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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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), or to contact one of the editors.

Reader Feedback
Comments on Public i articles may be emailed to (at) ucimc.org. Send the email with the word “comment” in the subject line.

SUSTAINING CONTRIBUTORS
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Action Group, Meets 3rd Saturdays of the
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The AFL-CIO of Champaign County
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Meetings every Sunday at 5pm at the IMC
Mile’s Restaurant
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Coming Events at UCMC

“Race, the Tea Party, the U. S.’s Hard Shift to the Right”—The Ubuntu Work Group is organized to forge an intellectual community rooted in the scholar activist identity of the Radical.

Following the dual mission of “Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility,” we will engage in projects designed to increase collectivity in and funding of research and instruction, participatory democracy of governance, and generation of activities that will raise conscious and promote social transformation on campus and in the community. November 30, 1201 West Nevada Street, Urbana, Illinois, 7–9:30 P.M.

Tatsuya Nakatani–performance & workshop: East Coast-based percussionist Tatsuya Nakatani will offer a solo performance followed by a workshop for improvisers. Dec 2 2010 7:30pm–9:30pm

RUN IMC: Doin’ It Live!—The U of I’s Engineering 298 class will be holding an event to raise general awareness of the beauty of the IMC as well as promote local artists, musicians, and citizens. This will be a dual event, the first night will be held Wednesday, December 1st at the Canopy Club in Urbana @ 6 PM. The festival will continue the evening of Friday, December 3rd at the IMC. Dec 3, 6-30pm–Dec 4 2010 2:00am

Chambana’s Got Talent—An event for youth to showcase their talent while raising funds for the Champaign-Urbana Teen Awareness Group (TAG)! Youth ages 12-18 can register to perform their talent for our panel of local celebrity judges. Families and individuals of all ages are encouraged to attend! December 10, 2010 7:00pm–9:00pm
‘pack the IMC’, Concert A night of live ambient and rock, this concert will feature the Grandkids, with guest The 7.5 Theory, the First Annuals, and other acoustic performances! Tickets will be $4 (to cover rent cost). December 17, 2010 6:00pm–10:00pm

Behold Productions Christmas Celebration: Celebrate Christmas with Behold Productions. Music and fun for the whole family. $10 admission December 18, 2010 6:00pm–11:00pm

Students demonstrate at Assembly Hall against “The Chief’s Next Dance”
What Kind of “Court” Is City Court?

By Belden Fields

City Court is an unknown entity to most citizens in Champaign County. When people think of courts, they think of the county or federal courts where one has certain constitutional rights. City Court is something altogether different.

You might wind up in City Court if you have violated a city ordinance and haven’t paid the fine in time. If you don’t pay the fine by the deadline, or if you decide to challenge the charge, you will appear in City Court either by walking in at a certain date, by being brought there in chains by a sheriff’s deputy, or by answering to the court via closed circuit TV from one of the county jails. The latter two options are for people who have ignored their summonses.

Judge Holly Clemons of Champaign County currently hears the cases in City Court. Prosecution is conducted by an attorney in the city’s legal office. Both Urbana and Champaign make use of City Court, but Champaign uses it four times more frequently than does Urbana, normally once a week as opposed to once a month.

The Rights of Defendants in City Court

Defendants’ rights are very truncated in City Court. The defendant has the right to a trial by jury—if the defendant is able to pay for it. The fee is $66.25 for a jury of 6, or $137.50 for a jury of twelve.

The fee is not remunerated even if the defendant is found innocent. Defendants in the City Court also have the right to be represented by an attorney, but again only if they can afford one. No public defenders are provided in these trials.

Class and Race

These policies are particularly disturbing when we look at those who wind up in City Court. Most defendants are there because they could not pay their fines. The fines for the 21 kinds of offences prosecuted in the City Court run up to $700, with minimums being $165, $215, and $310 depending on the specific offence. In my own court observations, $350 was a very common amount. In addition, there is the $750 court expense fee that one must pay to the county if one is found guilty. Until very recently, it was virtually automatic that the only alternative to paying over $1,000 was to work it off by sitting in the county jail; the meter there would tick $20 off your “debts” to the city and county per day. That was a bad deal for the county because it crowded the jail and it cost the county far more than $20 a day to hold and feed the prisoner. So, several months ago the sheriff decided to use monitored home confinement for some of those “debtors.” Debtors prison for private debts has been abolished. But it is alive and well for public debt, at least in our area.

Despite the costs of confinement to the county, the city of Champaign still manages to make a good bit of money off of these infractions. In 2009, 60% of the violations were paid directly or by mail, bringing in $493,365. In addition to that, the city made $119,073.71 from people fined guilty by the court.

In addition to the clear patterns we see regarding the economic class of the people appearing in the court, African Americans are severely overrepresented. In a recent study by Athena Hollins, it was revealed that 87% of those appearing in Champaign’s City Court between March and May 2010 were African Americans. Keep in mind that the percentage of African Americans in Champaign is only about 15%.

Hollins looked at the three most common charges brought before the court: “Specific Noise Violations,” i.e., loud noise that can be heard beyond property lines or residential units, “Vehicular Noise Violations,” i.e., mainly noise from car radios, and possession of 10 grams or less of cannabis.

In the first noise category, for which the minimum fine is $200, 88% of the defendants were African American. In the vehicular noise category, for which the minimum fine is $165, over 90% were African American. In the cannabis possession category, for which the minimum fine is $310, 89% were African American. Some of the other offences that come to City Court, such as public urination and placing trash in another person’s trash bin, hit the home- less particularly hard. Only 30% of the noise violations and 20% of the cannabis violations were paid directly at the city building or by mail. On the other hand, 80% of the citations for underage drinking of alcohol, 92% of delivering alcohol to minors, and 85% of the having beer kegs at a party without a license offences were settled by direct payment or mail. Here we see a racial and class bias at work. The latter offences were those committed largely by university students, the vast majority of whom are white. Yet or their parents could afford to pay the fines and avoid City Court.

Many in the African American community do not have the financial resources to avoid City Court. Furthermore, the fines and court costs that are extracted from the African American community are extracted from exactly that segment of the population that can least afford to pay. They also wind up disproportionately populating our county jails.

A major reason for this is the very different ways that the African American and white neighborhoods in Champaign are policed. The very aggressive, militarized, zero-tolerance approach that the police take in the North End, especially with youth who like their music loud and share the same environment from a joint that many white kids do without police intervention, is largely responsible for this bias.

Conclusion

We began this article by asking, “what kind of court is City Court?” What we find is that City Court is tailor-made to take advantage of poor people, and especially African Americans who make up a large percentage of our poor citizens. It is a court in which there is no right to a lawyer and no right on a jury trial; those things must be bought. In other words, City Court is a court where the guarantee of equal protection of the laws embodied in the 14th Amendment of the Constitution does not apply. City court reflects the spirit of Anatole France’s characterization of French capitalist laws in the late 19th Century: “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.” And in our City Court, to jail you shall go if

Iraq Veterans Against the War On Veterans Day

This letter was collaboratively written by Iraq Veterans Against the War and veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

This Veterans Day, Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) asked Americans to reconsider the meaning of supporting the troops. As a nation, we are dishonoring our troops by ending the wars and bringing our troops home. Veterans Day, November 11, 2010, will be a day for us to remember our soldiers and those who have served. The men and women who have served our country have earned our respect and gratitude. But we must go further. We must demand that our government work towards ending the war and bring our troops home.

As a nation, we must demand that our government end the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must demand that we hold our government accountable for the violations of human rights that have occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must demand that our government work towards ending the wars that we continue to fight.

We must demand that our government work towards ending the wars that we continue to fight. We must demand that our government work towards ending the wars that we continue to fight.

We must demand that our government work towards ending the wars that we continue to fight.
What Does 2009 Traffic Stop Data Tell Us About Police Behavior In Champaign/Urbana?

By Durl Kruse

Two components of the Illinois Traffic Stops Statistics Study focus on the percentage of citations issued. This is of particular interest because the officer has clear knowledge of the race of the driver when deciding to write a ticket or give a warning. The citation percentages below are six-year averages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Citations</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>Minority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champaign</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbana</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>U of I</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Champaign police appear to ticket Caucasian and minority drivers similarly (65% vs. 64%). But a distinct disparity appears for the Urbana (57% vs. 61%) and U of I (18% vs. 25%) police departments. In fact, in each of the last six years minority drivers were given a higher percentage of citations than their Caucasian counterparts by both departments. It is also misleading to describe the situation in Champaign in strictly equitable terms, for although Caucasian and minority drivers are ticketed relatively equally, minority drivers are still 45% more likely to be pulled over in the first place. It is interesting to note the low percentage of citations given by the U of I police. Evidently drivers on campus are treated differently, with Caucasian drivers being ticketed only 18% of the time.

A final component of the Illinois Traffic Stops Statistics Study reports on consent searches. Although the number of consent searches is small, they are important statistics because they can reveal potential bias in the officer’s decision to request to search a car.

In 2009 Champaign, Urbana, and U of I police requested 22,17, and 84 searches of drivers respectively. However, each police department requested minority drivers to consent to a search although the statistics show that constabular was found approximately twice as often in Caucasian vehicles. Also, the 84 consent searches by campus police were 45% more likely to be consented to than the Caucasian consent searches of the driving public.

With no special funding, the youth barely have anywhere to go / Boys and Girls Club, youth centers, / nowhere to go, no help, no guidance / And you think we could start with just Champaign, not the nation / Our system is so twisted, who can win? / They want you to discipline your kids, but then DCFS steps in / so now they are on the streets and out of control / But who’s really to blame with society being so cold? / There is nowhere for them to go but on the street / And it’s so dangerous, there’s no telling who they may meet / Drug dealers, gang bangers, even pedophiles / Promising them a brighter tomorrow, making life worthwhile / So the children can have shelter and a simple hot meal / Back in the day, it took a village to raise a child / But now in 2010, no one’s willing to go that extra mile / Righting this wrong / Candlelight marches, one big community strong / Our sweet Kiwane Carrington, / But now in 2010, no one’s willing to go that extra mile / Righting this wrong / Candlelight marches, one big community strong / Our sweet Kiwane Carrington, / But now in 2010, no one’s willing to go that extra mile / Righting this wrong / Candlelight marches, one big community strong / Our sweet Kiwane Carrington,
ALTHOUGH WE WERE TOLD “SYMPOSIA” and “conferences” were too academic in nature—the eBlackChampaign-Urbana project team stood by the knowledge that community groups have conferences all the time (Canaan Baptist Church held two in the past year; Glory Center International held one)—and that what was needed was a new strategy, not an abandonment of the idea of symposia. We would encourage other individuals from the University of Illinois to find ways not to abandon the traditional apparatuses of scholarly production and exchange, but rather to find new, experimental ways to make these apparatuses relevant and meaningful both to the scholarly community and to real, historical communities with which activists academics work.

Over 200 people came for part or all of a two-day campus-community Symposium on Friday, November 5 and Saturday, November 6 at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GS LIS) on the University of Illinois campus and the Douglas Annex in Douglass Park in North Champaign. The unifying themes of this event were: a) campus engagements in the historical African-American communities of Champaign-Urbana and b) digital technology transforming all aspects of community life (including campus engagements). The event began with Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement Steve Sonka speaking on how engagement at the University of Illinois needs to complete what he called the “knowledge cycle” or observation to documentation to analysis to implementation and back to observation. Speaking from his personal background in agriculture Sonka explained how this cycle, and the University’s involvement in it, completely changed the course of American agriculture, and the world. Sonka was invited to give the opening remarks for this two-day event because one of the goals of the conference organizers (Professor Abdul Alkalimat of African-American Studies/GSLIS and Noah Lenstra, graduate student, GSLIS) is to re-orient the land-grant tradition of the University of Illinois to systematically and sustainably address issues in African-American and low-income communities not only in Champaign-Urbana but across the state of Illinois, in the information age. Sonka’s address was followed by two community respondents, District 1 council member Will Kyles and Salem Baptist Church Rev. Zerial Bogan, and one university respondent, Kate Williams, who re-articulated some of Sonka’s remarks in terms of some of the issues faced by residents of North Champaign-Urbana. The full audio-visual-pictorial textual record of these remarks, and the entire symposium, is available for free online at eblackcu.net/portal/schedule.

SERVING CHAMPAGNE-URBANA

The rest of the day Friday was devoted primarily to conversations among dedicated “service” units of the University, such as the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and Illinois Public Media, and students from multiple departments involved in research projects focused on local African-Americans, who, in dialogue with the audience, shared what they were doing. They also explored the significance of their individual projects in terms of larger campus-community concerns. After the first morning roundtable on community engagement a member of local group Women of Prestige expressed her surprise at finding out so many different projects work with local youth and said the information was a little overwhelming.

USING MEDIA TO RECOGNIZE COMMUNITY LEADERS

One way in which the eBlackChampaign-Urbana project has tried to address this issue is through information. Specifically, we released a book entitled Community Engagement @Illinois: Connecting Research and Service (also available at http://eblackcu.net/portal/schedule) that features documentation of over 45 different research and service projects emanating out of the University of Illinois, or with heavy involve-ment of University individuals, that have as a primary audiience or subject local African-Americans or the historical African-American community. A copy of this book was given to each of the 103 Difference Makers, community and campus individuals who have gone out of their way to try to make a difference in the lives of local African-Americans, as part of a luncheon and awards ceremony Friday afternoon. The Difference Makers also received a commemorative booklet of biographies and photographs. The project team sometimes is asked why a project dedicated to digital technology would chose to release two books as part of its symposium. We believe in what we call the actual-virtual-actual cycle, in other words actual communities and individuals using the power of digital technology to make actual change in their lives and in the lives of others. As part of this cycle, our digitization work of actual primary source material and our use of open source word processing and photo editing software such as Open Office and GIMP allowed us to release two relatively large print publications on a short deadline that we hope will make actual change in campus-community engagement.

WORKING TOGETHER TO INTEGRATE DIGITAL AND DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

Saturday the symposium shifted gears—moving from campus to the Douglass Annex for conversations on how existing community agencies and institutions are using digital technology, with the hope being that connections could be made that would benefit all. Representatives of social service agencies such as Community Elements and Neighborhood Services (City of Champaign); educational initiatives such as Parklands WorkNet Center and Urbana High School; churches including Jericho Missionary Baptist and Church of the Living God; and community groups such as C-U Citizens for Peace and Justice and the National Council of Negro Women, Champaign County talked about some of the issues and opportunities they have faced in using digital technology as part of their work.

One theme that emerged was the need to find ways to work together to integrate digital technology into community day-to-day life. Kevin Jackson described some of the e-government tools developed or being developed at the City of Champaign while David Adcock of Urbana Adult Education described the need to provide the most basic, rudimentary computing education to many members of the local community. Later in the day, during the religious institutions roundtable a contentious discussion began about finding ways to create non-denominational means for churches to help each other cross the digital divide. Some thought the first step was bringing the pastors together and getting them all on board; others felt that those in the different churches already invested in digital technology should find ways to work together. In any case, the eBlackChampaign-Urbana project team believes that these issues need to be discussed more so that everyone can make effective uses of digital technology. One way in which an attempt was made to bring everyone on the same page was by asking everyone to sign a manifesto declaring themselves “Difference Makers” and dedicating themselves to work together to bring everyone online and to ensure everyone can make effective use of existing and developing tools for social change. Over 120 people have signed this manifesto—which can be signed electronically at eBlackCU.net.

EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

A follow-up meeting to the Symposium will be held Saturday, January 8, from 9 a.m. to noon, at the Champaign Public Library, Robeson Pavilion Room A & B. However, we encourage community and campus organizations to continue these conversations in their “home-bases.” The project team recognizes that sustainability requires moving these dialogues and actions off the University and into the organizations and groups that keep our community going. One way in which the project team hopes to make this transition is to ask groups to take a copy of the manifesto to whatever groups they are affiliated, discuss it, and bring remarks on these discussions to the follow-up meeting January 8.

A FINAL THANKS

As an all-volunteer symposium with modest funding from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement and the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access to pay for food, equipment, marketing and space, the eBlackChampaign-Urbana Campus-Community Symposium owes its success to both the campus and community individuals and groups who volunteered to make it a success, including:

1. the Community Informatics Club
2. the Illinois Informatics Club
3. Women of Prestige Champaign County
4. National Council of Negro Women, Champaign County
5. Champaign Park District
6. Salem Baptist Church
7. Graduate School of Library and Information Science
8. and individuals from Parkland College WorkNet Center and Canaan Baptist Church.
An Open Letter to University of Illinois Chief of Police, Barbara O’Connor

November 15, 2010—We write with grave concern about your recent use of the “Illini Alert” text-messaging system on November 15, 2010 to report the assault in Forbes Hall and to search for the suspect in that incident.

The use of the system in this case was, at best, an overreaction to the incident, and, at worst, a misuse of police power that smacks of racial profiling. To tell every member of the campus community to call 911 if they see a male, salt/pepper hair, 40-50 year old, 5’11, 170, med build” does not increase safety on our campus. On the contrary, through such a sweeping announcement, you have in fact put a considerable part of the campus community at risk, placing under suspicion valued colleagues, coworkers, students, and visitors solely on the basis of their race and gender. Given the local history of racial tensions, which seem to have increased dramatically over the past year, this kind of alert only exacerbates the very distrust that has been so corrosive on campus and in local communities. We believe that the use of electronic media such as text-messaging and e-mail to issue crime alerts has been profoundly counterproductive, with the unfortunate effect of generating widespread fear and suspicion that will often be expressed through racial divisiveness.

The sexual assault of a student is a deeply serious matter and deserves a swift and thorough response by police and campus authorities. We are as concerned as anyone else on this campus for the safety of our students in the dorms and elsewhere. We also believe that it is important that such incidents be handled in ways that do not inspire panic, and put our various racial stereotypes, but rather that educators, students, faculty, and staff about the most likely scenarios for sexual assault and other crimes on our campus.

We condemn the use of the mass-alert (text message) system to respond to such incidents. While it may be appropriate to use this technology to respond to rare cases of imminent widespread threat, such as a tornado or a bomb scare, the text-alert system was completely inappropriate — and, indeed, reckless -- in this case. We are extremely troubled that you could issue such an alert, given the appalling history of racial profiling in this community.

We understand that the Clery Act requires the University to give timely warnings of crimes on our campus, but we believe that it is possible to meet that requirement via other avenues of media. We expect you, as the police chief of a leading university, to take considerable care and responsibility when making a decision about when or if race should be mentioned in any communication. At a minimum, we urge you to use every opportunity to inform the public of the dangers of stereotyping and to remind us all of the tremendous contributions made by all racial and ethnic groups in our diverse campus community.

While you may have intended to protect students, faculty, and staff, instead you have done serious damage to the racial climate of our campus and our local community. We want you to realize that electronic crime alerts, especially last Monday’s text message, undermine the ongoing and difficult work that we all are engaged in and organizations regarding race, gender, and sexual orientation, along with our daily efforts to make this campus a safe, diverse, and open-minded place to learn and work.

We urge you to immediately revise your policy for issuing such alerts, to apologize to the campus community for this irresponsible use of police power, and to confer in meaningful and sustained ways with those of us who are committed to the pursuit of racial and gender justice and equity on our campus.

Sincerely,

Professor Merle L. Bowen, Director, Center for African Studies
Professor Jorge Chaipa, Director, Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society
David W. Chile, Director, Asian American Cultural Center
Jennifer DeLuna, Assistant Director, La Casa Cultural Latina
Professor Jennifer Hamer, Faculty Co-Chair, Black Faculty and Academic Professionals Alliance
Whitney Hamilton, President, Women of Color
Professor Dianne Harris, Director, Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities
Professor Ronald L. Jackson, II, Head, Department of African American Studies
Dr. R. G. James, Director, Bruce D. Nebert African American Cultural Center
Professor Lisa Nakamura, Director, Asian American Studies Program
Professor Susan Oliver, Director, American Indian Studies Program
Vera C. Pavlova, Ph.D., Director, Asian American Studies Program
Professor Robert Warrior, Director, American Indian Studies Program

An Open Letter to University of Illinois Chief of Police, Barbara O’Connor

Brazilian activist Denise Alves dos Santos has degrees in Brazilian language and literature, as well as art therapy. She has worked as a proofreader and a consultant for a global, nonprofit organization, and is currently involved in finding ways to create and encourage social change in Brazil and the world.

In Brazil, there is no activism. In Brazil, there are activist people.

The distinction between one and another is that the first is a noun and as such it is supposed to name what activists do. The second is an adjective, and it qualifies the person who consciously acts for change. At least is supposed to.

The Portuguese language allows each ‘I’, who uses it, to make nouns out of adjectives, and so activists become activism itself when Brazilian ‘Ts use one and another term indistinctly. So, in Brazil there is a situation that may be observed in those in the United States that, while there are activists, there is no held-in-common tradition of activism.

This phenomenon has been creating an environment where each ‘T’ designs a society such that the action of the individual seems more relevant than individuals acting together. Thus, what could be recognized as the cooperation of many for change ends up being perceived as the initiative of one.

I say “design a society” because I agree with the assertion of society being what people — like you and me — do in language and together with others when language. If there is no coordination of Ts actions, then there is no space in the public domain for activists to compose actions together. There is no activism as a movement in which each ‘I’ desires peculiar changes for the benefit of those who benefit from participating in the designing of their own society. By this, each ‘I’s desires and needs could be – respectively – attended and satisfied, but currently there is no systemic approach to the problems that call each ‘I to action.

When a systemic approach to problems is missing, seemingly unrelated problems will not be seen as intimately related. So also, when problems are perceived apart from each other, it is assumed the object of opposition as so as to dismiss it. As it turned out, dictatorship’s obligation not to vote became democracy’s obligation to vote on the Ts who are supposed to represent each ‘I’s interest in the executive and legislative systems.

But corporate institutions have been playing an essential role in government decisions currently. What is the duty that each ‘I’s has to vote on a board of directors?

My current formulation is that to state the “agamness” to something is an invitation to unsystematic changes, while “for- ness” is an invitation to further think of and speak about what things might replace the current undesirable ones. And so, in the process of finding the “how can it be done,” Ts find ways to deal with language and time in “time.” This involves language, which I use when I want to talk about organizing ways of thinking and speaking that arise out of the past organizations of ways of thinking and speaking. So by “deal with language,” I mean ‘Ts at least going through a dynamic process of naming, distinguishing, and describing.

My desire here is talk about the last term in the list (‘describing’) — but as a noun. I use description when I want to talk about an ‘I’s observer, observing a system, languaging it, and observing the observa- tion when doing it. By contrast, I use explanation to mean an understanding of a description, from which it is assumed the observer comes nothing to the observation, with a consequence also that description become static.

In my present frame, activism will have been composed in Brazil — under any possible and significant name — when each ‘I’s activist has made each Ts problems clear by descriptions (not explanations) and activist has made each ‘I’s problems clear by description, from which it is assumed the observer comes nothing to the observa- tion, with a consequence also that description become static.

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La Colectiva, the University YMCA, and Growing Immigrant Population in Champaign County

By Aaron Johnson-Ortiz

This allows for a more open environment for exercising freedoms of expression and action. In the midst of all the activism about change on a national level and at the University, students began to recognize a gap between their organizing on campus and the struggles of community members in Champaign County who face similar challenges. The campus-community divide is exacerbated by the fact that most UI Latino students grew up outside of the county, especially in Chicago. In addition, community members tend to be skeptical about student initiatives, as the perennial turnover of student leaders creates an eb and flow of public engagement and a lack of institutional memory or growth.

LA COLECTIVA AND THE Y

Last semester, La Colectiva student leaders began conversations with University YMCA staff, expressing a desire to move out of the “campus bubble.” The Y’s new executive director, Mike Doyle, who previously worked at Champaign County Health Care Consumers and who has a background in community organizing, worked with two La Colectiva student leaders to begin conversations with community leaders who are in some way invested in immigration issues locally. The focus of these exchanges was to begin a community dialogue about immigration and immigrant rights, and to inquire as to what issues most directly affect the immigrant community. Y programs would be developed from these insights, instead of deciding in advance what issues are and imposing those on the community.

Over the past summer, the students, Jesse Hoyt and Celeste Larkin, conducted about 30 interviews with local activists, religious leaders, engaged academics, community representatives, public officials, and business leaders in Champaign County. At the same time, the Y worked with the Independent Media Center to apply for an AmeriCorps position to continue this work into the academic year and then help build student-commu- nity relationships. This is where I came in. I applied to the AmeriCorps position with a background in immigrant rights organizing in the (other) twin cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN, and community organizing in Chiapas, Mexico. Through my work at the Y since September of this year, I continued the interviews with community members, and looked into several possibilities for responsible and sustainable student engagement. Our two new programs, the high school mentorship program and the helpline, emerged from this process and will continue to adapt to community feedback.

IMMIGRANT ORGANIZATIONS IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

There are already a number of community organizations that work with Latinos and/or immigrants, either exclu- sively or as one part of their general mission. Most notably are the East Central Illinois Refugee Mutual Assistance Center, the Latino Partnership of Champaign County, the Multicultural Community Center in Rantoul, Culti- vadores (also in Rantoul), Champaign County Health Care Consumers, the University of Illinois Extension, the La Colectiva program (established within the past ten to fifteen years), or have been newly created to address immigration issues. It is the intention of the University Y and La Colectiva to play a collaborative and mutually supportive role with these organizations, as well as strengthen ties between universi- ty and community members.

One of the key insights gained from our interviews is the significant growth rate of the Latino population in Champaign County in recent years. While the 2000 Census found that about 8,000 (or 4.1%) Latinos lived in the county, everyone seemed to agree that the 2010 results will show a marked increase. Perhaps the most pressing need at this historical moment is to come to terms with our changing demographic landscape, and to create open— but also safe and empowering—spaces for community dialogue amongst the increasingly heterogeneous communities of Champaign County.
French Protesters Have It Right: No Need to Raise the Retirement Age

By Mark Weisbrot, from guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 20 October 2010

The demonstrations that have rocked France this past week highlight some of its differences from the United States. The photo below, for example shows the difference between rioting in baseball-playing versus soccer-playing countries. In the US, we would pick up the tear gas canister and throw it, rather than kick it, back at the police.

More importantly, the French have decided to take to the streets in the millions—including large-scale strikes and work stoppages—to defend hard-won retirement gains. (It must be emphasised, since the media sometimes forgets to make the distinction, that only a tiny percentage of France’s demonstrators have engaged in any kind of property damage and even fewer in violence, with all but these few protesting peacefully.) French populist rage is being directed in a positive direction—unlike in the United States where it is most prominently being mobilised to elect political candidates who will do their best to increase the suffering of working—and middle-class citizens.

I have to admit, though, that it was perplexing to watch the French elect Nicolas Sarkozy president in 2007, a man who campaigned on the idea that France had to make its economy more “efficient,” like America’s. In reality, he couldn’t have picked a worse time to peddle this mumbo-jumbo. The housing bubble was already bursting in the United States and would soon cause not only our own Great Recession, but also drag most of the world economy into the swamp with it. So much for that particular model of economic dynamism.

But Sarkozy had a lot of help from the major media, which was quite enchanted with the American model at the time and helped promote a number of myths that were “unaffordable in a global economy,” and that employers would hire more people if it were easier to fire them, and if taxes were cut for the rich.

Sarkozy has recently abandoned one of his most politically unpopular tax cuts for the rich, but there may be others. But he had also promised to raise the retirement age for the public pension system. This has contributed to the mass outrage at his current proposal to raise it from 60 to 62, for those taking the reduced benefits, and from 65 to 67, for full benefits. (Under the US social security system, most people opt for the reduced benefit that is available beginning at age 62; full benefits are available, for those born after 1959, at 67.)

Once again, most of the media thinks the French are being unrealistic, and should just get with the programme like everyone else. The argument is that life expectancy is increasing, so we all have to work longer. But this is a bit like reporting half of a baseball score (or soccer; if you prefer). On the other side is the fact that productivity and GDP also increase over time, and so it is indeed possible for the French to choose to spend more years in retirement and pay for it.

France’s retirement age was last set in 1983. Since then, GDP per person has increased by 45%. The increase in life expectancy is very small by comparison. The number of workers per retiree declined from 4.4 in 1983 to 3.5 in 2010, but the growth of national income was vastly more than enough to compensate for the demographic changes, including the change in life expectancy.

The situation is similar going forward: the growth in national income over the next 30 or 40 years will be much more than sufficient to pay for the increases in pension costs due to demographic changes, while still allowing future generations to enjoy considerably higher living standards than people today. It is simply a social choice as to how many years people want to live in retirement and how they want to pay for it.

If the French want to keep the retirement age as is, there are plenty of ways to finance future pension costs without necessarily raising the retirement age. One of them, which has support among the French left (and which Sarkozy claims to support at the international level), would be a tax on financial transactions. Such a “speculation tax” could raise billions of dollars of revenue—as it currently does in the UK—while simultaneously discouraging speculative trading in financial assets and derivatives.

The French unions and testers are demanding that the government considers some of these more progressive alternatives. It is, therefore, perfectly reasonable to expect that as life expectancy increases, workers should be able to spend more of the lives in retirement. And that is what most French citizens expect. They may not have seen all the arithmetic, but they grasp intuitively that as a country grows richer year after year, they should not have to spend more of their lives working.

An increase in the retirement age is a highly regressive cut that will hit working people hardest. Puffer workers have shorter life expectancies and would lose a higher proportion of their retirement years. Workers who have to retire early because of unemployment or other hardships will take a benefit cut as a result of this change. And, of course, this cut would not matter to the richest people in society, who do not rely on the public pension system for most of their retirement income.

France has a lower level of inequality than most Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and is one of only five – out of 30 OECD countries – that saw inequality decrease from the mid 1980s to the mid 2000s. It also had the largest decrease in inequality in the group, although all of it was from the mid 80s to the mid 90s.

France has, until now, resisted at least some of the changes that have rolled the clock back for working people and, especially, low-income citizens in the high-income countries. The European authorities (including the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund) are currently accelerating these regressive changes in the weaker Eurozone economies (such as Greece, Spain and Ireland). All of these institutions and many politicians are trying to use the current economic problems of Europe as a pretext to enact right-wing reforms.

Polls show more than 70% support for France’s strikers, despite the inconvenience of fuel shortages and other disruptions. The French are stronger than many other countries do, and one that has the ability and willingness to organise mass protest, work stoppages and educational campaigns.

The French are, in effect, fighting for the future of Europe—and it is a good example for others. We can only hope that, in the end, the United States, we will be able to beat back any proposed cuts to our much less generous social security system, with attacks on benefits looming on the horizon.

Students Disrupt Board of Trustees Meeting Over Coming Tuition Hike

By Ben Rothschild

About twenty students from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Chicago attempted to disrupt a Board of Trustees meeting today over tuition increases and the re-segregation of higher education.

A member of the Urbana-Champaign community spoke on the importance of recruitment of African American students. The number of African Americans in the freshmen class at UIUC was higher in 1987 than in 2010.

Another student addressed the board on diversity and requested that the board freeze tuition. The board is planning another hike at their January meeting.

At the end of the public comment, one student shouted out, “Our concerns haven’t been addressed!”

Four security guards rushed toward him. Two other students spoke up and said “Higher education is being re-segregated!” and “We want to be listened to!” Security grabbed them and began to escort them out. Other students joined in and chanted, “tuition freeze now!” One policeman pushed a student. Police forcefully removed protesters from the building.

Fifty percent of UIUC students graduate in debt. The Undergraduate-Graduate Alliance is a coalition of student activism groups at UIUC.
MINNEAPOLIS—THE Jimmy John’s WORKERS UNION has filed a 12-page Objection to the October 22 National Labor Review Board (NLRB) election at 10 Minneapolis sandwich shops, outlining a pattern of pervasive and systemic labor rights violations that prevented the possibility of a free and fair vote. The union election, a first in fast food in the US, was as close as they come, with 85 votes in favor of the union, 87 against, and 2 challenged ballots.

Union power combined with political action pushed wages up in the old industrial countries, and that led to an expansion of benefits, pensions, and government-run programs. Another secret is that the confidence and self-respect with which workers once formed unions gave entrepreneurs and property owners the clue that investment in workers can be worthwhile when dealing with socially and technically skilled people who know what they offer.

The current economic situation deprives many unions here of any power, and with their powerlessness come reduced wages and cutbacks in benefits, pensions, and government programs. Since unions cannot demonstrate how workers here are essential, they cannot persuade or coerce anyone into paying us. Except for technical experts, resource owners and entrepreneurs, we are worth less, a lot less on the market than we have been led to expect. Successful property owners and entrepreneurs, making their money mostly outside this country, don’t understand why they should support us with their taxes any more than necessary to avoid the worst of social disruptions.

So when will we bounce back here? When all the budgets are balanced and ordinary people start again to improve their standard of living? I don’t seriously expect that to happen until either this country retreats into a drastic form of protectionism, or wage rates, working conditions and benefits become reasonably similar across the globe.

Jimmy John’s Sandwich Workers in the Tri-Cities
Continue to Press for Improved Working Conditions

“Franchise owner Mike Mulligan decided to go beyond the pale. His managers asked workers to wear anti-union pins, fired pro-union workers, threatened a mass firing, implemented an illegal wage freeze, tightened policies and retaliated against union members, […] and pressured workers to vote no. He broke the law repeatedly in order to win, and he just barely won. That’s not right. We are calling on the NLRB to set aside the results of this election,” said worker and union member Emily Pzybylski Pzybylsky.

In response to his employee’s union campaign, franchise owner Mike Mulligan hired a third-party anti-union consulting firm, Labor Relations Inc., to prevent employees from winning an NLRB Union election. According to documents obtained from the Department of Labor, Mulligan spent over $84,500 on an anti-union campaign intended to prevent workers from unionizing.

MN Labor Review Board (NLRB) elections have been used by employers to silence workers, prevent them from voting, and make workers feel unimportant and unsexy.

As productive power shifts from the advanced to the underdeveloped regions, as it has done it now. It is worthwhile to note that unions in China, working under conditions more oppressive than here, have recently been able to achieve wage gains of ten to twenty percent a year. That’s the advantage of not being priced out of the market right from the start.

Jimmy John’s is a franchised sandwich restaurant owned by Jimmy John Liautaud. The restaurant was founded in 1983 and has since grown to over 1000 stores, with many locations in college towns. The company headquarters is located in Champaign, Illinois. This is a press release issued by the Minneapolis General Membership Branch of the IWW.