

## NEW YORK SEMINAR TACKLES HOUSING ISSUES

The New York School's panel discussion on the tenth of March, *Housing and the Homeless*, presented its audience with two vital components of the debate on housing: the true severity of the situation, and the real potential for solutions that could eliminate the causes of the problem, not simply manage its effects. The three speakers were experienced in different phases of the housing crisis. Reverend George Kuhn, pastor of St Brigid's Church in Manhattan, became an activist because it was simply "unthinkable not to respond" to the situation outside his front door, namely the city's attempts to evict the homeless from a makeshift "tent city" in Tompkin's Square Park. Louis Atlas works for the beleaguered agency whose job is to serve the needs of New York's homeless population, the Bureau of Family Services. Walt Rybeck, President of the Center for Public Dialogue, has gone across the country promoting the kind of tax reform that would provide cities with both the incentives to build affordable housing, and the revenue to ensure a sufficient "safety net."

St. Brigid's Church faces Tompkins Square Park, and thus stands in a neighborhood in which contemporary urban problems are uniquely focused. Abandoned buildings are plentiful, and the depressed land values in the area provide opportunities both for gentrification and the establishment of land trusts and other creative housing ventures. In this chaotic environment, Father Kuhn has become a sort of unwilling celebrity; he was arrested for delivering food and drink to squatters whom the police were trying to evict. His presentation included a slide show of local posters and graffiti comparing police and the city policies to those of Naziism and Apartheid. Father Kuhn reported that many of the policemen who came three times to tear down the makeshift shelters in the park told him that they didn't like what they were doing, but "they were just following orders."

Father Kuhn cited the story of the Sunshine Community Center, where he was arrested, as a clear example of the absurdity of official responses to the housing crisis. An abandoned school building had been, for some years, a meeting place for prostitution and drug dealing. This was well-known in the community, and complaints were routinely made to the police, but the police made no headway. A small group of Tompkins Square tent-dwellers were not so powerless, however -- they went in and pushed the crack trade out, and began the huge task of cleaning the building and making it habitable. When that task was nearly completed, the police arrived to evict the squatters. The building remains unused.

Louis Atlas, who presented the seminar audience with an overview of services provided by the city to its poorest residents, said that he had been homeless himself for some two months, after a conversion forced him from his rental apartment. He said that the Bureau of Family Services is an umbrella organization under which many social services have been consolidated in recent years, in an effort to weed out redundant programs and use scarce funds efficiently. He listed an impressive array of services provided by the bureau, ranging from medical care, drug and employment counseling, to special holiday meals and festivities provided in shelters. He made it clear, however, that all of these programs are designed to provide services on a temporary basis. For example, city shelters are not supposed to allow people to stay for more than thirty days. To meet the needs of a seemingly permanent, and constantly growing, homeless class is well beyond the scope and the budget of the Bureau.



Reverend George Kuhn



Louis Atlas



Walt Rybeck

(continued on fourth page)

## POET-ACTIVIST CATHE SMELAND WANTS GEORGE IN MARKETPLACE

Cathe Smeland, an active San Francisco businesswoman, campaign director, sometime poet and peace worker has taken the reins as President of the Henry George School of Northern California. She has challenged her new Board "to be on the cutting edge of events." A supporter of the traditional educational programs of the School, Cathe is seeking ways to make us more credible in the community by participating with many other groups on "hot events." Under her aegis, the School in now a "host" of one of the major Earth Day activities.

The new Board President is a partner with her husband Jack Alter in a public relations firm called Alter Images. She has been an active Board member for a number of years, and a former Treasurer. An ardent spokeswoman for children, Cathe founded the National Children's Agenda in 1988. She was a founder of the Sacred Arts Community in 1986, and the World Peace Project in 1984. In 1987 she was a US peace delegate to the USSR, Poland and East Germany as part of a people-to-people peace work project. A candidate for public office herself in 1977, she has directed many campaigns including those of Congressman Panetta, Secretary of State March Fong and President Carter. Cathe is married and lives in San Francisco with her husband and their daughter Cendahl.

-- E. Robert Scrofani

## POLLUTION SOLUTIONS -- IN L.A. OF ALL PLACES

"Final Friday" Dinner sponsored by The Alumni Group of the LA School was held on the third Friday in March -- but at the usual place, Michael's Restaurant in Hollywood. The house was packed, LA Director Harry Pollard told the Newsletter. Folks remained quite late, with the last ones trickling out at midnight.

This was the first in a series of dinners dealing with the theme of external pollution (the previous two dinners considered legal and illegal drugs -- internal pollution). Speakers on March 23rd were Gary Flo, Jeff Smith, Harry Pollard and Margil

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