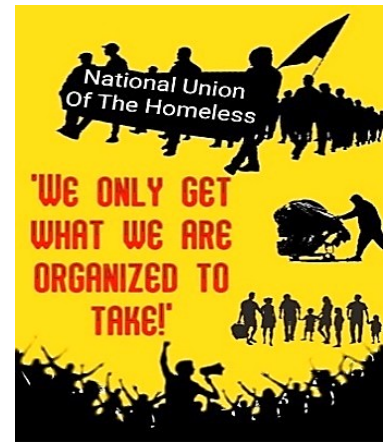


National Union of the Homeless Coronavirus Crisis Update*

* (Beginning today, we will be sending out daily updates via email and on our website: www.facebook.com/NationalUnionoftheHomeless.)



“The city is doing nothing.
We are setting up the washing stations.
We are feeding the people.
We are about those who can’t ‘shelter in place’ because they have no place to shelter.”

--Crystal Sanchez, President, Sacramento Chapter, California Homeless Union



**No
healthcare, no housing: As the system
fails, the Homeless Union is saving lives**

Reports from Sacramento, Santa Cruz, Los Angeles and Lancaster, PA; Homeless Union organizing, supporting housing takeovers; “Homeless Union: An idea whose time has come.” And, from The Nation Magazine, “The Revival of the National Union of the Homeless” by Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, National Co-Chair, Poor Peoples Campaign/A National Call for Moral Revival (See following pages...)

Sacramento Homeless Union

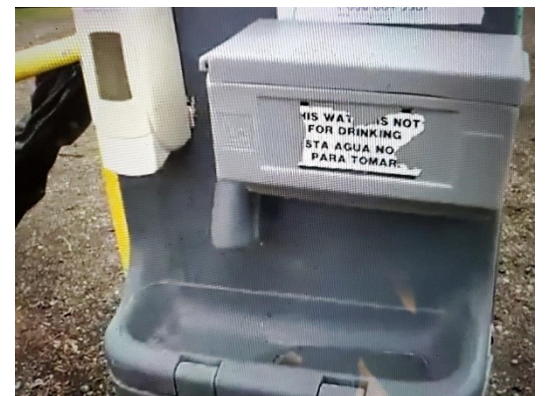
With 11,000 homeless here at risk for the coronavirus, a Governor who predicted 60,000 homeless will be infected—but is doing nothing about it--and a city administration “exempting” the homeless from a “shelter-in-place” order, the Sacramento Homeless Union and Perfect Union cannabis dispensaries went into action to raise funds and set up hand washing stations throughout the Sacramento area.



Reporters follow Union Officers Kyle Cooper and Crystal Sanchez to see handwashing stations at the encampments

When rolled out only days ago, Homeless Union president Crystal Sanchez declared: "This program will give our homeless communities access to the basic sanitation services most of us take for granted at a time when proper hand washing could be the difference between life and death."

But still, at this hour, the homeless are being dumped out of hospitals, shelters are closing, and the city is providing no information, no emergency housing and no medical care. Hundreds are wandering the streets, left to be exposed and die while working class homeowners are locked down, unable to work and many with no access to medical care, let alone access to testing and treatment for coronavirus.



“We will hold the city responsible for the harm they are causing through their negligence,” says local president Sanchez. “We are going to build this Union movement so something like this never happens again.”



Kyle Cooper and Crystal Sanchez for the day



SACRAMENTO HOMELESS UNION

EMERGENCY SUPPLY DRIVE FOR UNHOUSED KIDS AND ADULTS

To slow the spread of Coronavirus, we need donations of supplies for immediate use by Sacramento's 11,000 unhoused children and adults. The CDC tells people who are sick and those at high risk to stay at home, stay away from others, shelter in place and wash their hands and to practice good hygiene. But for people without homes, shelter or bathrooms, these measures are often impossible.



Through a concerted grassroots effort, four hand-washing stations have been donated and installed in the camps.

To protect the health of kids and adults – and to prevent viral transmission to the larger public – we urgently need the following items this week:

Outdoor equipment:

- Sponsors for more hand-washing sinks
- Tents
- Sleeping bags
- Tarps
- Extension cords
- Phone chargers
- Flashlights
- Camping showers
- Camp stoves
- Igloo and styrofoam coolers

Hygiene supplies:

- Soap
- Hand sanitizer
- Shampoo
- First aid kits
- Toilet paper
- Reusable water bottles
- Paper towels

- Garbage bags
- Over the counter medications such as Tylenol, Advil, Motrin, Tums
- Unscented wipes – 3 cases
- Hygiene packs

Clothing:

- Panchos
- Jackets
- Warm clothing – all ages and sizes
- Gloves
- Bras
- Underwear, Socks
- Shoes
- Adult diapers
- Child diapers – size 4, 5, 6, 3-4T, 4-5T pullups
- Calming/soothing books for K-3

- Sponsors for port-a-potties
- Solar panels to generate electricity for charging phones

Food supplies:

- Baby formula
- Pots, pans
- Plastic utensils: forks, spoons, knives
- Styrofoam cups, plates, bowls
- Snack items
- Dry food
- Can openers
- Frozen food
- Bulk food such as rice, beans, potatoes, onions
- Coffee
- Tea
- Dog and cat food, bowls
- Leashes, harnesses, collars – all sizes

Call us to schedule pickup for pre-made meals to deliver to the camps!

Crystal Sanchez, President, Sacramento Homeless Union
Executive Board Member, National Union of the Homeless
916-495-9026 | sacramento.homeless.union@gmail.com

Caity Maple, Vice President of Gov. Affairs, Perfect Union Sacramento
530-645-8322 | caitymaple@gmail.com



To contact the Sacramento Homeless Union,

Sacramento.homelessunion@gmail.com



Santa Cruz Homeless Union Report:

Homeless in Santa Cruz face riot police while Homeless Union and Food Not Bombs team up to feed the people and fight the virus.

Last night, community members led by the Santa Cruz Homeless Union and our partners in Food Not Bombs met at a local Safeway store to discuss how they can take steps to immediately obtain housing in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Somehow, “Take Back Santa Cruz” one of many anti-homeless fronts for real estate interests that have flourished across the country got word and alerted police to the effect that “the homeless were going to burn down Safeway.”

This inflammatory and false report—the making of which, or “SWAT” is against the law—brought riot-equipped police to the scene.

This is how the City of Santa Cruz operates in the midst of the crisis: no housing, no medical assistance, dangerously overcrowded, unsanitary “shelters” and police intimidation.

The Homeless Union and Food Not Bombs had a different approach:



The Union set up a “Covid-19 Relief Center” to receive and distribute donations of food, hand sanitizer, masks, blankets, tents, gloves and other survival gear. Food Not Bombs got nine pallets loaded with food and began doing what the City of Santa Cruz failed to do.

This is not charity; this is solidarity.

Santa Cruz Homeless Union COVID-19 Relief Center

The beautiful human spirit

Town Clock at Water and Pacific
Open 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM everyday

The people living outside need our support.
Please donate food, masks, hand sanitizer, blankets, tarps, tents, food handling gloves and other survival gear.
Volunteer to staff the Relief Center. Please drop by to see how you can help.

Call 1-800-884-1136



Contact: Alicia Kuhl, President, Santa Cruz Homeless Union, alicia11@hotmail.com.

Homeless Union Supports “Reclaiming our Homes”
“Seizing vacant houses for homeless families is
a moral and medical necessity.”

Protestors have now taken over 11 homes in El Serenio



*Caltrans owns 163 empty
homes around Pasadena—
and homeless families want*

to live in them: “The community has to take matters into their own hands”



Statement of Solidarity

Thirty years ago, the National Union of the Homeless led the way in seizing and occupying vacant HUD houses across the country after Housing Secretary Jack Kemp breached an agreement to set aside 10% of the inventory for the homeless. That’s when we undertook a coordinated series of high-profile occupations that stretched over three years and involved hundreds of houses, documented in the award-winning film “TAKEOVER” by Skylight Pictures.

The coronavirus crisis has dramatically accelerated and dramatized the existing crisis of housing accessibility, homelessness and poverty. “Reclaiming Our Homes”

marks an escalation of Oakland’s “Mothers 4 Housing,” in which ACCE, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, was instrumental. We are bound to see more and more of these home occupations—some well-organized and visible; others hidden but likely far more widespread. Our hope and commitment is to collaborate and broaden this “civil disobedience by necessity” into a real mass movement. (For more information, visit: reclaimingourhomes.org.)



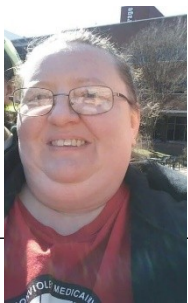
Lancaster (Pennsylvania) Homeless Union

Members of the Lancaster Local Union have aggressively responded to the coronavirus crisis, successfully working to get hand washing stations & portable bathrooms in and around downtown and in parks. The Union was contacted by the mayor’s chief of staff, who signaled the mayor’s agreement to work with the Union to get public bathrooms downtown!

Local Union President Tammy Rojas reports further: “We had a Lancaster Food Not Bombs serving last Saturday but not sure the cops will keep letting us do it. They were really watching us last week.”

“Put People First, Pennsylvania, a leading statewide advocate for healthcare, working closely with the Homeless Union, is demanding and organizing to compel Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf to get all the unhoused, housed by taking over housing or hotels. (You can see the demands here putpeoplefirstpa.org/Coronavirus)

“The Lancaster Homeless Union and the Lancaster Healthcare Rights Committee of Put People First! PA are both pushing for the reopening of the old St. Joseph’s Hospital. Put People First! PA is demanding all closed hospitals across the state be re-opened. Our Mayor is no help in that department, but what’s interesting is the local paper LNP (Lancaster Newspapers) seem to agree with us: their editorial board did an article stating the need to ramp up coronavirus testing in Lancaster County and voiced their agreement with us that St. Joseph’s hospital should be re-opened before it’s too late.



We started all of this by crashing a press conference hosted by the Lancaster County Commissioner’s last week. (See video footage link and time stamps below.)

Link to video: Eric spoke at timestamp 57:19 then Anne and myself spoke at 1:02:06. We had a
ba with the County Commissioner which was very powerful. We spoke to them
af l they were feeling the pain of our action.... and it was only three of us
<https://www.facebook.com/259821174228416/videos/2761013320614924/>

“Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.”

Brothers and Sisters:

Since June of last year, when dozens of us met in in Washington, D.C. to re-establish the National union of the Homeless, we have made tremendous strides, consolidated a functioning Executive Council and welcomed a growing number of homeless union locals across the country into our ranks. We are now receiving a steady stream of requests for information and applications to join. And we know that there are hundreds, if not thousands more homeless community leaders in the camps, the shelters, the college campuses, families sleeping in their cars, in and out of “welfare” hotels and on the streets who are already organizing.

We know, too, that there are many, many fighting grassroots organizations and individual leaders not only among the poor and homeless, but from *all* backgrounds—clergy, students, teachers, doctors, lawyers and other professionals—who understand the significance of homelessness as a concentrated expression of a broader poverty and a key link in moving the whole struggle for social justice forward.

We say to those of you are serious about building a real movement: Let’s talk. We don’t have to agree on everything; we *shouldn’t* agree on everything, not if we are serious about building something powerful. But can we agree on the *main* thing? Taking what are now scattered, disconnected battles and groups and from them form a Homeless Union movement of tens of thousands of the most dispossessed, the people who have nothing and nothing to lose? We say “Homeless, Not Helpless!” because we are part of that “new and unsettling force” of which Dr. King spoke, an idea whose time has come.

In Struggle and Solidarity,
Anthony Prince,
Lead National Organizer and General Counsel,
National Union of the Homeless, California Homeless Union/Statewide Organizing Council
Phone: 510-301-1472; Email: princelawoffices@yahoo.com

The National Union of the Homeless

Chico/Paradise, CA * Imperial County/El Centro, CA * Sacramento, CA * Santa Clara County/San Jose, CA
Monterey County/Salinas, CA * Marysville/Yuba County, CA * Ventura County, CA * Santa Cruz, CA * Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs
Washington, D.C. * New York City * Buffalo, N.Y. * Pomona, CA * Claremont, CA * Rochester, NY * Massachusetts/Boston
Harrisonburg, VA * Lancaster, PA * Greensboro, NC * Syracuse, NY

Visit our facebook page at: www.facebook.com/

NationalUnionoftheHomeless





THE
Nation.

The Revival of the National Union of the Homeless

The experiences and organizing efforts of the homeless can teach us all about taking action together in this unprecedented time.

By Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis



A man is seen in a homeless encampment on Thursday, March 19, 2020, in Oakland, California. (AP Photo / Ben Margot)Subscribe now for as little as \$2 a month!

Early last week, Americans woke to news of the largest one-day oil price drop in history. Since then, stocks on Wall Street have continued to plummet and the Fed has materialized, overnight, \$1.5 trillion for investors. For over a year, economists have predicted the probability of an impending recession, and those fears have only multiplied since the coronavirus has unsettled markets around the world. As the Trump Administration struggles to articulate even a short-term strategy to mitigate this public health emergency, we must consider what a deeper economic collapse will mean for the nation, and the 140 million poor and low-income people who already live their own public health crisis and recession every day.

During the Great Depression, one of the most visible and alarming signs of a society in crisis was the explosion of homelessness across the country. In response, the newly homeless built shantytowns and encampments in and around major cities, known as “Hoovervilles”, after President Herbert Hoover. The self-organization and survival strategies of close to 2 million homeless people is not often remembered in the retelling of history, but they prefigured many of the major policy developments of the New Deal period, including housing reform.

During this unfolding health and economic crisis, it is not difficult to imagine that we could soon see the emergence of “Trumpvilles” all across the country. Although some local and state governments have taken measures to head off the immediate growth of homelessness, like moratoriums on evictions, it is clear that the nation is not prepared for the level of precarity that millions will be thrown into, only compounding the deep poverty and instability that existed before the coronavirus pandemic hit the US.

In New York City, the government waited at least an extra week to close schools because over one hundred thousand students are homeless and rely on school services for regular meals and shelter. What will happen to these children and the millions more whose families are one paycheck or healthcare crisis away from poverty and homelessness? Meanwhile, while we wait for a federal government response that is commensurate with the problem, folks are beginning to take their own life-saving measures. In Los Angeles, homeless moms

and their children have begun to move into abandoned homes to protect themselves and the larger public from further exposure.

In early February, at the same time that the US government was receiving intel on the inevitable growth of the coronavirus into a global pandemic, the Trump administration released its proposed budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Their reforms represent a sweeping policy of austerity that would cut low-income housing assistance programs by \$4.2 billion, decrease public housing operating funds by 21%, and end all funding for public housing capital repairs. When the government continues to disinvest in critical programs and services, and appears wholly ill equipped for the social and economic challenges ahead, the experiences of the homeless and their efforts to organize for change has much to teach us about why and how poor and dispossessed people are beginning to take action together in this time.

Today, there are somewhere between 8 and 11 million homeless people living in the United States—on the streets, within a crumbling shelter system and a growing constellation of informal encampments, and trapped in the rotating door of cars, couches, doubled or tripled up apartments, and public space. This is nothing less than a national emergency that has developed over decades, but which is largely ignored or made invisible. For over 40 years, while the crisis of homelessness has quietly exploded, a narrative has been popularized that understands homelessness through the hyper-racialized and atomized image of a black man sleeping on a city grate. For a wealthy elite that has advanced a generation of neoliberal reforms, it has been critical to cast homelessness in this way: as an aberration on the margins of an otherwise healthy society, rather than as the most visible indictment of a political and economic order that has left 140 million people poor or low-income, in which homelessness and poverty are structured into the very core of society.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, major structural shifts to the global economy were accompanied by domestic policy adjustments that included deep tax cuts, deregulation of banking and financial markets, privatization of public utilities and services, and anti-labor measures. In the midst of these epoch-making policy decisions, homelessness swelled as the government demolished public housing and invested in private urban development projects which fueled gentrification and

pushed poor families out of their homes. From 1978 to 1983, the HUD budget was reduced from \$83 billion to \$18 billion, and the cuts only deepened from there. Thousands of families who had lived for generations in public housing were rapidly left without homes and swept into a new and growing network of shelters.

Out of those shelters, poor and homeless people quickly began to organize themselves into communities of mutual-aid and solidarity. In 1983 in Philadelphia, a group called the Committee for Dignity and Fairness for the Homeless formed, and in less than a year had over 500 homeless members. They opened their own shelter, what they called a “project of survival”, and used it as a springboard to organize among the homeless. In 1985, they founded the Philadelphia/Delaware Valley Union of the Homeless with the express goal of uniting homeless people across lines of division like race, gender, sexuality, and religion. They recognized that among them rested a latent power that could galvanize the larger society around their appalling conditions, but only if they built genuine and independent political organization. One of their key slogans became “Homeless Not Helpless”.

By the late 1980s, they had gone national, with close to 30,000 members in 25 cities. With a powerful and growing base, organizers across the country escalated their efforts, including waves of coordinated takeovers of vacant HUD buildings. These takeovers met the material needs of some, at a time when the government had abdicated its responsibility to protect and provide for its poorest citizens. They also served as a campaign of mass popular education, raising the question of the immorality of homelessness when there were more empty, federally owned houses in the country than there were homeless people.

In just a few years, the National Union of the Homeless broke into the national narrative and began to challenge the prevailing notion that their members were poor and homeless because of bad personal decisions and the moral failures of their families. Instead, they targeted the systems and structures that produced their poverty, and in the process they won a number of significant victories, including the right for homeless people to vote without an address, municipal programs and services led by the homeless, and commitments from HUD to make 10,000 housing units available for the homeless. These victories and the sustained organizing of homeless communities, led by

the homeless, were an emphatic repudiation of the commonly held position, even among the left, that the poor could at best be a spontaneous spark of dissent and outrage, but never an organized force that could lead a larger movement for social justice.

I was eighteen when I joined the Homeless Union in Philadelphia. I threw myself into efforts in North Philadelphia, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Pennsylvania. Over the coming years, I saw the power that homeless communities were building there and all across the country: we took over and occupied vacant houses, built projects of survival, marched and organized, and learned from poor people's struggles of the past, from Reconstruction to the Poor People's Campaign of 1968. I also saw firsthand how the state and its economic tools press down on the poor when they attempt to unite across lines of division. By the mid-1990s, despite its visionary efforts, the Homeless Union began to go into decline, undermined by the "chemical warfare" of the crack epidemic, the march of gentrification enabled by decades of neoliberal urban policies, and the successful co-optation of some of its efforts and leadership.

For the next two decades, veterans of the Homeless Union continued, in fledgling but groundbreaking ways, to lay the foundation for a mass movement to end poverty, led by the poor. In 2018, many of those leaders joined with poor people and moral leaders from other organizing histories and contexts to launch the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

At the core of this new effort can be found the ethos of the Homeless Union; that poor people can be agents of change, not just subjects of a cruel history; that within our communities lies the political calculus for transformation in this country; that our power as poor people depends on our ability to unite across difference; and that the position of the homeless only anticipates the poverty and precarity of millions of people in an economy undergoing massive structural change and dislocation.

At a national convening of the Poor People's Campaign last summer, homeless leaders voted to re-constitute the National Union of the Homeless, with locals in over 10 states and counting. The California Homeless Union has proliferated in particular, in a state with enormous wealth beside a growing crisis of affordability and homelessness. In

early February, they won a tentative \$300,000 settlement with the City of Maryville and Yuba County for the seizure and destruction of property after seven riverside homeless encampments in the area were forcibly evicted. They are also closely connected to the California Poor People's Campaign, which counts in its numbers tenant union organizers in central Los Angeles and community leaders supporting the mothers who have led the now nationally recognized takeover of vacant housing in Oakland.

These leaders understand that their fight is not just for homeless people, but for all poor people and those living just an emergency away from poverty and homelessness; that this is a fight that cuts across every issue, from housing, education, healthcare, environment, militarism, systemic racism and sexism, and more. In the last two weeks, the California Homeless Union has advised the organizing efforts of graduate students and university employees at UC Santa Cruz, who are staging a general strike in the face of low pay, high costs of living, and the reality of homelessness on the campus of the richest university system in the nation.

The California Homeless Union understands better than anyone what's at stake and why we must organize: last October, Deseire Qunitero, a member of their Santa Cruz local, died alone in the woods only miles from the university, after the city destroyed the encampment where she was living. The Homeless Union released a public statement after the death of Mama Desi, as she was known, calling poor people en masse to see themselves in her story: "millions of people are one paycheck, one eviction, one family medical emergency or one 'natural' disaster away from homelessness."

The California Union of the Homeless knows that the conditions that allowed for her death are the product of a status quo that is hurting the majority of people in this country. If we are to change this reality, we would do well to follow their lead.

REV. DR. LIZ THEOHARIS The Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis is codirector of the Kairos Center, cofounder of the Poverty Initiative, national codirector of the Poor People's Campaign, and author of *Always with Us?: What Jesus Really Said about the Poor*. She is an ordained minister in the

Presbyterian Church, and has spent the past two decades working with grassroots organizations across the United States.