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Resisting Homelessness: Global, National, and Local Solutions

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Introduction

The increase in numbers of people without homes both nationally and internationally reflects the deep neglect of basic human needs within modern capitalist society—a "social indicator" marking the decline of the welfare state and the rise of monetarist neoliberal economic strategies (Teeple 1995). Homelessness will end only with the widespread recognition that all societies have a responsibility to provide their citizens with decent and affordable housing, excellent health care, stable, meaningful, and well-paid employment, and freedom from arbitrary exercise of state and private authority—and when these are implemented. Ending homelessness is about creating a truly democratic human society beyond the barbarism of the current stock of social inequalities and economic and political violence.

First, I comment briefly on the increase in those living without homes both in the United States and internationally. Second, I examine how the prevalent ways of thinking have led to confusing effects with causes, and suggest other ways to think about the problem of homelessness. Third, I introduce a theoretical argument that attempts to integrate this apparent diversity of causes. Briefly, my argument asserts that
the combination of rapid integration and monopolization of transnational corporations (TNCs) and the application of neoliberal economic policies of deregulation, privatization, and imposed financial austerity measures, privileges finance capital and accelerates the accumulation of capital at the expense of working families and the poor, locally (city), nationally, and internationally. These privileges, in turn, generate international, national, and local (city) extremes of social inequalities, putting populations at risk of losing their shelter. Fourth, I examine possible solutions. I have broken down these solutions into global, national, and local (city) levels, with the understanding that global solutions will be carried out at the national and local level, and across national boundaries. Given the limited scope of this essay, most of my solutions are designed for the United States.

Descriptive Trends

Since the 1980s, when people without homes first engaged the public consciousness, the poor have grown poorer and have included more women with children, and higher numbers of African Americans and Latinos. Without debating definitional problems of what homelessness is, I will simply note that most studies indicate that people without homes come predominantly from the bottom 20 percent of the population, from the ranks of the very poor. As Hopper and Milburn (1996) and Baker (1994) have observed, most of the urban homeless tend to be African American, Latino, and Native American, those segments of the population overrepresented among the poor. From the 1990 count of homeless persons conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, African Americans make up close to half of families without homes (54%) and over one-third of individuals without homes living on the streets (Hopper and Milburn 1996:123). Given that people of color are disproportionately represented within the ranks of the poor and very poor, it is not surprising to find such a representation among those living without shelter. It is generally agreed that approximately one-quarter to one-third of people living on the street have some kind of serious mental disability, and a higher percentage suffer from substance abuse. Attributing these descriptors of disability to causes, however, is problematic (Snow, Baker, Anderson, and Martin 1986). While the figures vary depending upon which study one wishes to quote, it is generally acknowledged that approximately 60 to 70 percent of those without shelter are single males and approximately 30 percent are women with children. Of the latter group, children and youth comprise a growing category of the homeless population. While most of the shelter population is comprised of single women and children, most of those living on the streets are single males.

Studies conducted in the 1980s used widely inflated estimates, in the millions, to dramatize the nature and scope of people without shelter. However, the U.S. Bureau of Census, in a deeply flawed study, came up with a figure of about 200,000 unhoused people in 1990. Since counting the numbers of people who are actually homeless is a major methodological challenge, it is safer to use the estimates of increased shelter and food bank use as well as homeless episodes. Most people who experience a loss of housing do so occasionally, existing at or near the poverty level. This segment of the population moves in and out of homelessness depending upon the state of the economy and the availability of resources. From 1985 through 1990, over 5.7 million people reported having episodes of homelessness (Link, Susser, Sueve, and Phelan 1994:1907); 26 million people are estimated to have experienced times without shelter over their lifetime in the United States. Wolch and Dear (1993:32) estimated that between 840,000 and 1 million people experienced episodes of homelessness in 1991 alone. If we look at shelter requests, what is clear is the steady increase of demand for needed homeless services over the past two decades. In 1998, requests for emergency shelter increased by an average of 11 percent from 1997, in 72 percent of the 30 major cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors (1999). Twenty-six percent of the requests for shelter were denied. Due to a lack of resources, 67 percent of the cities surveyed had to turn away families and individuals who had no shelter, at a time when the number of shelter beds in the surveyed cities remained constant and transitional housing units increased by only 11 percent. City officials identified lack of affordable housing as the lead cause of homelessness.

Declining incomes for the bottom 20 percent of the population, the decline in the absolute numbers of low-income housing relative to the need, and an impoverished community-based health care system define the immediate context of homelessness not only in the United States
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(Shinn and Gillespie 1994) but increasingly worldwide. According to the United Nations Center for Human Settlements, 40 million people were estimated to be without shelter globally during the 1980s (Bingham, Green, and White 1987). In 1996, the Habitat II conference held in Istanbul, Turkey, estimated that the numbers of people without homes had increased worldwide to 100 million, with over one billion people suffering from inadequate shelter. The fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of a market economy in Russia witnessed an increase in people living on the streets. In Germany families looking for shelter often live under bridges, in tents, and in squatter camps. Glasser (1994:89) estimated that in Cologne 45,000 people were living in emergency shelters. Mayer (1996:15) documented 15 housing encampments each containing about 300 people in and around Berlin. In Japan, single men without a fixed residence live in the tunnels of Tokyo, often suffering from some variation of mental illness or substance abuse. Even in a country with a very high social wage such as Sweden, social housing authorities have worked to exclude people rendered homeless by the open housing market when those people are perceived as costly, where “costs . . . exceed the possible revenue from rents” (Sahlin 1997:151). While the Netherlands claims an unhoused population estimated at between 17,500 and 34,000, the causes have often been attributed to traditional forms of disaffiliation, such as substance abuse and loss of family supports. However, Deben and Greshof (1997) argue that the move toward increasing urban gentrification, the reduction of government subsidies for social housing, and the influx of immigrants without adequate income guarantees will expand the ranks of the homeless, converting a problem of disabilities into one of poverty. The numbers of people without shelter are even higher in developing countries, such as Brazil (Burns 1987) and Mexico, that have embraced “free” market economies.

The initial policy response by the United States and other countries to the expanding numbers of people losing their homes was to expand emergency services such as shelters and food banks. In the United States, the passage of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987 guaranteed that federal support would be forthcoming for homeless services; fiscal support increased from $180 million in 1987 to almost $1.8 billion in 1994. When this did not reduce the numbers of people living without shelter, elite attitudes hardened. This has forced a more punitive response from local politicians and policy makers, criminalization (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 1999; Barak 1992: 75–99; Stoner 1995; Fischer 1992), and containment. Discouraging loitering in public places, anti-camping and anti-panhandling ordinances, and arrests or detention for “quality of life” crimes are complemented by the attempt to contain homeless persons in institutional shelters and facilities—out of sight of the general public, especially the tourist trade. Shelters have implemented widespread regulations and sanctioning systems, not unlike TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) regulations. As more and more people living in the streets are arrested for violating local panhandling or camping ordinances or harassed into hiding in remote areas of a city, their disappearance from tourist areas and other public spaces creates the illusion that homelessness as a social problem is ending.

Harassment, arrest, and incarceration can be used, therefore, to back up city and state policies of removing people who lack shelter from public places when police sweeps fail. This points to a disturbing trend of using prisons and shelters as the housing of last resort for the very poor, but specifically poor people of color. With 1.63 million people incarcerated throughout the United States in 1996, a large increase from the 1980s, Western (1999: 1031) argues that criminal justice policies have led to “a sizable, nonmarket reallocation of labor, overshadowing state intervention through social policy.” Incarceration is most frequent for African-American men, who make up 51 percent of the prison population. Headley (1990–91) sees the increased incarceration of African-American men, homeless or otherwise, as a consequence of deindustrialization and job relocation by industries seeking to increase capital accumulation by moving to low-wage areas and non-union states.

Conceptualizing Causes: Individual, Social-Structural, Political-Economic

Developing solutions to shelter people depends upon our understanding of the causes of homelessness. Historically, discussion about the causes and effects of, and solutions to, homelessness has revolved around the differences between individual causes, normally attributed to deficits in individual character or ability, and social-structural causes, attributed to the lack of
human services, affordable housing, and adequate income. A third, more productive route is to examine the interactions between individual "causes" and social-structural causes, and how those interactions fit within wider political-economic struggles for capital accumulation and racial privilege. The struggle to understand homelessness as more than an individual deficit or a lack of housing involves understanding the context of social, economic, and political power within which homelessness emerges. Therefore we must distinguish between proximate and ultimate causes (Wright, Rubin, and Devine 1998:9).

Individual—Proximate Causes?

Koegel, Burnam, and Baumohl (1996) marked one set of explanatory "causes," those defined by a personal limitation—what we could define as proximate causes. Mental illness, substance abuse, inability to sustain relationships, and other individual factors make up this "cause" in explaining homelessness. While conservatives use a religious/moral framework to invite homeless people to repent of their sins, a liberal perspective built on these "causes" treats homeless people as victims in need of treatment, and therefore works to promote better rehabilitation programs and community care networks (Koegel, Burnam, and Baumohl 1996: 25). Reducing the causes of homelessness to individual behavior or visible characteristics allows conservatives to claim that people without shelter choose to live on the streets because they lack the motivation and will to compete successfully, and thus end up at the bottom of the social ladder. Quick to distinguish between housed and homeless persons, conservatives react to homeless people as crazy, free-loading, or troubled and dangerous characters needing police action to contain their movements (Barak 1992:54). Such a traditional position is most closely related to the social perceptions of the "hobo," "tramp," or "bum" that accompanied the 1930s Depression Era.

The "liberal" position views the personal defects of homeless people as treatable—more a disease than a moral or personal failing. Adopting a "medical" model, those who embrace this position are motivated by assisting individual homeless people. This charity model typically is embraced by shelter and service providers. The expansion of shelter services and other medical services are thought to provide the solution to homelessness—getting individual people back on their feet. "Lack of proper services, that is, caused the problem, and only more and better services will solve it" (Wright, Rubin, and Devine 1998:11). While the first position sees the problem as one of moral choice, the second position sees it as a treatable disease. In the second explanation, critical political-economic causes are supplanted by individualized "languages of disability" (Snow, Anderson, and Koegel 1994) oriented toward client treatment, and a "politics of compassion" (Hoch and Slayton 1989) that privileges charity and the gift relationship. Adherence to the standards of the gift relationship can then be used to mark those people without shelter who are "deserving" (women with children) from those who are "undeserving" (single adult males).

For the first position, punitive solutions are necessary to shape moral behavior and discourage "bad" behavior. For the second position, compassionate solutions are important because people can end up homeless through no fault of their own, but rather through the progression of an addiction. Wright, Rubin, and Devine call these two theories "homeless by choice" versus "inadequate services." Both of these positions, embraced by Baum and Burnes (1993), are refuted by Wright, Rubin, and Devine because they ignore the role of social-structural factors. These factors—the creation of increased poverty, concentrated in inner-city areas, the loss of housing and jobs, and the abandonment of the social safety net—suggest that "defects and dislocations of social structure . . . create a population at risk of homelessness; defects of persons determine who within the at-risk population actually becomes homeless" (Wright, Rubin, and Devine 1998:9). A causal model of analysis that focuses on personal defects, therefore, misleads us into pursuing the wrong solutions. "Analyses that focus on personal deficits of the homeless mistake the characteristics of people who are homeless for the causes of the homeless" (Wright, Rubin, and Devine 1998:6). This confusion creates problems in so far as the application of treatments or "solutions" designed to correct or help personal defects fail because the basic issues of social structural poverty, housing, and income are not addressed. The overemphasis on treatment for mental illness or substance abuse does not consider the heterogeneous nature of the homeless population—the fact that while rates of mental illness and substance abuse appear higher in this population than in the housed
population, it does not follow that treatment for these deficits is all that is required to take people off the street.

Academic researchers, foundations, and advocates for the homeless encouraged the fragmentation of the very poor as a constituency into separate categories defined by special needs (homeless teenagers, homeless families, homeless Veterans, homeless HIV drug users, and the like). This individuation of “deserving” people (Hopper and Baumohl 1994; Katz 1989) without homes, who were understood as having a variety of social and personal deficits, was supported by an institutional funding agenda. This agenda emerged from the medical field and was supported by the National Institute of Mental Health. As Blasi has pointed out in a search of the literature, which produced 539 entries including 354 articles on homelessness, two-thirds of the articles appeared in journals devoted to psychiatry, psychology, and medicine, with five percent in journals on political economy, economics, or housing (1994:580). “American social science is embedded in a broader culture in which virtually all social phenomena particularly those related to poverty—are seen as reflecting personal characteristics, personal choice, and personal failings” (Blasi 1994:581).

Social-Structural—Proximate Causes?

The second explanation is that “homelessness was caused by structural forces” (Koegel, Burnam, and Baumohl 1996:25), usually defined as a lack of low-cost housing or lack of income. Wright, Rubin, and Devine, refusing the individual causal model of personal defects, assert that homelessness is a result of a wide “variety of complex social system dislocations” (1998: 4) that render large numbers of people at risk of losing their shelter. The three social-structural “causes” most often quoted as contributing to a loss of shelter are inadequate income, declining welfare services, and loss of housing.

Increasing Income Inequality and Poverty

For over two decades, the United States has experienced a growing population in poverty, a deepening of poverty, an increase in the duration of episodes of poverty, and increased spatial and social isolation of the poor (Wright, Rubin, and Devine 1998). Contrary to what one might expect in a growing economy, the overall poverty rate—declining only a small amount in 1998 to 13.3 percent from 13.7 percent in 1996—has concealed the extent to which the number of those living in poverty has increased from 29.2 million in 1980 to 36.5 million in 1996, an increase of 7.3 percent. In addition, the bottom fifth of the population, which commanded 5.4 percent of the total national income in 1970, has experienced a decline in income to 4.2 percent of the total national income in 1996. The upper fifth, by contrast, experienced a massive increase in their share of the total national income. This increasing impoverishment of the bottom fifth conceals the degree to which those in extreme poverty, those making less than 50 percent of the poverty wage, have experienced even more dramatic declines in fortunes. The economic vulnerability produced by these declining incomes increases the risk of homelessness.

Using various time measurements and calculations of poverty rates, Devine and Wright (1993) concluded that indeed the bottom fifth of the United States population has experienced longer and longer episodes of poverty corresponding to the declining shares of national income. The increasing spatial and social isolation of the poor, noted by researchers in the 1980s and into the present, reveals that the vast majority of the poor reside in inner-city areas, isolated from job markets and subjected to higher crime rates and substance abuse patterns within their neighborhoods. These communities consist predominantly of people of color, a feature that also characterizes most homeless individuals in urban areas. What has produced this drop in income and the expansion of the poor population at risk of losing shelter?

Reducing Government Support for the Poor

The end of welfare, trumpeted as a way of taking the poor off of federal dependency, is improving the lives of some of the poor while increasing the impoverishment of others. Before the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was passed, support levels of the prior program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), were steadily declining around the country relative to the increasing consumer price index. Not surprisingly, therefore, poor families with children have made up an increasing portion of those without shelter. Although the average earnings and overall incomes of low-income female-headed families with children increased between 1993 and 1995, with an expansion of
the economy, the incomes of the poorest 20 percent of these (2 million families, 6 million people) fell an average of $580 per family from 1995 to 1997, as welfare reform took hold. These families have incomes below three-quarters of the poverty line. Cutbacks in government cash and food assistance can explain this decline. Between 1995 and 1997, the number of people living in poverty declined only 3 percent while those receiving food stamps declined 17 percent. In 1995 some 88 percent of poor children received food stamps; in 1998 only 70 percent received food stamps. From 1995 to 1997 the number of people on AFDC and then TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) declined by 3 million or 22.2 percent. Had the safety net programs been as effective in 1997 as in 1995, there would have been 700,000 fewer poor children. Reductions in benefits thus exceeded new family earnings (Primus, Rawlings, Larin, and Porter 1999).

While some welfare mothers did find jobs and moved off of welfare, others have languished, trapped in low-paying jobs with few benefits, and still others are waiting for any type of job. It is most probable that while such families may barely hold on during this time of economic expansion, given the inevitable recession we can expect these families and other poor individuals to flood the ranks of the homeless. While it is true that some people are pulling out of poverty as a result of economic expansion and the elevation of the minimum wage, many are worker longer hours at lower-paying jobs just to stay in place. Given an economic downturn, these segments of the working poor will join the extreme poor in increasing rates of homelessness. The result of welfare reform among poor families is mixed. For some, the reform has temporarily lowered the risk of homelessness. For many others, remaining in poverty with few benefits marks them as at risk for an episode of homelessness.

Decreasing Affordable Housing

In addition to declining incomes and reduced government support, the picture of low-income housing looks quite bleak, at least in the short term. As the pool of national and global poor populations expands, the availability of low-income housing is simultaneously shrinking, creating an "affordability gap" (Shinn and Gillespie 1994; Dolbeare 1996). For example, the number of poor renters in the United States making less than $10,000 a year increased from 7.3 million in 1970 to 9.6 million in 1989. The number of affordable housing units declined by 14 percent during the same time period, to 5.5 million housing units, generating a shortfall of 4.1 million units (Timmer, Eitzen, and Talley 1994: 19). According to a recent U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development study, The Widening Gap, 372,000 affordable units available to those at 30 percent of the area median income were lost between 1991 and 1997 alone. Rents are increasing at twice the rate of general inflation. In 1998, rents increased 3.4 percent while the CPI increased a mere 1.7 percent. Between 1995 and 1997 the number of Americans making less than 30 percent of the area median income increased 3.1 percent, expanding from 8.61 million to 8.87 million. This is one out of four households. As indicated above, the growth of the bottom 20 percent of income groupings, and the poor population as a whole accelerated in the 1990s, as has the decline of low-income housing units relative to the need. Too many poor are chasing too few units. Unless incomes are raised sufficiently and rents are lowered, or both, this gap between incomes and housing availability is expected to grow into the next millennium.

Housing discrimination continues to mark the housing choices for both poor and middle-income African Americans. In a tight housing market, such discrimination guarantees that African Americans will have few positive choices and a disadvantage in competing for what limited affordable housing is available. African Americans as a group are still locked in segregated neighborhoods within urban areas, and increasingly in suburban areas, even while some cities and suburban areas have managed to overcome these barriers to integration (Massey and Denton 1988, 1993).

Besides the escalating cost of housing and the declining incomes of the poor, housing often associated with low-income populations, such as single-room occupancy hotels (SROs), has declined rapidly through gentrification of urban areas and condominium conversions that favor upper-income home buyers. Homeless shelters have come to replace the housing often associated with the Skid Rows of the past. Federal attempts to grapple with this decline in affordable housing have been weak and inadequate. While it is true that budget allocations have increased to cover Section 8 housing vouchers, the Stewart B. McKinney Funds for homeless
support, and various other housing programs targeted at the poor, the rates of increase have declined and the growth of the problem has expanded far faster than government planning can accommodate. The problem stems from both the decision by the federal government to remove itself from constructing and financing new housing for the poor, and a wholesale abandonment to the private market to provide needed housing.

Unfortunately, most explanations of homelessness in the literature have fallen between these twin poles of personal deficits and social-structural causes. The opposition between these two explanations is a false one. In fact, as Koegel, Burnam, and Baumohl point out, "lives of all people, homeless or not, are embedded in circumstances shaped as much by structural factors as personal and biographical ones" (1996: 26). Both the personal defect and social-structural models fall short because they remain detached from a critical analysis that could explain why those conditions have emerged in the first place. They don’t ask the deeper questions: Why has income dropped for the very poor relative to other income classes? And why have government benefits been reduced and affordable housing lost relative to need for the past 20 years? An answer requires a causal explanation that understands loss of housing, income, and welfare services as effects of a more profound restructuring of capitalism induced by political elites working for their self-interest within a market economy—a restructuring that allocates greater benefits to the wealthy and privileged than to the poor, working, and middle classes. If workers are rendered vulnerable because of downsizing, and then start drinking, having family problems, and ending up on the street, is it the problem of the worker or the problem of why the downsizing occurred in the first place? Who benefits from and who pays for this arrangement of social power? And how do these benefits and liabilities manifest themselves?

**Political Economic—Ultimate Causes?**

Individual and social-structural causes as explanations for the expansion of homelessness can be subsumed under political-economic explanations, which incorporate a historical perspective, the role of culture and ideology, and the role of markets in capital accumulation. Barak (1992: 6) explains that “homelessness as characteristic of the new poverty that emerged in the 1980s is a product of the transition from an industrial-based capitalist economy to a postindustrial capitalist service economy within the context of internationally developing global relations.” The decline in average real wages, the reduction in health care, and the inability to secure adequate housing are part of a “national crisis of profitability and productivity” that emerged in the 1970s (Barak 1992:53). U.S. corporate capitalists responded to this crisis in capital accumulation with extensive layoffs of blue-collar workers in the 1980s and white-collar workers in the 1990s, accompanied by outsourcing, an acceleration of technological innovation in communications and computers, and overseas expansion (Blau 1992:33–47). With wages driven down, families had to work harder and longer to stay ahead, increasing family stress and fraying fragile social networks.

Other countries, such as Japan and Germany, with more advanced levels of political struggles and higher social wages, resisted the “American model.” They have attempted to regain their margins of profitability and productivity by innovating technologically, expanding markets, subsidizing industry and education, retaining skilled workers, and importing immigrant workers, even while carrying on a limited privatization of state assets. However, even for these countries the American model has beckoned as their financial situations deteriorated and as elites have moved toward a market model of allocative efficiency.

Historically, in the tradition of Keynesian liberal politics, government spending in the United States was understood as the most efficient vehicle for addressing and correcting social ills produced by the market. Raising money for needed social programs through increased taxes and expanding social services was an important part of this vision of creating civility. Federal enforcement of anti-segregation laws, combined with the Civil Rights Movement, was essential in ending legal racial segregation. In California, the struggle of the United Farmworkers Union to create decent working conditions for farmworkers would not have been successful without the establishment of the state Agricultural Relations Board to enforce the new policies. Social movements for justice went hand in hand with an increased government commitment to helping the poor and to curb racist and sexist policies. However, with the stagnation of the 1970s economy, the conservative backlash against the movements of the 1960s, and the
questioning of democracy by national elites, concern about ending poverty shifted to concern about lowering deficits and ending stagflation. The solution adopted by policy elites was to embrace neoliberal market ideologies privileging supply-side economics, deficit reduction, privatization, and social conservatism. Public attitudes sympathetic to reduced government spending and rationalizations for those reductions by political elites moved beyond the marginal right-wing political groups of the 1970s into mass acceptance in the 1990s, partly because of the attractiveness of these simplistic antistatist metaphors and allegories (Block 1996). Liberal government's attempts to help the poor, not poverty itself, were now redefined as the problem. This effectively rationalized the cutbacks in welfare payments as "tough love." By assuming that the market could do a better job of providing housing and with the desire to reduce government budgets, new federal housing construction was the natural victim for federal budget cutters.

The dominant cultural ideology now shared by both major political parties in the United States relies upon the assumptions that spending on social welfare increases dependency and that "excessive" government intervention in markets and state regulation makes it difficult for businesses to stay competitive in a global marketplace. This ideology, strengthened by the "no new taxes" rebellion of the 1980s, undercut attempts to use government for social good. The "no new taxes" rebellion started in California with the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 (Schrag 1999), and spread to other states in the 1980s. Coupled with the twin ideological concepts of deficit reduction and privatization of public services, the reduction of government services increased the misery of the poor while advancing the economy for the benefit of upper middle-class professionals and wealthy investors. According to Block (1996:166), attempts to reform the market by countering investor ideology could be neutralized effectively by the reactions of bond traders. Integrated global financial markets, high rates of social inequality and incarceration, and the violence of poverty directed into nationalist ambitions, racist and sexist attacks, and anti-immigrant fervors appear to define the negative side of this neo-Gilded Age. The globalization of financial markets, the ease of capital movements, and endless currency speculation have produced widespread pleasure for the few at the expense of the many, the disintegration of local controls, and a fragmentation of civil society (Bauman 1998).

The limitations of the individual and social-structural explanations are apparent. Deepening poverty and homelessness, decreasing amounts of low-income housing, and a failing health policy are the surface effects of a deeper cause: the success of the neoliberal market model of capitalism in transferring wealth and power to an expanded and consolidated global and national elite at the expense of the majority of U.S. citizens (Blau 1999). I don't want to give the impression that individual factors are not important, only that they constitute "nested" causes within social-structural causes, which are in turn nested within political-economic causes. Following this argument, it makes sense to support service providers and increased funding for detox centers and mental health treatment, while also supporting better-paying jobs, more low-cost housing, and comprehensive health care. But this support is best served within a broader struggle for human rights and economic democracy that tackles the deepening social inequality, globally and nationally, that can put individuals at risk.

Simply put, my argument is as follows: At the level of appearance, homelessness is about poverty and ill health. However, these conditions are created by the normal capitalist production of low-wage jobs, high housing costs, coupled with a reduction in social welfare benefits from states attempting to compete with one another over the price of labor and the costs of benefits. In addition, such capital strategies have always depended upon differences in racial/ethnic and gender privilege to operate for the advantage of the privileged. Social conditions have worsened since the 1970s as the dual class compromise between labor and capital has dissolved and been replaced by neoliberal ideologies that subject all international and national policies to the criteria of market "efficiency," the privileging of allocative as opposed to coordination efficiency (Block 1996:56).

Globally, the neoliberal model depends on the strengthening of international bodies that will foster free trade as well as trade agreements that allow for the free circulation of capital and commodities. Nationally, neoliberalism depends on the "hollowed out state" (Jessop 1994; Hirsch 1991) where budget deficits are reined in through privatization, deregulation, and social
wage cutbacks. According to Devine (see Barak 1992:58), who operationalized the links between political economy and homelessness, economic development under neoliberalist policies lowers elite interest in helping the poor. Locally, cities are invested with "entrepreneurial" functions acting as an independent player in private-public partnerships (Mayer 1994; Wright 1997). These policy shifts have increased the vulnerability of the poor, with the abolishment of the safety net, medicalization and criminalization of the homeless, and the shifting of funds from the civil welfare state to the corporate welfare state. Citizen rights and capital responsibility via progressive taxation and an expanded social wage have been reversed to capital rights and citizen responsibility via regressive taxation and a shrinking social wage. Hence, we have both increased numbers of people without shelter combined with a reduced commitment to solve the root causes.

The spread of neoliberal "free" market models is already under attack from both conservatives (Gray 1998) and progressives (Sassen 1998; Bauman 1998; Bourdieu 1998; Peck and Tickell 1994; Teeple 1995) who understand the manner in which economic chaos leads to political authoritarianism and the overall decline of capitalism. Even as these ideologies come under attack, they continue to spread through European welfare states threatening to generate new levels of homelessness.

Integrating Solutions: Global, National, Local

Given the above analysis, what can we put forward as positive solutions to end homelessness at the global, national, and local/city levels? Proposed solutions cannot be framed merely as a national problem or as a local problem, but must be thought of as a multidimensional problem with global, national, state, and local levels of intervention. Local actions without global commitments remain insular and weak. Global actions without local commitments remain elitist and disempowering. Any solution to end homelessness must consider how to curb the excesses of capitalism and promote the democratizing of every level of society, including the economic realm (Blau 1999).

Possible Global Initiatives

Contrary to the globalization thesis, which maintains that all nation-states have to adjust their economies to international market demands, states are not powerless (Weiss 1998). Governments can re-regulate capital flows and increase social investments, as we have seen in the withdrawal of Malaysia from the financial markets to curtail speculative investment during a crisis. While the pressure from corporate elites is intense, counterpressures can also be increased. States that have maintained a strong welfare state tradition are now doing better in both human and financial terms than those that have not, giving a lie to free market advocates. Contrary to free market polemics that criticize the extensive system of social benefits created by European countries, countries that have maintained their social wage have been able to reduce substantially their levels of poverty. This has also allowed for shaping more effective policies for ending homelessness.

While homelessness is increasing globally, it is increasing with more speed in countries that have adopted the neoliberal market model than in those that have attempted to defend their social wage while fighting homelessness. To be sure, pressures to readjust European economies have been great since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty encouraging the integration of European markets and since the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to promote free trade. Limited privatization, wage reductions, and the cutback in some benefits have occurred in most European countries. But the degree of such free market impositions has been contested through popular protests. For now, well-organized labor unions and Left political parties have managed to hold off the Americanization of Europe. How long they can do so remains to be seen.

Promote Global Human Rights to Regulate Capital

Internationally, citizens can fight back; social problems such as homelessness and hunger can be addressed, financial markets regulated, and social investment increased. A new global vision of ending poverty and homelessness can become dominant through employing mass media techniques where possible and local, community-based organizing networked internationally. In 1966 the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights provided one of the first attempts to globalize human rights. Since adopted by 135 countries, this covenant—along with ongoing pressure for the realization of political, social, and economic rights by member states of the United Nations, human rights
groups, nonprofit development groups, ecology organizations, and Women’s Rights groups—has helped shape the current debate on taming global markets. International social movements and global alliances of labor unions, women’s organizations, homeless advocacy groups, and ecology groups can work to curb the power of international unregulated capital investments and the impoverishment of workers, and give priority to the construction and financing of low-income housing, jobs with descent wages, and descent health care for all. Accelerated capital mobility, the threat of investment withdrawal, can be blunted by international organizing depriving capital of its safe havens. Communication networks and computer programs that have helped free capital from national and local restraints can also be appropriated by activists and extended worldwide (Evans 2000).

Reform International Finance and Development

One step in ending homelessness globally is international financial reform (Block 1996:266), which would return control to national economies by restoring fixed exchange rates on currency to prevent speculative financial trading, which does nothing for local populations, and restricting the free movement of capital across national borders. According to Block, a transaction tax on international currency exchanges of around 1 percent would reduce the $1.2 trillion dollars a day traded on the global markets; only 5 percent of these transactions are for actual trade, investment, or travel (1996:267). Other controls on capital could be negotiated at a new Bretton Woods-style conference of nations; such controls would encourage legitimate business, but would return more capital to governments, enabling a more effective response to widespread social inequalities.

Reforming IMF policies of fiscal austerity, which enrich local elites at the expense of a nation’s poorer citizens, would place greater emphasis on local community development and absolve poor nations of their debt to Western banks. Heavy debt loads impoverish local populations, restrict the overall rate of social development, and lead to loss of housing or inadequate shelter. World Bank policies of fiscal soundness are already being rethought and moved away from the dominant neoliberal market model to one of sustainable development with ecological considerations, and a fundamental respect for human, political, and economic rights. This requires a new model of development that places social capital, democratic rights, and public health above investor rights.

Develop Global Coalitions and Protect Social Housing

The conflation of what is “good” for global market investors with the general good conceals the reality that what is profitable for private real estate developers is not necessarily profitable for those who cannot afford to live in market-rate units. Gentrification of cities worldwide is forcing the poor (Smith 1996; Sassen 1998) to compete for limited housing. Resistance is possible, but homeless activists cannot resist alone. Developing strong coalitions that cross race, class, and gender boundaries, nationally and internationally, and exploring shared ideologies for a just and equitable world are essential. Activist organizations, such as the Innen Stadt Aktion (Inner City Action Group) and the Anti-Racist Initiative in Berlin, who oppose racial discrimination against immigrants and fight to stop gentrification, can find common cause with similar groups in the United States. The 1996 Habitat II agenda of a right to housing, sustainable development, and “enabling” partnerships can also provide an ideological framework to link activist groups. The right to shelter, common in most industrialized countries, could be extended to the United States in legislation through sustained advocacy.

Many European countries have resisted strict market ideology for years and have a diversity of housing stock that evolved out of the political struggles between business and labor informed by a much stronger Left tradition than in the United States. These large stocks of social housing, which are not part of the private housing market, provide one of the most effective ways to house the poor. From the subsidized housing units in Holland and Denmark to the social housing of Germany and Britain, various alternative housing arrangements not part of the private market are common, including co-housing arrangements and converted squatter buildings. The diversity of European housing stock provides many good examples of how housing policy could look in the United States. Defending social housing and enhancing its desirability is therefore one possible solution for global housing problems. But this will require a concerted and organized effort to resist the further implementation of market-driven policies for “reform”
at the expense of working people and the poor. Similar to the national Community Reinvestment Act in the United States, which calls upon banks to justify their lending practices to poor communities before expanding their markets elsewhere, an International Community Reinvestment Act could be lobbied for. It would force transnational corporations (TNCs) to invest in the social capital of the host country before they would be permitted to engage in business. Those TNCs that showed the greatest ability and commitment to support the poor and develop local communities would be granted investment rights. Democratic assemblies responsible to regional and local populations within any given host country could guide the social capital investment offered by outside TNCs into productive channels.

National Initiatives

Organize Coalitions

Organizing a “coalition around common human needs” (Blau 1992:181) will link homeless advocacy to other social change groups. To achieve a more democratic political system responsive to the needs of the less privileged, labor would have to unite with community-based organizations and also work harder to organize the unorganized. In addition, the politics of identity would have to be refashioned with a new vision that can mobilize grassroots organizations around a populist democratic and progressive platform. This will mean moving from the ideology of individual empowerment to collective empowerment (Wright 1997:317) and direct action. It will mean placing more resources into the hands of the poor and homeless, offering collective mobility and collective resources to the homeless. Wagner comments (1993:180), “What if the dense social networks and cohesive subcultures that constitute the homeless community were utilized by advocates, social workers, and others?” One model of organizing that has proven effective in crossing race, class, and gender barriers, often cited in contrast to the Alinsky model, is that of the Piedmont Peace Project (Stout 1996). Providing social services is rejected in this model, because “we work to help people understand that they can bring about change if they are organized. They can get the services they need" (Stout 1996:106). However, people living without homes present a problem in that they have no home-based community that can be organized. Therefore, organizing will work best not in conjunction with formalized, institutionalized services, but rather with small actions, such as the serving of food that Food Not Bombs accomplishes, as vehicles for bringing people together for social change, or in the defensive civil rights struggles waged by the National Coalition on Homelessness, and its locals, against arbitrary police harassment of people living on the street. Bringing together the strategies of the Piedmont Project with those of Food Not Bombs and the Coalition on Homelessness could provide one way to bridge organizing gaps among people without shelter, homeless advocate groups, and housed social change groups.

Because we live in a media-saturated society, this will require establishing and using new media forms, co-opting corporate media outlets, and generating new networks to create the necessary cultural imperatives to push for change. Media campaigns can be shaped to hammer home the following agendas. However, for these kinds of political changes to occur, changes in campaign finance reform must be pursued at the national and state level. Blunting the power of large lobbyists affiliated with the real estate, health care, banking, and other business sectors is necessary, as is the true democratic opening of the political process. First I would like to discuss briefly the necessary political changes and then address specific policy issues such as health care, housing, jobs.

Reform Lobbying and Campaign Financing

It is clear that any progressive agenda to end homelessness must have a politics in place that is responsive to an alliance between the middle classes and the poor, not to the dollars of big business. The corruption of the democratic process is evident in the massive contributions given each year through lobbying in Washington, DC. To blunt the effect of big money, lobbying reform is essential. The recent replacement of the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act, which tightly regulated banking, finance, insurance, and real estate operations, by the 1999 Gramm-Leach Act, which lifts those regulations, came after a sustained lobbying campaign by the finance sector. In 1997–98 this sector spent $154.4 million dollars in soft money, PACs, and individual contributions to influence congressional sentiment, according to the Center for Responsive Politics in Washington, DC. While this one example illustrates the power of
banking and finance interests, the real estate lobby works hard to maintain mortgage interest deductions on homes, effectively cutting off other options for government housing investment. In addition, campaign finance reform is essential if candidates sympathetic to the needs of the poor and homeless are to have even a ghost of a chance of winning elections. To solve the problems that create homelessness will require electing officials who are not afraid to stand up to big business.

**Change the Tax Code**

The mantra of "no new taxes" is unsustainable in a civilized society. With corporate taxes at an all-time low (corporate taxes were 21 percent in 1962 and declined to 11.5 percent by 1997) and a disproportionate share of the wealth accumulated in the top 5 percent of the population, a vigorous progressive corporate and individual tax system should generate the required capital for social investments. Taxes on the assets and income of the wealthy have also declined over the past 20 years. Closing tax loopholes will be essential. The top 1 percent of wealthy families have managed to realize savings on average of $97,250 per family between 1977 and 1985, while the bottom 80 percent had an increase of only $221 per family (Blau 1999:196). Changing priorities to combat homelessness will require redistribution of income and wealth.

**Change Research Funding Priorities and Develop Media Resources**

Philanthropy- and foundation-sponsored think tanks have often led the way in new policy research and supportive services. Many progressive foundations have remained hampered, however, by their support of direct service, in the case of homelessness, and direct action of activist groups, and have not invested the funds necessary to build up a collection of progressive think tanks, as various conservative foundations have created their own. Funding new progressive research centers is just as essential as funding direct action groups, since direct action groups can benefit from the new knowledge generated by such policy organs. It is not a matter of either/or—both the development of new progressive think tanks and research centers and funding direct action groups are essential if political change is to occur. Changing priorities of fund raisers, an increase in private foundation commitment to progressive advocacy research, think tank development, and media/political resources to sustain a progressive vision are all important to help support grassroots efforts.

**Push for a Single-Payer Health Care System**

Raising the incomes of the very poor and redesigning a health care system that delivers decent health care for all, regardless of ability to pay, is also essential for ending homelessness. The current battles with managed-care HMOs reveal the inadequacies of a health care system built in conjunction with the insurance industry, whose primary motive is to secure greater returns on investments. A single-payer health care system is most effective in providing needed services and will ultimately prove less expensive than the current system of managed care. Providing increased health care services is essential to counteract the damage caused by homelessness, but not sufficient to stop the larger widespread impoverishment. Given the serious shortage of detox centers, mental health outreach clinics, and services for the disabled in general, ending homelessness will involve making the necessary investments in these services throughout the country. Specialized services (mental health and substance abuse treatment, shelters, transitional housing, job training), the most common benefits allocated for the poor, are important; but without more low-income housing, higher incomes for low-skilled work, and fast, accessible health care, those benefiting from such services will still find themselves exposed to intolerable living conditions.

**Move beyond Welfare Reform and Expand Child Care Support**

While moving people off welfare and back to work may be a laudable goal in theory, accomplishing it through punitive sanctions and strict time limits is cruel and ineffective. Given that most people on welfare are there for only a short while, many people who have received jobs through TANF might have received them anyway. The poorest 20 percent of those recipients, however, have serious problems that are not being addressed by a forced work program. The lack of systematic and widespread funding of child care centers and the lack of good, well-paid jobs ensures that even those who are removed from the welfare rolls will be stuck in low-wage occupations. Since most women who have been on AFDC and are now on TANF work as mothers, subsidized child care is essential for any work
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base strategy to be successful. In fact, such a system is not unheard of. The Kellogg system of child care implemented during World War II provided subsidized federal day care, allowing many mothers to work in the defense industry.

Renew a Federal Commitment to Housing and Promote Social Housing

Following Habitat II, the United States should declare a national “right to housing” which calls for decent housing and a suitable living environment for all citizens. The United States needs to strengthen its social policy with renewed efforts to develop new low-income rental housing construction programs, programs that move beyond the voucher system or private-public systems for public housing. New public housing can easily compete with the private sector in developing low-cost and attractive alternatives, not the concrete megaliths of the 1950s. This is self-evident in the new attractive Gautraux scattered housing developments now being built in Chicago.

Since a major part of the problem, other than the lack of serious federal commitment, is the normal operations of the market, mechanisms must be found to curb the power of markets to distort housing affordability. For example, with the assistance of the federal government, a public capital-grant financing program could be implemented to support the development of the “social ownership” of housing (Stone 1993; Hopper and Baumohl 1994). This means removing permanently a portion of the housing stock from resale on the private market. After paying for the cost of producing or acquiring the housing stock, remaining costs would be reduced to capital improvements and operations. This expansion of the “social sector” of housing would increase the stock of affordable housing while allowing other market-rate units to service high-income persons. Ownership of housing can be assumed by many different entities from local nonprofit developers, housing agencies, churches, labor unions, and other community groups with federal assistance (Stone 1993: 193).

End Housing Discrimination

State governments can put increased pressure on landlords to stop unfair evictions, rent gouging, and housing discrimination through vigorous enforcement of the Fair Housing laws and an expansion of housing litigation and testing procedures. Fair Housing Councils around the nation are hampered by insufficient budgets and lack of real commitment from both the business community and local cities in enforcing housing discrimination provisions. State governments also can discourage irresponsible redevelopment in local areas where such redevelopment threatens to gentrify an area at the expense of working and poor people, as is occurring in San Francisco, California. Housing and homeless activists can have a larger impact at the state level if there is a renewed federal commitment to working families and the poor.

Raise Wages and Rebuild the United States

At the most basic level of reform, increasing the minimum wage is essential to provide jobs with livable incomes. Already the small increase in minimum wages has generated more income for the bottom 20 percent of the population, decreasing the poverty level by a small amount over the past three years. While a step in the right direction, this is simply not enough to compensate for the widespread loss of union wage employment in the 1980s and the middle-management downsizing of the 1990s. With the increase in temporary employment, many workers have to struggle just to break even every month. Two strategies that would help end homelessness would be a guaranteed annual income (Blau 1992:183) for everyone and a new federal “living” minimum wage indexed to the cost of living within a particular PMSA or rural area, enough to sustain a single person or family at or above the poverty level, where the poverty level is redefined according to a “market basket” approach for a particular region (being poor in San Francisco is very different from being poor in rural Mississippi). Similar to European plans, a guaranteed income plan would provide the bottom floor for sustaining a family and could replace welfare and many of the other social service programs that supported poor families who did not have sufficient income. This would also create incentives for business to pay their workers a decent salary; otherwise they would find themselves with serious shortages of labor. The second proposal would equalize wages among regions, discouraging businesses from moving into areas where land prices are high and encouraging moves into low-priced areas, therefore raising the livelihood of depressed economic zones.

To provide immediate help to the very poor and homeless, a public works program that expands opportunities for well-paid low-skilled
labor and that addresses basic infrastructure repair integrated with community economic development could help raise people up off the streets. Long-term neglect of basic maintenance of bridges, roads, parks, and services calls for a solution. A National Marshall Plan to rebuild America could include social investments in new housing construction, city infrastructure repair, and national health care for all. The key is in providing not just make-work positions but ones that have a promise of a future and pay a livable wage. Job training in this context could directly link open positions in employment with needed jobs, promising continuity between low-skilled positions and ones calling for higher skills. Preferential treatment in hiring given to the poor and to people of color will also raise the income levels of the bottom 20 percent and to discourage the widening split between the primary and secondary labor markets.

The cost of such a plan would be expensive at first, but would be repaid many times over in the long run through lower costs in containing social problems, improving human happiness, and increasing productivity. After all, the time when government investment was at its highest, during the 1950s, was also the period of the highest growth rate in American history. We can easily afford larger government investments. United States government expenditures have risen only 5 percent between 1967 and 1994, to 33.5 percent of the GDP (Block 1996:87), far below that of European states. The problem is not that we spend too much, but that we spend so little. Spending has actually decreased on critical physical infrastructure, constituting only 1.9 percent of GDP in 1996 compared to 2.8 percent in 1976 (Block 1996:294). Japan spent 6 percent through the 1970s and 1980s, and former West Germany spent 4 to 6 percent of its GDP on infrastructure—substantially more than the United States. There is work to be done in the United States after these many years of neglect. Making decent well-paid jobs repairing the nation's infrastructure available to those with low and moderate skills will also provide an avenue for homeless people to get back on their feet. New housing will provide the places to live and a national health care system the necessary support services for those too disabled to work.

Local-City Initiatives

Modest versions of all the national policies outlined above can be adopted at the state or local level. In fact, the creation of progressive coalition politics may be easier at the local than national level. Local minimum wage laws, child care initiatives, health care services, and social housing initiatives are all possible. As at the national level they will require the election of political leaders independent of local real estate growth coalition interests. Other initiatives are more fundamentally local.

Homelessness as a Community-based Human Rights Issue

Local homeless advocates, such as the Coalition on Homelessness in San Francisco and Chicago, are able to use the human rights perspective to educate the general public. This should not be viewed as counter to a proactive strategy (Shaw 1996:26), but rather as integral to developing a larger coalition based on human rights, social justice, and equity. Local struggles for human rights have an international dimension and, with modern technology, can easily link up with groups in other countries fighting similar battles. Activist groups in local neighborhoods in the United States may have more in common with working-class struggles in Berlin, London, Paris, Tokyo, and Mexico than with wealthy communities within their own city. Connecting these struggles using modern communications can help provide solidarity and work to globalize the local.

Responsible Redevelopment

The application of “quality of life” policing merely applies a cosmetic fix, moving social problems to less visible industrial areas. Cities can work to develop downtown areas with mixed-use housing, containing middle-class, working-class, and poor in the same areas, without robbing the poor, working class, or middle class of available units, services, or “quality of life.” City redevelopment plans can be shaped as responsible redevelopment that recognizes the necessity to have all elements of the population represented in downtown core areas, not just the privileged—and represented in proportion to the actual composition of the employment base. This would include a renewed commitment to build more mixed-income single-room occupancy units in downtown core areas, as well as in suburban areas. These will become important not only for the very poor but also for those single working- and middle-class baby boomers who cannot afford to buy their own homes. Democratic downtown/suburban development can state publicly the types of new employment
created by a particular project and its approximate pay scale to allow for planning a proper housing mix. Gentrification does not have to displace the poor and homeless segments of the community. A responsible gentrification can upgrade a community at a gradual pace, with safeguards to protect the less privileged. Vision statements and plans developed by local redevelopment agencies can be refashioned to represent all segments of the population, and can be assisted by grassroots advocate movements for the poor. This will require bringing homeless advocates, not just local business elites, into the very planning process of downtown areas and in suburban areas of outlying districts. The lack of federal funds makes it difficult for cities to reduce land costs that might attract affordable housing developers, and market models of housing only privilege the upper tier of citizens. However, the reliance upon tax increment financing (TIFs) and business improvement districts (BIDs) robs cities of necessary funds while giving developers unnecessary tax breaks. These can be reduced or reshaped to increase provisions for creating substantial amounts of low-income shelter.

Redevelopment agencies, in cooperation with state legislators, entrusted with applying 20 percent of their budgets to building affordable housing, should expand that percentage in line with the numbers of newly created low-income jobs within a city. The 20 percent figure can be amended by state legislators. However, cities can also increase their component of low-income housing construction by increasing the amount of redevelopment funds for low-income housing in proportion to the needs within their communities. For every new business (cafes, hotels, clothing shops) that services incoming clients, a host of low-income jobs will be created. City development plans can take this into account through their Environmental Impact Reports and push to build housing that can accommodate service workers near the site of new businesses, preferably within walking distance. Setting up Housing Trust Funds for low-income housing is one solution, but a better solution would be controlled development that balances the numbers of low-income housing units created with the number of jobs being proposed. An example of lopsided redevelopment are the plans for the Mission Bay development in San Francisco, which promises up to 31,000 jobs, but only 6,000 housing units in a city with an extremely low vacancy rate and the highest housing costs in the country. This will put even more pressure on the already squeezed housing market and certainly price the working poor out of San Francisco and make it impossible for people without shelters to get off the streets. A more rational redevelopment plan would allow for equal proportions of housing and jobs within a two-mile radius, to reduce transportation costs, in a mix proportional to the types and pay of jobs created.

**Democratize and Support Shelters**

While shelters are not the answer to homelessness, new shelters should be supported as an interim measure. Existing shelters can be encouraged to end restrictive shelter practices that treat homeless families and individuals in a degrading fashion, and can be supported to the extent that they have initiated democratic procedures of accountability for their patrons. In addition, such shelters can be maintained in downtown areas or in those areas where support services can be best organized, but not encouraged to relocate to degrading industrial areas or "refuse" spaces (Wright 1997: 101–11). Cities would be pressed to provide needed social services on a fair and equitable basis (Wolch and Dear 1993) with smaller shelters in all neighborhoods and a firm opposition to NIMBYism. There is always room for supportive services, like shelters, but we should not assume that they constitute solutions to homelessness.

**Living Wage Ordinances**

Cities can also enact "living wage" ordinances to improve the wages of city workers. In addition, preferences for minority-owned businesses can be built into city contracts for services to assist people of color, who make up the disproportionate number of poor in the inner cities. Given the advanced deterioration of infrastructure in most major cities, public investment in massive repairs employing both skilled and unskilled workers at a decent wage will allow the poor to accumulate the necessary income to provide for their families. With increased income, poor communities will be able to take care of many of their own. The decline of wages within minority communities and poor white communities over the past 30 years has meant a concurrent decline in the viability of social networks (Roschelle 1997), contrary to the earlier findings of Stack (1974). The increase of such wages will not only help the
working poor, but also strengthen family networks.

Conclusions

While these proposals for global, national, and local solutions may seem utopian—read "unworkable"—I have drawn many of these examples from diverse social experiments already underway in various countries. This is a vision of where we might go, if not a finished plan. Any struggle to end homelessness will involve an open-ended process of conflict between competing political and economic interests, involving gender, racial/ethnic, and class conflict. These cannot be defined adequately ahead of time, but will emerge in the process of social change through collective empowerment. What is clear is that ending the bitter legacy of homelessness will require substantial changes in the strategies of capital accumulation, not just simple reform. To press these initiatives will take more than wishful thinking or even coalition building. It will take determined politics. A critically conscious political movement willing to take bold steps will have to emerge—a movement that calls into question the dominant strategies of neoliberalism and fights for the rights of working people and poor people everywhere, a movement connected deeply to grassroots activists who are mobilized to struggle globally and locally.

References


