

5 MAIN SLOGANS

(Lessons from the History of the NATIONAL UNION of the HOMELESS)

The epidemic of homelessness is worsening. The corporate businesses are today compelled by competition to "downsize" employing the labor-replacing devices of electronic technology to cut production costs and maximize profits. Human labor is made increasingly useless and homeless. To eliminate homelessness, this profit-making and people-murdering system cannot be simply bandaged. It must be eliminated. Adequate paying jobs cease to be the source of economic survival for the homeless and millions of the other poverty-stricken as they are hurled permanently outside of the production process.

Homeless Takeovers and The 1992 LA Rebellion

Under these conditions, homeless and poor people have no choice but to take what they need by violating economically unjust laws confronting directly the governmental apparatuses that uphold them. In the video, *TAKEOVER*, Ron Casanova--Editor of the *Union of the Homeless National News*--spoke to the necessity of these acts of civil disobedience when he stated, "It can be done. It can be done...forget that's it against the law. I'm dying in the streets, I think that should be against the law." This political nature of the problem and solution of homelessness kept asserting itself throughout the National Union of the Homeless Organizing Drive of the late 1980s.

Like leaks in a dam that's about to burst, the housing takeovers of the Homeless Union Organizing Drive anticipated the 1992 LA rebellion. The masses of people participated in the rebellion through looting. This mass looting amounted to mass illegal "takeovers" and violations of the property of community exploiting businesses. It would be a mistake to overlook the class differences between the looting done by the poor with the looting done by the rich. For instance, anyone at all familiar with living on welfare knows that at the end of the month you run out of basic necessities to live on. The rebellion erupted on April 29th and then tied up the distribution of food stamps and welfare checks. Tens of thousands were placed in a still more desperate situation. Many took what they needed--baby food, pampers, shoes and clothing, etc. This can in no way be equated with the luxury lootings of the Hollywood upper income opportunists and the multi-billion dollar thefts done by the HUD and Savings & Loans looters.

Mission, Organizing Slogans, & Streetheat

The political character of the National Union of the Homeless Organizing Drive revealed itself in every aspect of the drive, from its mission statement and slogans to its militant street actions. In May of 1988 the new homeless Executive Board members of the Union collectively formulated the mission of their organization,

"The heart and soul of the NATIONAL UNION OF THE HOMELESS

is to commit our lives to ending the oppression of all Homeless People and work tirelessly for economic justice, human rights, and full liberation.

"We dedicate ourselves to transmitting our awareness of our sisters and brothers, to planning a sustained struggle and to building an organization that can obtain freedom through revolutionary perseverance.

"We pledge to deepen our personal commitment to end all forms of exploitation, racism, sexism, and abuse. True solidarity demands that we create not only the new society, but also the new human being."

The five main slogans developed and used during the Drive were: 1)"Homeless but not Helpless!"; 2)"You are but one paycheck away from Homelessness!"; 3)"No Housing, No Peace!"; 4)"You Only Get What you Are Organized To Take!"; and 5)"Up and Out of Poverty, Now!" They proved to be effective tools for organizing the homeless and their supporters. They also served as tools for political education.

The shrewdly formulated slogan, "Homeless but not Helpless" initially confused even the most conservative bourgeois foundations into thinking that the homeless organizing drive provided good public relations for their "self-Help" theories denying the responsibility and blame of the government and society. So they at first granted some of the drive's efforts much needed financial and media supports. On the other hand, the actual organizing and agitating thrust of the drive made the slogan a declaration of political independence from the poverty-pimp agents of the Powers That Be. Malcolm X taught the importance of such an independent thrust of the oppressed. He once stated,

"I'm for whatever gets results. I don't go for any organization...that has to compromise with the power structure and has to rely on certain elements within the power structure for their financing, which puts them in a position to be influenced and controlled all over again by the power structure itself."

"Homeless but not helpless" meant that the homeless would take the leadership of the struggles against homelessness into their own hands. It provided the homeless organizers a tool for teaching a very strategic lesson of history. This was best summed up in the booklet, **WHICH WAY WELFARE RIGHTS?**,

"The history of this country is replete with examples of social problems being brought to a successful conclusion only when led by those American most victimized by the problems. British colonialism was defeated under the leadership of those who were victimized by colonialism. American slavery was abolished with the heroic efforts of slaves and former slaves in the forefront of the struggle. The fight for women's suffrage was successfully led by women. The same was true of 1930's strikes for union rights and the 1960's movement

for civil rights. Those who benefit, if only so slightly, from the economic status quo cannot successfully vanguard social change no matter how good their intentions. Those in pain know when their pain is relieved."

The slogan, "You Are Only One Paycheck Away From Homelessness" served as a weapon to win support from other sectors of public opinion. It also provided a means to expose and explain the class economic causes of homelessness exploding the myth that the homeless and poor had failed society instead of society failing them.

The slogan "No Housing, No Peace!" originated out of the police riots against the homeless takeover of Tompkin Square Park in New York City. The Tompkin Square Park Tent City Homeless Union introduced the slogan to the National Union. It later blared forth onto the national scene during the torturous east coast "Exodus March to Washington D.C." of some 350 homeless men and women from New England and New York. "No housing no peace" is a declaration of war against the conditions of homelessness and a determination to "stick and stay" the course stopping at nothing short of revolution if necessary to obtain housing for every man, woman, and child.

"You Only Get What You're Organized To Take!" was the recognition that takeovers and all efforts must be reinforced by organization which includes the establishment of "power bases" to sustained operations. The *talk* means nothing without the *walk*. This slogan meant for the poor and homeless fighters, the beginning of the political understanding that the real fruit of any battle or takeover was the consolidation and expansion of their unity and organization. And that indeed and especially in America, *political power grows out of organization*.

Obviously this historical and strategic meaning of the slogan, "You Only Get What You're Organized to Take!" has not been lost on the political police--the FBI and the local "red squads." In the aftermath of the April LA uprising they have concentrated their surveillance and fire on the most organized element of the rebellion, the politicized so called "youth gangs."

The National Union of the Homeless took up the slogan, "Up and Out of Poverty, Now!", when it joined with the National Welfare Rights Union and the National Anti-Hunger Coalition and convened the National Survival Summit in Philadelphia, PA in July of 1989. In taking up this call, the Homeless union leaders took a gigantic step toward linking up with hundreds of other poverty victims-led organizations and groupings. This slogan is the recognition that only in consciously-directed massive numbers do we possess the strength to shake and reshape the economic and political foundations of homelessness and poverty ending these deadly diseases sooner not later.

In the course of its existence, the Homeless Union has used and will continued to use many slogans to rally, educate, and organize homeless and near homeless people. The five mentioned above are the main ones and have all stood the test of time.

FIVE MAIN SLOGANS

"Homeless Not Helpless!"

•We, the poor and homeless, can and must lead our own struggle to end poverty!

"You Are Only One Paycheck Away From Homelessness!"

•Homelessness is a class issue. We are homeless because we do not have enough money for a home.

"No Housing, No Peace!"

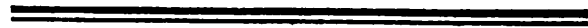
•There can be no peace in America while people go without!

"You Only Get What You Are Organized To Take!"

•Power in America comes from one place... Organization!

"Up and Out of Poverty, Now!"

•People mobilize in their self-interest. It is in our self-interest alone to end poverty. We know when our pain is over. Therefore, WE must lead the struggle to end poverty. And we must end it NOW!



**NATIONAL UNION OF THE
HOMELESS**

