

REPORT TO THE MEMBERSHIP, 2021

The last report, written at the end of 2020, ended with the sentence “The Year 2020 has been truly unique.” After all, it was the year we met Covid-19, the year we watched George Floyd being murdered by a Minneapolis police officer, followed by massive demonstrations responding to that and other examples of racist police abuse. And then there was the 2020 national election that replaced Donald Trump. It seemed to be a uniquely challenging year until 2021 began and the challenges continued.

This report picks up the story at the beginning of 2021. On January 6, 2021, a violent mob of Trump supporters attempted to prevent the certification of the 2020 presidential election by staging a violent attack on the U.S. Capital, Covid still raged on, with violent disagreements about all the medical practices being put in place to control it. Belief in the legitimacy of the 2020 election split the country. Attacks on democratic institutions prevailed.

The challenge for progressive organizations like the Community Forum for Economic Justice, was to carry out our mission under these difficult conditions. How did we do? Here are a few examples.

We have always tried to use the tools of education, advocacy, and service to meet our organizing goals. Zoom became our primary communication medium for educational forums and planning meetings. For service projects -- like the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, that required personal contact to be successful, countless hours were spent developing methods that would allow sufficient person-to-person contact while protecting the safety of taxpayers and tax preparers.

In our organizing, we worked, when possible, with other community organizations with whom we shared common goals: with CAFÉ (Community Action for Education), the NAACP, Black Lives Matter, and others on important public education issues such as the United States Department of Justice Consent Decree, a restructuring/reorganizing of the SBCSC, and the presence of SROs (School Resource Officers) in the South Bend schools.

In August we initiated a new housing campaign based on our conviction that safe and affordable housing is a human right. We organized three public

forums on local housing issues. Judy Fox, director of the Notre Dame Clinical Law Center, presented a critique of the eviction process. The Covid-related federal moratorium on evictions was about to expire and an exponential number of evictions were anticipated.

South Bend Housing Authority Director, Dr. Catherine Lamberg, and SBHA Resident Services Director, Michael Williams, discussed the critical role played by federally funded public housing at the second forum. Fred Harris, Housing Chair of the South Bend NAACP, and Diana Moya, from the South Bend Human Rights Commission examined issues related to housing discrimination at the third event.

These discussions led to the formation of HHR-Action, a grassroots group of housing activists seeking to change policies and practices that deny residents of St. Joseph County the ability to achieve housing stability -- a basic human right. Two major concerns of this campaign are the eviction process and increasing the acceptance of vouchers by owners of affordable housing.

Most members of the Community Forum are active in other community organizations as well. We have members working with health-related groups like the Lead Affinity Group and Birth Equity & Justice SJC. Many members of South Bend's Reparations Working Group are active in the Community Forum as are the organizers of a Social Justice Book study. In addition, our members participate in neighborhood organizations and in a wide variety of community groups. Although that creates time and energy pressures, it also provides knowledge and experience that is invaluable to our mission of opposing and ending injustice.