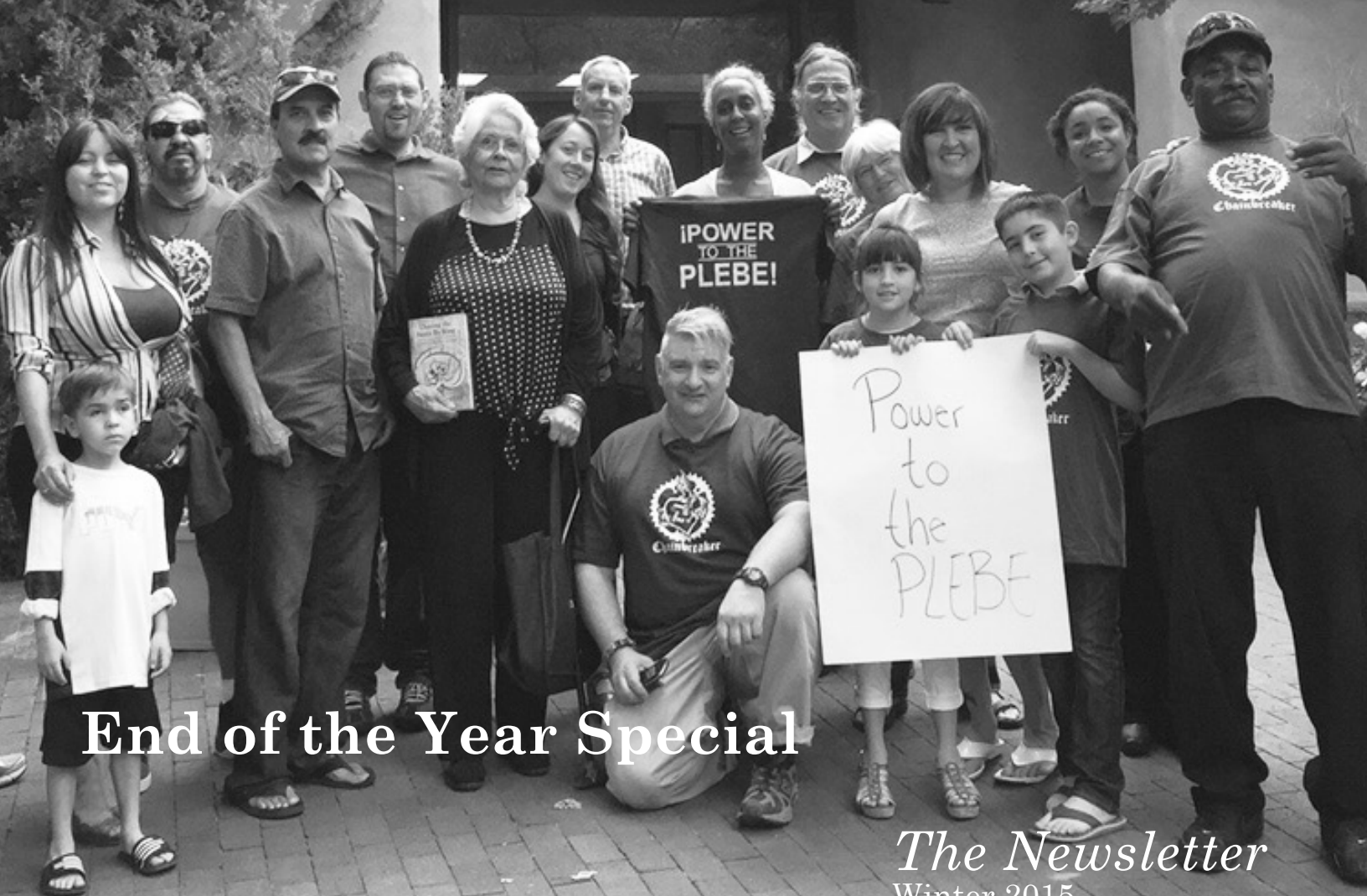


Resist.



End of the Year Special

The Newsletter

Winter 2015

Volume 24 #4

How Chains Break in Sante Fe

Resist speaks with Tomás Rivera of Chainbreaker Collective

Interview with Tomás Rivera

Saif: Chainbreaker Collective has been a Resist grantee since 2011, but a lot has changed since then, hasn't it? Let's start off by giving a little bit of background information on Chainbreaker. – a "who-what-when-where" of the organization if you will.

Tomás: Sure. Chainbreaker is a membership based economic and environmental justice organization. This is our eleventh year. We are as grassroots as you get. We had a group of people who rode bicycles and needed them to get around and had no other mode of transportation and couldn't afford to fix them up, so we basically sat around teaching each other how to do so. That evolved into a bicycle recycling project modeled after many that you see around the country.

We really like the idea of skill sharing and letting people understand how to do their own work instead of us doing it for them. We felt that really sat well with our politics, our beliefs, and our ability to do the work, because we had

no resources at the time; we literally built our first space out of wood pallets and lumber that we found.

Then in 2008 the market collapsed and the economy hit people really hard, gas prices rose to \$4 a gallon, and we looked around and people coming to us - we weren't a membership-based organization quite yet - but a lot of people were coming to us and saying, "Hey, we like what you're doing, but there's a lot more that needs to happen here. What you do with bikes is great, it's a great start, but it's not the whole picture."

I think our politics and our analysis had evolved a little bit, too; we started to begin to get an understanding of what it means to do organizing instead of just being an activist. And we wanted to incorporate that into the organization.

Saif: So what happened next?

Tomás: So the next big jump was towards becoming a membership-based organization. We started talking to the folks that were already there, and then we began jumping on buses, which was the next logical step for us as an organization; a lot of the people that

we were working with were bus riders as well, and so it was a natural fit. Lo and behold, we were trying to figure out, "What does transportation justice mean? How do we address this from a civil rights lens, a social justice lens?"

We know that those things are real, but there are not as many examples of organizations doing that as we'd like to see, although there are and we've learned about more since, but at the time we really felt like we were shooting in the dark. Becoming a membership-based organization was about our own personal politics and our own organi-

continued on page five

Resist.

Resist

259 Elm Street, Suite 201

Somerville, MA 02144

617-623-5110 info@resist.org

The Resist Newsletter is published four times a year. Subscriptions are available free to prisoners and to individuals for a suggested donation of \$25/year. The views expressed in articles, other than editorials, are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Resist staff or board.

Resist Staff: Jax Gil
Kendra Hicks
Ravi Khanna
Seth Kirshenbaum
Saif Rahman

Resist Board: Jennifer Bonardi
Kevin Alexander Gray
Kay Mathew
Jim O'Brien
Gregory Pehrson
Nisha Purushotham
Camilo Viveiros

Newsletter Editor: Saif Rahman

Resist Intern: Andrea Martinez

Printing: Piro Printing

Cover Photography Chainbreaker Collective

Printed on recycled paper with vegetable-based ink

www.resist.org



Photo: Chainbreaker Collective

Who Should Be Thanking Who?

An end of the year note of gratitude from the Resist Staff

By Resist Staff

“Thank you.”

We hear those two words from grantees almost every-day here at Resist.

But this is backwards. They should not be the ones thanking us; we should be the ones thanking them.

We have the easy job. Though our fundraising model is extremely rare and can present challenges, we believe it is the right one. We ask for donations, large and small, from a dedicated and passionate community of like-minded supporters. And every year they come through because they know the only way to change the world is through grassroots organizing, visioning, and creative action.

Those grassroots groups on the ground have the tough job. Despite all the dollars and energy coming in all directions to subdue these grassroots movements, they are not only able to endure and grow, but they are able to win victories day after day, year after year.

Those victories build upon one another. That is how mass movements create history.

Our role is critical and of course those in power don't like us either, but the activists on the ground are the ones that endure the real challenges: harassment, suppression, and violence from those in power. And through resolute bravery and dedication, they still persevere and win.

This edition of the *Newsletter* is a bit different. It features stories on how these activists do this, and what role Resist's support played.

So to all of the donors and potential new donors out there, please know you play an essential role with your donation to Resist. You are not only supporting some of the most courageous and visionary organizations out there, you are also supporting our best hope for peace and justice.

And to all the grassroots groups out there that are reading this, please don't thank us. We are the ones who are forever indebted to you. So thank you for another year of providing all of us here at Resist with inspiration and hope.

In love and solidarity,
Jax, Kendra, Ravi, Saif, and Seth

How Chains Break in Sante Fe *continued from page two*

zational politics, and that aligns really well with what we believed in. But it was also pragmatic in that it helped us sort of form what it means to do policy around transportation, and how to do it in a grassroots way, and how to do it from a social justice perspective. So it allowed us to have bus riders come in and talk about what are their issues, how is transportation related to larger social, environmental, and economic justice issues. Right about when we started doing that, the city council decided to cut our bus system by about a third; it was a sweeping cut. And we were going to lose entire lines, weekend service, evening service; we were gonna see “Youth Ride Free” programs taken away, help for folks with disabilities and seniors - all of that would have been taken away.

So it wasn't really hard for us to figure out how we start doing policy work, because the first thing we do is address service cuts. And we did,

and our membership jumped from zero to about 150 in three months. We partnered with a lot of organizations because a cut to services means cuts to jobs, so we worked well with a lot of unions. We stopped those cuts and we have essentially been fighting cuts to our bus service ever since. We've fought every single attempt to cut our bus service since 2009, so we're very proud of that. And that's kind of what we've been doing up until two years ago when, again, we talked to our members, and they said “Hey, what you're doing is great, but we need to do more.” We started understanding that the reason we need to expand our bus system, the reason that people are stuck in car dependency in the first place, especially low-income people, is because Santa Fe is an incredibly unaffordable place to live; the cost of living is extreme. So we did what we do, we went around knocking on doors, we talked to people, we held house meetings, we figured out what our next steps were and how we can transfer focus on transportation into a larger environmental justice,

urban planning, and housing issues as well.

So that's where we've been in the last couple of years, addressing all of those things. We still have the bicycle project, we still do the transit organizing, and now we do organizing around built environment and housing.

Saif: And this has all led to your latest big victory, right?

Tomás: Yes, we just recently passed a resolution that was written by people in Santa Fe with 200 participants giving testimonials about it. It created a citywide “Residents Bill of Rights” that really pinpoints what a lot of problems in the city are, and how exactly we can address them through policy, and it's an accountability pull for our elected officials, so we can really say, “Hey, you passed this law, now we want you to back it up with policies against the budding segregation we see in Santa Fe.” We want to make it affordable for people; we want to stop the gentrifications of centralized neighborhoods - of

continued on page five

How the Youth Pass Became a Reality

Youth Power led the way (and your support helped!)

By Dave Jenkins

In 2007, the Youth Council of the Boston-area Youth Organizing Project (BYOP) noted that using the regional public transit system—the “T”—was getting more and more difficult. That year, youth leaders launched their campaign for a deeply discounted age-based “Youth Pass” to address the fact that youth riders were increasingly priced out of the service they depend on for just about everything.

Seven years later, the Youth Pass battle had outlasted four Transportation Secretaries and the largest fare hike in recent T history. Generations of youth organizers from BYOP, Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE), and groups across Greater Boston had led dozens of creative and direct actions, published a research report on the affordability crisis for youth riders, formed partnerships with labor and seniors, and launched the Youth Affordabili(T) Coalition (YAC) to unite the fight and win the Youth Pass.

Despite the tremendous effort and many small victories along the way, YAC’s leadership feared their progress was at risk as the Governor and current Secretary wound down their terms in office. Since the Secretary had made a conditional commitment to pilot the Youth Pass several years before and conditions had been met, it seemed that the only way to win would be one final push to pressure the decision-makers to honor that commitment. The youth leadership had also learned that marches and traditional appeals to media might not be enough.

At the end of 2013, YAC’s newest generation of leadership retreated with veterans of the campaign, some of whom would soon age-out of the proposed Youth Pass but were committed none-the-less. They laid out a six-month plan for mobilization that included

energizing the campaign’s youth base, launching a twitter storm to engage the public, identifying winnable short term demands to build momentum, and calling-on the Secretary to honor his commitment to the Youth Pass. In addition, inspired by senior and disabled riders who had blocked intersections to roll-back part of the fare hike during the previous year, YAC was prepared to use civil disobedience if it proved

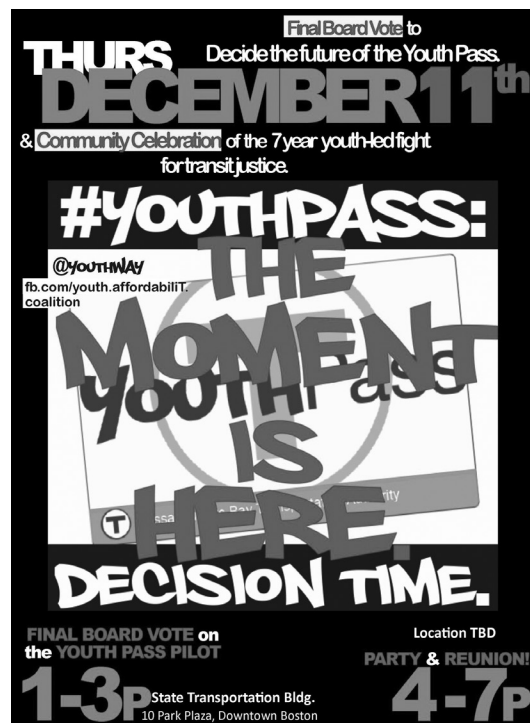
but the real break came two-months in when YAC got word that they had been approved for \$5,000 of funding from Resist.

The mobilization moved forward, winning its short-term strategic gain in March—free weekends for 21,000 high school students—but no commitment to pilot the Youth Pass. In May, the campaign issued an open letter demanding that the Secretary of Transportation honor his previous commitment. And on June 11, after receiving no response, 30 members of YAC entered the Secretary’s office and refused to leave until the pilot of the Youth Pass was official. It was the dubbed the “Sit-in for Opportuni(T).” At 7:00 PM that day, with news cameras and hundreds of supporters outside, 21 youth leaders and adult supporters were arrested by Massachusetts State Police and removed from the building.

In the weeks that followed, which included the first of what would have been several months of follow-up actions, dialogue was reopened. State officials met with YAC’s leadership and agreed to terms for the pilot program of the new Youth Pass. YAC was invited into a working group to determine the remaining details of the pass and design the tenets of the pilot program, which launched on July 1, 2015.

This long fought victory involved thousands of youth and dozens of organizations. Without a doubt, credit is also due to Resist, who offered resources at the turning point of the fight, and who trusted the campaign to know how to use those resources and get it done. YAC and its partners, and the many young people who can now—and will.

Dave Jenkins was formerly the Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project (REEP) and supported the REEP team to build youth voice, power, and movement for environmental justice.



necessary to move state officials.

Even with leadership and participation from youth leaders, YAC’s mobilization would require added capacity to coordinate groups, planning meetings, and execution of the actions. To that point, the coalition had operated on in-kind resources from cash strapped organizations, and had no budget of its own. Given the make-or-break of the moment and the timeline, the group went ahead and hired a coordinator on faith that their community would come together with the resources to make it work. Union partners chipped in and supporters raised cash online,

How Chains Break in Sante Fe

continued from page three

all neighborhoods. At the same time, we want to stop seeing cuts to our bus service as well. So that's where we are right now, we're in the midst of doing that, we're proud of passing that ordinance and we will continue organizing in that way.

Saif: The Residents Bill of Rights. How did that idea first come up? It seems like a big shift in some ways, but not so big of a shift in other ways. It seems like that was a natural progression of the organization and the needs of the membership, and where some energy was naturally organically flowing. But can you describe a little bit of when the idea sparked?

Tomás: It's hard to talk about transportation without talking about urban planning and housing. The reason that people need better bus service is because people are getting pushed further and further into the outskirts of the city. And that predominantly affects low-income people and people of color.

We've known that for a long time, we know also that bus ridership tends to be those folks. There are people that sort of ride the bus because they choose to, it's good for the environment and they get out of their cars - lots of reasons to do that. But we find that the bulk of people do it out of necessity. So we've always known that that was part of the problem that we wanted to deal with. We just hadn't had the capacity as an organization up until recently to be able to address some of the larger issues. All of these things are interrelated, and we have a large analysis, and we've always tried to figure out, well how can we use this larger goal of really trying to resist oppression, trying to help low-income people actually have a voice in how their city is built, how can we end ongoing segregation in Santa Fe? Those are very big things, and our ability to effect that change has been limited to bus ridership, bus policy, and helping folks with bicycles up until a couple of years ago. I think that we had enough - we'd done enough organizing that we had a strong enough base out there that

it really allowed us to do things like to mend our bus system at the same time as going out and starting another campaign. So really it was about organizing, that's what allowed us to do that. Why the Residents Bill of Rights specifically? Again, we - when we were moving into this we were saying "Wow, housing is such a big deal, we can focus just on Santa Fe's increasing segregation. We can focus just on homeless issues. We could just focus on code enforcement issues."

There are organizations that dedicate years and years and years of hard work to just enforcing civil rights violations out there. So we know that all of that is a piece of it, but we don't know what that means - how to go about it. So we reached out to friends and allies around the country, we reached out to and became a member of the Right to the City alliance. So as we got more and more into the conversation we realized, "Well, hey, this is something we can actually do in Santa Fe!" It not only

continued on page six



Photo: Chainbreaker Collective

Members of Chainbreaker Collective in action Sante Fe, New Mexico

“Best Check I Write All Year”

Resist donor shares why he donates to Resist

By Anirvan Chatterjee

As one of the curators of the monthly Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour (www.BerkeleySouthAsian.org), I research and share the stories of a century of South Asian American movements for justice in Berkeley, California.

Some of the stories we share on our walking tour are grand epics, like the history of the Ghadar Party, an anti-colonial movement that mobilized thousands from across the West Coast and around the world to return to India to try to end British colonization.

But most of the stories are much smaller, from the sixteen South Asian students who organized an anti-racist protest in 1908, to the Pakistani and Indian students who built a campaign to end backlash attacks at their school in the days after 9/11. The history of South Asian organizing in Berkeley is fundamentally the story of a century of modest grassroots movements, fighting for progressive and radical change, one tiny localized struggle at a time.

We share these narratives on the streets, using stories, visuals, and street theater, grounded in the stories of ev-

eryday people, from intersectional feminists working to bring accountability for abusers in the community, to a gay Bangladeshi activist struggling to balance work, family, activism, and love. Sharing these histories can inspire difficult conversations, inspire the creation of art, and best of all, inspire people to join movements for justice.

As a community-based historian, I've seen the massive cumulative impact of a century of local movements for

justice in my community. And that's why I'm proud to be a Resist donor since 1999, to fund this work in communities across the country.

My annual Resist pledge is the best check I write all year, and an investment in our shared future. In the face of climate injustice, privatization, and attacks on our bonds of support, Resist grantees stand on the right side of history, winning real measurable victo-

ries today, and building the movements whose stories we'll be able to celebrate in decades to come.

Anirvan Chatterjee is a techie, community historian, and activist from Berkeley, California. He's been a RESIST donor since 1999. Find him online at www.chatterjee.net and @anirvan.



How Chains Break in Santa Fe *continued from page five*

is helpful here in Santa Fe, it can be a model that is replicable in cities around the country. I think that that is working, it's starting to show. I think Right to the City gave us a lot of support; we used a template that was crafted not just by Chainbreaker members but also other organizations around the country working on those issues. It was very collaborative - there was a lot of solidarity out there. I think we took that template, that national model, and made it our own here locally, in Santa Fe, and that helped us kind of get out there, give

us a reason to knock on doors, help us understand the issues locally as well, and kind of give us a footing into a new, or what seems like a new, issue.

Saif: That's so cool. Yeah, that's really inspirational.

Tomás: Well we couldn't have done it without Resist.

Saif: No, no - that's nowhere near true.

Tomás: No, that's not sucking up or anything, that's absolutely true.

Saif: Well, thanks, we'll see if I can work that into the interview somewhere.

Tomás: I think when we got our first Resist grant, it was probably like 80%

of our income or something like that, so it is significant. I can tell you that that money, now that our budget's increasing - it's still a lot. And I think out of all of our funders, you know, I think Resist really understands and feels part of the movement, you know in a way that we really appreciate.

Saif: Aw, thanks. But really, it is you who we should be thanking for all that you do. Ok, back to the questions! What are some of your current - what are some of the biggest obstacles or challenges to your work, or what do you foresee being

continued on page seven

How Chains Break in Sante Fe

continued from page six

some of the biggest obstacles or challenges to your work.

Tomás: Well, I think essentially what we're trying to fight is some really deep-rooted, ingrained, institutional racism and sexism and classism. Undoing colonialism doesn't happen easily or without a lot of hard work. We always say it isn't rocket science, but it's a lot of hard work. And the folks that we're trying to organize are affected by that every day, so we have members that will come to meetings after working two jobs, and it takes them literally two hours to come to our office, and they bring their kids. That's a very humbling experience, to know that that work is so important that people would do that. But a lot of people don't have the ability to do that, and it's a challenge. And I think that is one of the reasons people

don't rise up in the way that we should be against all of the injustices that we see, is because the system really punishes people for doing it in everyday ways. And I'm not even talking about throwing people in prison, I'm talking about making it so that people don't have time spend with their families, or making it so they have to work. So that is a big challenge. But I do think that it is something that's overcome-able, and I do think that is why organizing, to me, is important; because it changes those dynamics, and it allows people to have real say, and real agency in how the decisions that affect their lives are made.

Saif: Thank you, that was beautifully put. So, the last wrap up question is, if you can briefly give us a hint of what is coming up in the future for Chainbreaker.

Tomás: Definitely. So we just had a membership meeting last night and we have huge news, but this is something

we're launching publicly in December, at our annual, end-of-year party. So I can give you a little sneak peak. It's called "Operation Elephant." Check back with us at the end of the year to find out more!

Saif: Can't even imagine what is in store for Santa Fe, but I bet it's going to be amazing. And when you all do your first action, please send us a photo!

Tomás Rivera is the executive director of the Chainbreaker Collective, a Resist Grantee. Saif Rahman is the director of communications at Resist and is the editor of the Newsletter. Thank you to Andrea Martinez who is an undergraduate student interning at Resist. Her hobbies include learning, running, and black coffee. When her nose is not deep in a book, it can be found behind the lens of her Petri film camera.

Make Your End of the Year Donation to Resist! Support the Forefront of the Movement for Social Justice

Your contribution to Resist supports hundreds of activist groups resisting, organizing, and building a better world. We will never have the money that those in power have, but Resist believes in a simple equation: a little bit of support plus grassroots creativity and passion can equal radical social change.

- Yes! Here is a one-time contribution of \$_____. Enclosed is my check.
- Yes! Deduct \$_____ from my credit card (note card information below)
- I want to become a Pledge! Deduct \$_____ (note card information below)
 - monthly quarterly twice a year yearly

Name

Phone or email

Address

City / State / Zip

MC / Visa / AmEx Card #

Exp. date

Signature

For more ways to donate, including donating/pledging directly from a bank account, stock donations, and planned giving, please visit www.resist.org/donate or call 617.623.5110

Cut out and submit form to:
Resist • 259 Elm Street, Suite 201 •
Somerville • Massachusetts • 02144
Donations are tax-deductible.

Resist.

The Newsletter

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON, MASS.
PERMIT #2956

259 Elm Street, Suite 201
Somerville, Massachusetts
02144

www.resist.org
617.623.5110

**RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED**

End of the Year Special



Chainbreaker Collective in Sante Fe, New Mexico

“Well, I think essentially what we’re trying to fight is some really deep-rooted, ingrained, institutional racism and sexism and classism. Undoing colonialism doesn’t happen easily or without a lot of hard work. We always say it isn’t rocket science, but it’s a lot of hard work. And the folks that we’re trying to organize are affected by that every day, so we have members that will come to meetings after working two jobs, and it takes them literally two hours to come to our office, and they bring their kids. That’s a very humbling experience, to know that that work is so important that people would do that.

- Tomás Rivera of Chainbreaker Collective. See inside for the full interview