



DC NLG Chapter Newsletter

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Executive Board: Anitra Ash-Shakoor, John McCoy (co-chairs), James Drew, James Klimaski, Turna Lewis, Bill Montross, Ann Wilcox

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DC NLG Chapter Statement on Violence at US Capitol on Jan 6, 2021. (Written by co-chair John McCoy and members of DC Chapter Mass Defense Committee)

On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, an insurrectionist mob of white supremacists laid siege to the U.S. Capitol, at the behest of President Donald Trump. The events of that day shone a spotlight on what Black and Indigenous people, People of Color, the LGBTQ community, and religious minorities have expressed for decades: the violent ideologies of white supremacy and racial resentment that lies at the root of American society. This right wing insurrection, and its brazen attack on the Capitol, was only the latest salvo in a series of violent conflicts that have escalated in both intensity and audacity. This racist cadre found a leader in Donald Trump, and an article

of faith in stolen election lies. He gave them a purpose, he gave them a voice, and he gave them a target, culminating in an act of treason that left 6 people dead.

The DC National Lawyers Guild (DC NLG) stands in support of our community, who have borne the brunt of the MAGA rally's descent on the District not once, but 3 times in the last 3 months. Each time these violent white nationalists have been intent on attacking and harassing members of our community. And each time, law enforcement officers stood idly by, turning their enforcement intentions towards the victims of the fascist attack rather than the attackers. DC NLG Legal Observers have repeatedly been witness to and the recipients of police brutality and white supremacist violence while providing legal support to local activists. In collaboration with Law4BlackLives DC, we will continue to serve the organizers, protesters, and residents of the District of Columbia.

Throughout the summer, Black Lives Matter protesters in the District were attacked numerous times by Metropolitan Police and U.S. Park Police. Videos from the January 6 Insurgency shows law enforcement officers calmly opening barricades to the mob, while occasionally pausing to take selfies. The polite restraint exercised by law enforcement stood in stark contrast to the overwhelming show of force directed at BLM activists and advocates, at whom the police never hesitated to use tactical violence and lethal force.

Questions surrounding police "unpreparedness" miss the point entirely. The events of that day were yet another instance where armed agents of the state coddled extremists while turning a blind eye to the violence those extremists inflict. This attempted coup served as a reminder that an unaccountable police force poses as great a threat to democracy as those who actively try to subvert it. As the need for new domestic terrorism laws move to the forefront of the conversation, the DC NLG advises restraint and caution moving forward. It is inevitable that, regardless of the party holding power, any new laws on domestic terrorism will be used to further target and surveil people of color, and prosecute political activism. The disparity will be even more stark in the District of Columbia, a predominately Black city policed by more than 30 agencies, each empowered to arrest and employ lethal force.

The DC NLG and its Legal Observer program urge those watching the District of Columbia to keep their eyes trained on events in the upcoming weeks, and their aftermath. It is imperative that elected officials listen to communities that have been targeted by white supremacists and far-right hate groups. The appropriate answer is not a repressive backlash directed at political organizing, but rather solidarity with BIPOC and other marginalized groups demanding self determination and working towards liberation.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Mass Defense Committee December and January were busy times for the Mass Defense Committee, as they prepared for more MAGA rallies after the first such in November. Legal observers and the Law for Black Lives - NLG jail support hotline provided resources to local activists throughout the weekend of December 12 and into January. Despite the challenges that

came with DC's increased militarization this month, the legal observer program continued to show up for our community, heading out to several events. The MDC has also been deep in discussion about legal observer safety, relying on what we and other NLG chapters learned throughout 2020. For more information, contact DCMassDefense@gmail.com.

Housing Committee: The Housing Committee is exploring ways for NLG to work with Cancel Rent and eviction protection efforts in DC (and surrounding jurisdictions). We have publicized L&T pro bono trainings, and are researching responses to recent court decisions which undermine COVID-related tenant protections. We seek new members and law students, to assist those efforts. The committee chair is Renee Bowser, Esq. Please contact Ann Wilcox, Ann1Wilcox@gmail.com, for details, or info on the next committee meeting.

SEEKING CHAPTER MEMBERS INTERESTED IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Here's your chance ! The chapter has several committees that need more members to help organize, lead and assist their work. This is a great way to join with other chapter members to help the chapter grow and develop in areas you feel are important. Chapter committees and initiatives now in most need of volunteers include: Housing; Membership; Meetings & Events; chapter newsletter, and the chapter's Left-legal Film Library.

The chapter's Mass Defense committee is very active, and it can always use more chapter members participating. Other committees once active that currently need organizing support are Immigration, Private Practitioners Roundtable, and Labor & Employment. We have also discussed establishing Police Accountability and Mass Incarceration committees. If you are interested in starting a new committee in the chapter, that can be done. Just discuss it with either Co-chair.

The chapter will be holding elections for executive board members in May or June of this year. We would like to know if you are also interested in serving on the board.. The board sets policy and direction for the chapter and makes decisions between chapter meetings. (The fine print: Board members meet for at least 6 meetings during the year - usually monthly - reviewing budget, programs, membership, and other areas.)

Whether you are a long time member or brand new to the Guild, we urge you to let either of us know if you are interested in serving in some capacity to help make our Guild chapter stronger and more effective. Thank you.

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OTHER NLG NEWS:

Newly-elected NLG President Suzanne Adely joined DC NLG members and Board for a Holiday Gathering, on Friday, Dec 11, 2020 (via zoom). Suzanne was elected to succeed Elena Cohen, at the recent Law for the People Convention (held via zoom in Sept-Oct 2020). In her remarks, she filled us in on her plans for the year, and developments at the national office.

Meet the new NLG President: Suzanne Adely is a New York-based attorney, who has been chair of the NLG International Committee and active with the Labor & Employment Committee. She is the co-director of the Food Chain Workers Alliance, a bi-national coalition of worker organizations in the food economy, and has led organizing in the Arab-American community.

From the new Southwest Virginia NLG chapter:

In August 10, 2020, the Washington Post reported that federal scientists have begun to address a massive COVID-19 outbreak at the immigration detention center in Farmville, Virginia. One person has died, and some 300 detainees are being monitored for infection. The National Immigration Project of NLG filed suit in relation to this outbreak. “The CDC staff will focus on one specific thing,” said Sirine Shebaya, a lawyer with the [National Immigration Project of the National Lawyer’s Guild](#), which is representing some of the plaintiffs in that case. “In our lawsuit, we’ve raised a whole list of conditions that go beyond the issue of testing,” she said. “It’s very unlikely that the CDC inspection will cover all of these different areas.”

Also in 2020, attorney Alan Graf and the new Southwest Virginia chapter of NLG formally urged Virginia authorities to provide state prisoners with the COVID-19 vaccine, as a priority group. The chapter also called for confederate statues in Floyd, Virginia to be removed.

“Moving the Bar: My Life as a Radical Lawyer,” by the late Michael Ratner, director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, published by OR Books

From Board member Bill Montross: a new memoir by the late Michael Ratner, director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, has been published by OR books (www.orbooks.com). “Moving the Bar: My Life as a Radical Lawyer” is a book left uncompleted at the time of Ratner’s death in 2016, which has been completed by associates. Michael Ratner wrote many books on subjects such as Guantanamo & torture, and the right to dissent. This memoir contains important lessons for progressive lawyers (see below).

Michael Ratner (1943–2016) was one of America’s leading human rights lawyers. He worked for more than four decades at the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) becoming first the Director of Litigation and then the President of what Alexander Cockburn called “a small band of tigerish people.” He was also the President of the National Lawyers Guild.

Ratner handled some of the most significant cases in American history. This book tells why and how he did it. His last case, which he worked on until he died, was representing truth-telling whistleblower and now political prisoner Julian Assange, the editor of WikiLeaks. Ratner “moved the bar” by organizing some 600 lawyers to successfully defend habeas corpus, that is,

the ancient right of someone accused of a crime to have a lawyer and to be brought before a judge.

Michael had a piece of paper taped on the wall next to his desk at the CCR. It read:
4 key principles of being a radical lawyer:

1. Do not refuse to take a case just because it is long odds of winning in court.
2. Use cases to publicize a radical critique of US policy and to promote revolutionary transformation
3. Combine legal work with political advocacy.
4. Love people.

Compelling and instructive, *Moving the Bar* is an indispensable manual for the next generation of activists and their lawyers.