with corruption, sexism, racism and the like.

I worked hard at many jobs, helping to launch the Octopus allot and when I moved here I attended one of the first meetings of the alternative that was to become the Indymedia. I went to the meeting, not to become a writer but to just start to get my feet wet in the community. I followed some story ideas and the editor/manager Paul Young just said, “Great. Write them.” That’s what I started doing. Three things I loved about it: 1. I found that some stories could actually effect change in people’s lives. 2. It was such a great way to be in the pulse of what was going on in the community. 3. My name was recognized. I loved that level of attention. I also really learned how not to put up with corruption, sexism, racism and the like.

SANDRA AHTEN

Sandra Ahten is an artist, activist, writer, diet and wellness coach, friend and most recently, a graphics producer. She has lived in Urbana since 1995.

Why did you get involved with the Public i?

I was reading alternative newspapers and when I moved here I attended one of the first meetings of the alternative that was to become the Octopus. I went to the meeting, not to become a writer but to just start to get my feet wet in the community. I followed some story ideas and the editor/manager Paul Young just said, “Great. Write them.” That’s what I started doing. Three things I loved about it: 1. I found that some stories could actually effect change in people’s lives. 2. It was such a great way to be in the pulse of what was going on in the community.

Who else do you remember working with?

Dorothy Martiniano, Shelley Masur, Dave Maddern and I put together an amazing story that was a document of where all the “conspiracy theories” surrounding 9-11 were actually reported first as facts in mainstream media. We worked on it in my basement for at least 15 hours a week for a month. Darrin Dreda pulled it together visually. It was an amazing story.

I credit Darrin, with really being the backbone of the paper. The hours he put in, the graphic design skills, the editor’s eye that he brought to the table were so consistent week after week. So although we had a fluid process, it arrived on time and in a format that people could get used to, which is something that really helped it flourish.

What were some of your favorite articles?

The “article” that I got the most comments on was my recipe for Vegan Sloppy Joes.

What did you learn at the Public i that you have since used?

The process of consensus was really hammered out at the early stages of the Public i. We first used a model of “editor” and “departments.” There was going to be one editor, a bunch of soliciting articles for “departments” and another for “women’s issues,” and other for “community happenings,” etc. The consensus was in that we decided who these people would be and who the editor would be.

But then we took it one step further and moved away from “departments” and “an editor” to a paper that was really pulled together equally by the people who were actually at that month’s meetings and sustaining the commitment to it. It was a not a pretty process, but one that I learned a lot from and that has really been most helpful to me in my life.

And then in working at that level of true consensus, with the shared respect that it demanded helped me grow as a human being. I also really learned not to put up with things I knew not to be patronized. That’s come in pretty handy too.

LAURA STENGRIM

Laura Stengrim currently lives in Phoenix, Arizona, where she works in the legal field for her day job, is an adjunct writing instructor in the community college system, does some freelance editing, tries to avoid Arizona politics, and enjoys hiking, yoga, swimming and spending as much time outdoors as possible.

Why did you get involved with the Public i?

I had seen the newspaper around town and was studying media consolidation in a graduate course at U of I, sometime in 2001 or 2002. At first I went to a few Public i meetings just out of curiosity and I started writing a few articles myself. Then I became totally attached to an amazing group of people who produced a very important and wonderful little newspaper.

Had you ever written for a newspaper before?

My first letter to the editor was published in the Rocky Mountain News when I was like 12. I was angry at my social studies teacher for not allowing us to watch Bill Clinton’s presidential inauguration, and I wanted to make a point about the pitiful state of public education in America. I still write occasional letters to the editor when outraged by some ridiculous injustice or another, but no, I hadn’t consistently written articles for a newspaper prior to being involved with the Public i.

What is “indypendent” media?

Local journalism, freedom from “departments” and “an editor” to a paper that was really pulled together equally by the people who were actually at that month’s meetings and sustaining the commitment to it. It was a not a pretty process, but one that I learned a lot from and that has really been most helpful to me in my life.

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functional group of people when I was involved with the Public i. Darrin Drda was the graphic artist who had a hand in masterminding the paper from the beginning. There was a very solid group of writers and editors that included Linda Evans, Meghan Krausch, Sandra Alten, Rickie Bald- 

win, Lisa Chason, and Bob Illyes. Brian Dolinar became a key facilitator and contributor. Dave started doing the layout after Darrin left. And of course the Public i, nay, Urbana, would not be what it is today without Paul Mueser.

What were some of the big stories that the paper covered?

I moved to Urbana a few weeks before 9/11 and left in 2007. We all know what happened during that time period. But while Urbana flourished as a hub for WMDs, such as genocide in Sudan, Bush's re-election in 2004, health care crisis, Hurricane Katrina, Iraq, Iraq, Iraq, etc. The Public i would have articles about these major issues written from a local perspective, and it also had articles about all kinds of topics, local and not. We liked doing a big middle article and trying to have others work around a theme for the month, but not be constrained by it. Urbana-Champaign has a great wealth of resources and very smart people who can be tapped for occasional articles without being deeply involved in the facilitation or production of the paper.

What were some of your favorite articles?

I enjoyed facilitating (and reading, and sometimes writing) the theme-driven pieces on a number of authors and their various perspectives. I think we did one around the 2004 election on different candidates, one about the Free Trade Area of the Americas, one called “Meet the Coalition!” about Bush's Cabinet and WMDs, and one around the fighting, supporting and sending troops in the Iraq effort), and there about Bush's Coalition of the Willing (the countries that were involved in the facilitation or production of the paper.

MEGHAN KRAUSCH

Meghan Krausch left C-U in 2005 for NYC, and eventually landed in the PhD program in biology at the University of Minnesota. Currently in Buenos Aires researching utopian social movements, she is also the drummer for the Angry Feminists.

Why did you get involved with the Public i?

I originally got involved with the Public i after I returned from a Witness for Peace trip to Nicaragua. The trips are designed sort of like real-world seminars, and a big part of the trip is finding ways to share the information with your local community when you get back to the US. I had been looking for something to get involved with in C-U since I was still relatively new to town, so this provided the push I needed to really check out the Public i. I originally showed up just to pitch my article (“The Neoliberal Noise Hanging Nicaragua”), but was immediately drawn to the editorial collective, the UC-IMC as a whole, and an entirely new (to me) way of organizing (ideas which now form the basis of my dissertation) I was radicalized, or at least more radicalized, if you can say that. The editorial group at the Public i taught me how to actively participate in a meeting that needs to arrive at consensus, which is a great organizing skill and just a useful life skill, and how to maintain those principles even when deadlines loom. I learned to carefully reflect on what it means for indymedia to be a tool for those left out of the mainstream media—does that mean just presenting an alternative narrative, or does that mean working to include voices of color, of others, or folks otherwise marginalized in both mainstream and alternative media? Finally I would say that I gained the confidence that anybody really can make their own media. We just were a ragtag group of volunteers producing a monthly paper, and somehow it was good.

MAGGIE QUIRK

Maggie Quirk graduated from the U of I with a bachelor’s in Business Administration in December, 2011. She lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, where she works as a specialist in corporate financial reporting and regulatory compliance. She is building an e-business in her free time.

I joined the Public i team as a writer and collaborator during my junior year of high school. in 2003. I was delighted to discover the opportunity through my involvement in the IMC. While my mind was being shaped by my teachers, the paper gave me an outlet to develop my interests. I wrote articles and joined the weekly meeting in which those in attendance facilitated articles and organized the paper. I had the opportunity to develop some very important life skills at an early age. My experience was valuable for engaging with the local community and learning directly about the university and political affairs.

I practiced three of the most important skills for success as an adult: writing, teamwork, and dealing with people. I have found these to be invaluable in and after college. The only way to improve is through practice. Joining the Public i sets the foundation for the most valuable skills you can have in life.

Written communication is still as important as ever, and can be used to improve your position in life. Many people will have to work with those they cannot stand. You may be required to pair it with marketing, or use it in other ways. Writing and journalism have always fascinated me. I even hope to support myself someday with the e-business I’ve started providing information and advice for people interested in a vegan diet.

Working on the Public i gave me so many opportunities to grow. I learned how reporting, makes the world go round. It is the main way people hear new ideas and are exposed to things outside their direct experience. As we sat around the couch at the old IMC building, I was immersed in adult conversation. It was a welcome change to be treated not like a child, but like a valuable contributor. I learned about current events from new perspectives. I was exposed to new thoughts and ideas. The experience was like traveling to a foreign country.

Possibly the greatest benefit from working with the Public i was all of the people I met. The Public i is a meeting ground for free thinkers who walk their talk. Some of the most intellectual and active people in Champaign-Urbana contribute and collaborate. You have the opportunity to make lifelong friends. This is valuable not only for socializing, but it helps build a network of people you can leverage in job searches, college applications, and future projects.

The people who made my time at the Public i so memo- rable have my sincerest thanks. The gift of their attention and guidance nurtured my abilities. It was a notable part of my life, which I remember fondly I recommend that one, especially high school students, consider joining to give back to the community and develop valuable life skills.

SHARA ESBENSHADE

Shara Esbenshade wrote for the Public i as a high school student from 2007-2008. She is currently studying history at Stanford Uni- versity and working on public history edu- cation projects at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research &amp; Education Institute. It was through my activism that I first learned about and started writing for the Public i. Independent media is crucial to movements for social justice. It provides information and news that corporate media often ignores and a platform in which movements can form. It is open to all as a space for expression about locally relevant news, reflections,
Ten Years of Indepedent Media

Continued from previous page

The high caliber intellectual discussions that took place behind the scenes were what defined the paper. There was more passion in those conversations. I suppose some might say the consensus mode was a limitation in that some things couldn’t move forward just cuz one person would shoot it down. But, I saw its value. And, the fact that we were a 501c3 limited our ability to take action on these issues. This isn’t a limitation to create public dialogue about issues that mattered. In a community climate where marginalization, systematic silencing, and brutal assaults to dissenting voices are not unusual, the paper used its pages to create public dialogue about issues that mattered. In a community climate where marginalization, systematic silencing, and brutal assaults to dissenting voices are not unusual, the paper used its pages to create public dialogue about issues that mattered.

Why did you leave your work with the Public i?

I found my new career path 2 1/2 hrs north of Urbana.

ANTONIA DARDER

Antonia Darder is a Professor Emerita at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She is long time Puerto Rican activist-scholar involved in issues related to education, language, immigrant, workers, and women’s rights.

To offer the excerpt from A Dissident Voice as part of a reflection of my history with the Public i and the vision that I believe the paper attempts to nurture in the world. For over eight years, I lived in the Champaign-Urbana community alone and feeling alienated and quite the outsider. One of the few places where I found connection and where my voice and my ideals were welcomed was at the Public i, which over the years has consistently published to bring a variety of voices on the margins and bring them to the center of the political discourse of this community.

This does not mean, of course, that in this process of collective knowledge production there were not moments of deep internal struggles or conflicts; for to be a political publication that embraces dissident voices means that there will always be struggle and differences, which must be engaged with courage and persistence. As expected, conflicts surfaced about many of the same issues we find in any context—racism, class privilege, gendered relations of power, homophobia, and even the sort of political elitism that can still rear as head winds to progressive people.

Yet, what I found rather extraordinary with the Public i over the years, and especially during the time that I was a member of the editorial committee, was that most understood that conflict and political differences are essential to any democratic process, including the rethinking of political issues and community struggles. And although at such moments there were some who simply chose to walk away, those who remained came to learn much about what Audre Lorde called “that deep and true and deep truth which understanding serves. This depth within each of us that nurtures vision.”

Moreover, if our voices of dissent were to challenge the powers that be, we were encouraged that dissent is hard to be a welcomed dimension of our editorial dialogues and our efforts to bring a different vision of political life to the community. As such, over the years, the political analysis, sensibilities, and contributions of a variety of community members were documented in the pages of the Public i, leaving an incredible historical footprint of important and powerful dissenting voices within Champaign-Urbana voices united loosely by a collective vision of social justice, human rights, and economic democracy.

Despite many monetary and organizational limitations, the paper’s uncompromising commitment to this vision served over the years as a sort of public pedagogy of struggle. As such, the Public i consistently challenged social inequalities and material injustices, and while also working to strengthen the collective political consciousness within the larger community. However, this was not done solely through the publication of the newspaper, but rather through the willingness of its members, who organized marches against war, greed, and inequities and standing with the disenfranchised when things were at their worst.

So, when black youth were shot or incarcerated over the years, the Public i has repeatedly challenged the fabrication of race, racism, and the racist postures of scientific neutrality, as defined by western philosophical assumptions of knowledge. Instead, dissident scholars refuse to be extiricated from the flesh and, thus, immerse us fully into the blood and guts of what it means to be alive, awake, and in love with the world. Instead of the boredom, isolation, and banality of contemporary mainstream life, dissident scholars seek places of imagination, possibilities, creativity, and eros from which to live, love and dream anew.

However, the journey can be arduous and contemplative. Dissidents must be constantly self-vigilant and forward-thinking ready to confront with wits, contradictions and veiled obstructions that, consciously or not, serve as effective roadblocks to the wider dissemination of radical ideas and revolutionary visions. This is to say, unless one is born into or is in alliance with the street culture, the journey towards civil rights, the public i, and thus, among other things, the paper’s uncompromising commitment to this vision, is an extremely precarious one. Many come dangerously close to losing heart, mind, body, and soul—serious losses that can effectively disable dissident passion, driving us out of the street culture, and thus, immobilize the transgressive power of dissenting voices—voices absolutely essential to democratic life.

—A Dissident Voice (Darder, 2011)
US Suppresses Minimum Wage in Haiti, and More

By Chip Bruce

The release of 1,918 Haiti-related diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks this summer reveals details of US involvement in Haiti from 2003 to present. Unfortunately, the cables do not support the historical pattern, just add in disturbing details. If there is any good news here, it’s of a rare example of responsible journalism. The Nation is collaborating with the Haitian weekly newspaper Haiti Libre on a series of groundbreaking articles about US and UN policy toward Haiti, which are based on those cables.

The pattern goes back at least to the earliest days of the 19th century, when President George Washington, a slave owner, had Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson grant the first significant foreign aid of the United States to the slave owners in Haiti in a failed effort to suppress the slave revolution there. Following the success of that revolution, the US enforced a diplomatic and trade embargo against Haiti until 1862. From 1915 to 1934 the US imposed military occupation ostensibly to stabilize the country and keep out Europeans, but also to shape Haiti into a profiteering neo-colony.

As popular resistance to occupation grew, the US withdrew and shifted its support from 1934 through 1986 to the fascist Duvaliers, father and son, and their Tonton Macoutes paramilitaries. Haitians suffering from a bloody military coup and massacres of protesters, Haiti elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide by a landslide in 1990. Aristide called the mass movement that put him into power Lavalas (“torrent” in Creole). His election succeeded despite the millions that the US gave to his opponent, Marc Bazin, a former World Bank official. In 1991 a US-backed military coup deposed Aristide as president. René Préval replaced Aristide, and the US Embassy in Haiti was re-elected after, replacing Préval in 2001.

The newly released cables pick up the details from 2003 on. Because Aristide’s army in 1995, it was difficult for the U.S. and its allies to organize a coup. On Feb. 29, 2004, U.S. Special Forces kidnapped Aristide and his spouse, Mildred Trouillot Aristide, taking them to the Central African Republic.

The cables also show how the US, the European Union, and the United Nations supported Haiti’s recent presidential and parliamentary elections, despite the exclusion of Lavalas, Haiti’s largest political party. They agomized a bit about sponsoring an election that would exclude the majority party from participating about “enslaving” the country, but decided to push through the sham election because so much was invested already in the neocolonial relationship with Haiti.

The US embassy noted that Haiti would save $100 million a year under the terms of the Caribbean oil alliance with Venezuela, called PetroCaribe. The savings would be earmarked for development in schools, health care, and infrastructure. US Ambassador Janet Sanderson immedi-ately set out to sabotage the deal. She noted that the embassy started to “pressure” Haitian leader Préval from joining PetroCaribe, saying that it would “cause problems with [the U.S.].” As major oil companies, such as Exxon Mobil and Chevron, threatened to cut off ties with Haiti, Sanderson met to assure them that she would pressure Haiti at the highest levels of government.

From Athens to New York, a Flotilla is a Demonstration with Press Coverage

By Robert Naiman

Often in the last few months, I had the opportunity to answer the question: why are you attempting to sail with the Gaza Freedom Flotilla? I always answered by talking about the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian beings living under restrictions that the International Committee of the Red Cross has described as illegal collective punishment against a civilian population, in direct violation of the Geneva conventions concerning the treatment of civilians under occupation. The “permanent opening,” created by the interim Egyptian government, of the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt has turned out to be largely a “nothing burger,” with an average of 400 people crossing a day; an average of 300 people a day crossed before the 2006 people crossing per day was the closure of Gaza in the first place. Construction materials are still largely prohibited Palestinians from Gaza still have great difficulty obtaining permission to travel to East Jerusalem and the West Bank for work, study, or medical care. Palestinian fishermen are restricted to operating within three nautical miles of Gaza’s coast. They were promised twenty miles under the Oslo accord. Israel, with the collaboration of the US and Egypt, largely prevents Gaza from exporting goods to Europe and to the West Bank. What preventing the export of strawberries to Europe has to do with Israel’s “security” has yet to be explained to a skeptical world public.

There is another aspect to the question besides “what are you protesting: why this approach? You could write to the newspaper, say, “Congress, hold a demonstration…” You hold a demonstration on a busy street because a key objective is to get the general public and you can communicate with the general public if they can’t see or hear you.

When we were in Athens, pressing for permission from the Greek authorities to leave by boat—and also preparing to sail without their permission—we noted that the Canadian boat had a much better chance of getting out than we did, because they were in Crete. If they could slip past the Greek Coast Guard, they might make it to international waters. But there was little chance of that for us, docked in Athens—a lot of water separated us from freedom as if we were at sea, and the Greek authorities were making to run a border for the run, but he was in El Pazo and you were in Peoria Ultimately, when we sailed, we were quickly intercepted by the Greek Coast Guard commando and forced back to a subsidiary port. From the point of view of press coverage, it was better to be in Athens than Crete. Athens is a convenient place for international media; Crete, not so much. While we were in Greece, Athens was erupting in protest against the austerity plan imposed as a condition of the European/IMF bailout of European banks that made bad loans to Greece. There were two days of general strike while we were in Athens; many protests, loss of tear gas, even a few buildings set on fire. As we awaited permission to leave—or a decision to execute our plan to leave without permission—we worried we would lose our media contingent. On our boat, we had 36 passengers, four crew, and 10 journalists. Some of these were TV journalists from the major networks and others were print jour- nalists from major publications. They weren’t going to stay indefinitely while we held press conferences. They needed action. Fortunately, Syntagma Square—the “Tahrir Square” of the Greek protests, across the street from the parliament building—was a short distance from the hotels where the American passengers on our boat were staying. “Go cover the anti-IMF protests,” we said “Well let you know before we leave.” When we did leave, all the journalists were on board.

With our flotilla, we put the issue of workers on the international stage, raising the political price of the blockade and of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. We showed that a few hundred peace activists, largely from North America and Western Europe, mostly middle-aged and many of them Jews, could force the Israeli and U.S. governments to publicly answer for their blockade of 1.5 million people.

Meanwhile, contractors for Fruit of the Loom, Hanes and Levi’s worked closely with the US Embassy to block a minimum wage increase for Haitian garment workers. In a June 10, 2009 cable to Washington, Ambassador Sanderson argued, “A minimum wage would be extremely expensive and by Préval may be critical to resolv- ing the issue of the minimum wage and its protest ‘spin-off’—or risk the political environment spiraling out of control.” After Préval negotiated a deal to create a two-tiered minimum wage—one for the textile workers at 53/day and one other industrial workers at about $5/day, the US Embassy was displeased. David E. Lindwall, deputy chief of mission, said the $5/day minimum “did not take economic reality into account.” It was just a populist measure aimed at appealing to “the unemployed and underpaid masses.”

Think about this when you buy underwear or jeans. The artificially low price you pay, which killed the North American textile industry, goes to pay for shipping, marketing, high executive salaries, and industry profits, with Western workers and with Americans few the clothes. But if you live in the EU or especially in the US, you can know that your government continues to work to maintain those low prices, and resists appealing to the “unemployed and underpaid masses.”

Think about the manipulations of the democratic process in Haiti when people ask why the rest of the world fails to see the wisdom and the glory of Western democracy. Think also about how much of this has been covered in your local newspaper, or on television and radio news.

This protest was not an isolated event, but part of a series of actions to bring the question of Palestine back to the international table. A few days after most of the Americans returned home, hundreds of activists from the US and its allies to organize a “flytilla,” attempting to join protests in the West Bank. The Israeli government’s reaction was to block these activists from flying into or entering Israel, because they intended to commit the “crime” of visiting Palestinians in the West Bank. This dramatized the fact that the West Bank is also under a form of closure, with the Israeli government deciding who may enter and leave.

The next “flotilla,” takes a different form. This action will take place in September, when Palestinians present their applica- tion to become a member state in the United Nations. It is a flotilla in the sense that it’s the many countries of the United Nations uniting against the opposition of a strong few, and it’s also a flotilla in the sense that it’s a protest with press coverage. Indeed, plans are underway to engage an actual flotilla to sail to the UN. Even if that doesn’t take place, there will be demonstrations around the United States and around the world on September 15 in support of Palestine’s applica- tion for membership. The demonstration in Champagne-Urbana will be at 5pm on at the Champagne County Veterans Memorial, Broadway and Main, Urbana. The national website is www.september15.org.
The NFL lockout is over!

At the outset, things did not look good for the players. There were worries about DeMaurice Smith, the new executive director of the NFL Players Association (NFLPA), having to learn the ropes during a first labor standstill since 1987. Another question mark was the potential for solidarity during the 1987 strike, when players once again saw the realities of the game. An average career for an NFL player is 3.4 seasons. Studies have shown that NFL players are dying approximately 20 years earlier than the general population.

The tentative collective bargaining agreement that ended the lockout was a huge success for the players. While owners received a rookie wage scale that limits rookie compensation, the players have almost guaranteed increased pay for veterans by establishing not only a salary cap, but a minimum spending requirement for owners across the league. The players preserved the regular season from being expanded from 16 games to 18 games.

NFL Labor Lessons

By Neil Parthun

The NFL lockout is over! At the outset, things did not look good for the players. There were worries about DeMaurice Smith, the new executive director of the NFL Players Association (NFLPA), having to learn the ropes during a first labor standstill since 1987. Another question mark was the potential for solidarity during the 1987 strike, when players once again saw the realities of the game. An average career for an NFL player is 3.4 seasons. Studies have shown that NFL players are dying approximately 20 years earlier than the general population.

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Common Ground Food Coop Raees Funds for Expansion!

By Jacqueline Hannah

On Monday, August 1st, at exactly 1:51pm, an e-mail went out to over 3,000 members of the Champaign-Urbana community that started off with the following in big, bold letters: “You did it! At this minute we have owner loan pledges totaling $685,000!” The Common Ground Food Co-op (the CG) sent this message of celebration out to its over 3,000 owners that day at the conclusion of its owner loan drive for its upcoming expansion at Lincoln Square Mall. In just 59 short days during the sleepy summer when many are out of town, Common Ground had raised over half a million dollars in loan commitments to help fund the planned build out project that will grow the current store to 2.5 times its current size.

The CG was founded in 1998 on 900 square feet of basement space of the Illinois Disciples Foundation building at Springfield and Wright on campus. For 35 years this little store was open only to those who chose to purchase an equity share and become an owner. In 2007-2008, the CG raised $270,000 in owner loans and made the leap to Lincoln Square. This summer we also opened our doors to the general public. CG completed the build out of the old Bergner’s space that had been vacant for seven years. At three years in this site, it’s been a runway success. At the time of the co-op’s move to Lincoln Square both the board and the community knew it was very likely the co-op’s success would soon outgrow the new store space and secured an option on additional space next door to its current location. With sales now increased almost 300% since then.

To plan the expanded store, CG did an in depth survey with its owners in January of this year to find out what services and products they felt would make the co-op a greater resource to the community. From those results, CG was able to create a list of goods from other food co-ops around the nation, a plan for the expanded store was created. New offerings planned for the store are an expanded deli with hot, made-to-order foods, handmade specialty breads and pastries, beef and wine in a selection with local, regional, and organic offerings, fresh, in-house bakery breads made from organic ingredients; and an expanded local meats freezer section as well as a new fresh meat case.

All current departments the co-op offers, from our bountiful produce department featuring organic and local produce to our bulk and grocery departments will be greatly increased as well, most to double their current size. At the start of this year we are already expected to be completed by late spring 2012. The construction will be done in phases while the current store stays open. Customers will be able to watch the changes as they are unveiled department by department.

For the co-op’s backers, Common Ground is driven not by sheer profit but by a desire to meet the goals set forth by its owners for the organization. To vastly expand our ability to further two of our goals—to be the center of a vibrant and inclusive community, and to serve as an educational resource on food issues. CG’s expanded store will feature an on-site classroom with room for two dozen students at a time and a full demonstration kitchen for cooking classes. When not in use as a classroom, the room will be open for customers to use as a place to enjoy their deli food and converse with their fellow owners.

Common Ground is a success because of the amazing community that created it and continues to provide support. All who continue to support it! For Expansion! (OPEN MIC POETRY/SPOKEN WORD SET)

Theme: “SEIZE THE TIME” (The title of a book by Black Panther Bobby Seale)

S.P.E.A.K. Café is Back!

By Gary Storm

Progressives need make a much simpler and more direct case for their positions going into the Fall 2012 elections. Tea Party advocates have managed to capture the rhetoric being used in most mass media today. The headlines would have us believe that the deficit is caused solely by government spending and can be cured only by “smaller government” and “program cuts.” In fact, such cuts, coming in the midst of both consumer and business reluctance to spend, often increase unemployment and exacerbate the economy’s decline.

The media make little effort to identify types of government expenditure that, if supported by reasonable taxes to fund them, would stimulate the economy, increase jobs and/or improve the quality of public and private life in numerous ways. Investments in physical infrastructure, education, and scientific, technological and medical research, for example, would not just create jobs immediately; they would stimulate future growth.

We seem to have lost sight of the fact that the purpose of government is to promote the general welfare. This is especially true when the private sector is unwilling or unable to do so. When its actions actually harm the public by polluting the environment, these owners have once again shown their deep lack of belief in the mission of providing the funds to make this expansion possible. Through growth, we can continue to grow our local food shed, support a stronger local economy, create good jobs, and make the change we want to see in our community. Thank you to everyone who invested in Common Ground, both in 2008 and this year, and to all who continue to support it!