

Anti-PAN Work

Engaging With Communities of Color in Arizona

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Background

In crisis there is opportunity and the impending placement of the “Protect Arizona Now” (PAN) initiative on Arizona’s November ballot (named Prop 200) provides us the opportunity to engage with people of color communities as well as a range of left-leaning organizations and individuals. At its core, PAN is a racist proposition seeking to deny social services to undocumented workers. Arguing that immigrants “cost the tax payers a lot of money,” PAN criminalizes the act of giving State services to any undocumented worker. However, the real impact of the proposition is the preservation of white privilege through the intimidation of the Mexican undocumented laborers.

In Phoenix, Bring the Ruckus has been searching for an issue with the potential to build power in communities of color, thereby challenging white supremacy. The anti-war efforts, while aimed in part at reigning in the military industrial complex and fighting U.S. imperialism, did not involve many people of color here. We view immigration as one issue that could mobilize the communities that we wish to work with in Arizona. However, we have been searching for an angle from which to organize. We currently think that PAN provides an angle. PAN has already shown itself to be a hot-button issue with the ability to galvanize different constituencies – 26 organizations have already submitted statements for the November voting guide against PAN. They include elected officials at various levels and groups ranging from the Libertarian Party to the Arizona Hispanic Community Forum to Unions and more grassroots organizations.

Using Reformist Strategies to Reach a Revolutionary Goal

Because PAN is an electoral issue, we must use some traditional electoral organizing strategies in our efforts to defeat it. This includes voter registration, rallies, press conferences and get-out-the-vote efforts, which legitimize the existing political system and fail to challenge the two party dictatorship. However, even if our strategy isn’t revolutionary, our goal is. Our primary goal is to challenge white privilege and organizing against PAN provides the mechanism to do this at this point. This work also gives us the ability to foster relationships with groups and organizations with strong ties to communities of color. As of now, the PAN initiative is the issue galvanizing people of color in Arizona. In Tucson, the anti-PAN organizing has been spearheaded by immigrant rights organizations such as Derechos Humanos, Border Action Network, and the American Friends Service Committee. These groups have a base in the immigrant communities near the border, as well as strong ties to the Sanctuary Movement. In Phoenix, the Statue of Liberty Coalition (SLC) has been leading the contra-PAN efforts. SLC’s uber-patriotic name is problematic, perhaps caused by its liberal Chicano leadership and their desire to show allegiance to American Ideas. It also reflects their centrist politics and their interest in courting the middle class vote. SLC is coordinated by heavyweights in the Chicano community with strong ties to elected officials and other power elites. However, much of their membership is grassroots, including representatives from SEIU, Cadena Comite (a Chicano/a led student group working on legalization for undocumented students), ACORN, and other organizations. Our hope is to connect with these more grassroots groups, hoping to play a role in the direction and framing of the struggle.

Ruckus has also been working with a third group called Communities Against PAN (CAP), a group that initially was started by progressive white college students. However, the make up of

the group is quickly changing as more Chicano students come to the table. With their help, we were able to organize a coordinating meeting for possible anti-PAN work in Tempe. The meeting had over twenty participants from seven different organizations. While it is difficult to tell where this groups will head or the type of work they will do, we see potential in some of the more radical Chicano students. We will not be working on electoral politics as a means in itself, but as a tool to enable us to collaborate with other organizations and speak directly with community residents. Electoral tactics can simultaneously defeat PAN and achieve our goals. For example, Jan Adams writes in "Proposition 187 Lessons" that the No on Prop 187 (a California anti-immigrant initiative that was passed in 1994) campaign in San Francisco concentrated available resources on raising the number of no votes from the Latino and Asian Pacific Islander communities. This strategy resulted in a significant rise in the percentage of no votes from Latino, Asian American, and African American communities.

Intra- and Inter-Organizational Tensions Among Anti-PAN Organizations

Jan Adams' article describes the disagreements over messaging between "Taxpayers United Against Prop 187," the more mainstream Prop 187 opponents, and "Californians United Against Prop 187," a more people of color oriented coalition from northern California. The Taxpayers group conceded that immigration was a "problem" and played on voters' fears of brown people spreading diseases. The Californians group felt that this insulted communities of color. This tension over messaging is also playing out in Arizona. Derechos Humanos/Alianza Indigena Sin Fronteras of Tucson created an anti-PAN pamphlet describing PAN as anti-immigrant, extremist, dangerous, part of an agenda of hate, and increasing division and fear in communities. SLC felt that the pamphlet was too radical and wanted to create its own literature that would appeal to more moderate or conservative voters.

There are also disagreements within SLC over direction and strategy. At a recent meeting, the facilitators promised that there was an action plan in the works but did not put forth any concrete proposals besides fundraising. The people in attendance did not want to adopt the "wait and see" attitude the leadership was pushing. They wanted to take action immediately and had already begun voter registration and other activities. The challenge in working with SLC is to actually begin organizing without creating the impression that we are working against SLC. We are also trying to position ourselves inside SLC to encourage some movement. While these tensions have not been a problem so far, it promises to be a difficult issue as the campaign continues.

Our Strategies

At this point, we are talking to a variety of organizations in order to form the broadest coalition possible. This includes MeCHA, AMSA (Association of Multicultural Student Activists), Los Vecinos (a Tempe neighborhood group), the Statue of Liberty Coalition, Green Party, Women in Black, Nosotros y Tu and other groups targeting progressive young voters. We are doing this for two reasons: 1) to build a good working relationship with other people and organizations, and 2) to begin coordinating the struggle against PAN. This coalition will decide what tactics to use to defeat PAN. However, BTR will be emphasizing a more radical message, i.e. voter registration

is ok, but we should have to attack the racist underpinnings of the current system and challenge that. Our hope is to not just defeat PAN, but to also build the level of awareness and engagement among low income and people of color communities who are not eligible to vote.

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