



# A WORKING LENS

NEWSLETTER

*of Class Conscious Photographers*

WINTER 2024

# FEATURE

## Camp Resolution: A Home For People And Their Furry Friends

Images and text  
by glenda drew  
& Jesse Drew



Among the many thousands of people without housing in Sacramento, Camp Resolution, or “Camp Res” as it is commonly called, stands out as an inspirational victory for the unhoused. For years, the homeless in Sacramento have faced harassment, “sweeps,” violence and insecurity as city bureaucrats and the local police have chased them from river fronts, abandoned lots, parks and any other place people gathered to shelter themselves.



A few years ago people had endured enough, and a group of activists emerged to work together to take over a vacant lot in Sacramento to call it home. This encampment grew into a community of around 60 people who organized themselves into a self-governing community known as Camp Resolution. With help from local activists and community members, Camp Res was able to hold off their threatened evictions and they have just recently celebrated their one-year anniversary as a self-governing community.



Camp Res has been a godsend for its citizens, as it has given a feeling of security to people who have often been victimized and abused on the streets. The community has a fenced lot and a self-governed security detail that gives some peace of mind to its residents, many of whom are women and kids. The community often has community meals, poetry readings, live music, and other community-building events that bring in people from across the Sacramento area. For their one-year anniversary, participants from the Wood Street encampment in Oakland bicycled up to the party to offer their congratulations. Walking into the encampment, one of the first things one notices is the large number of dogs, estimated to be more than 50! Despite the close quarters of dogs with community members, everyone seems to get along just fine. We decided to photograph some of the community members and their dogs, who are important members of the community.



# VIEWPOINTS

Images from Our Members



Families, Artists, Activists and concerned human beings poured into San Francisco's streets in October 2023 to demand a permanent ceasefire of Israeli bombardments in Gaza  
Najib Joe Hakim





Free Palestine Rally/March  
Rhinebeck, NY, April 15, 2023  
Onaje Benjamin





Four thousand demonstrators from throughout the San Francisco Bay Area protested in front of the Federal Building the Israeli bombing of Gaza and demanded a ceasefire. San Francisco, CA 19 October 2023 David Bacon





**Mzerita Tsulaia, 78, prepares lunch in her kitchen that she will soon have to vacate since it has been condemned. Mzerita is an Internally Displaced Person from Abkhazia, an autonomous state within Georgia. The war lasted from August 14 1992 – September 27 1993. Many of Mzerita's neighbors are IDPs with nowhere else to go. Tbilisi, Georgia / September 28, 2023 / Eric Nomburg**



**Looking out from Mzerita Tsulaia's window at the Kartli Sanatorium. Mzerita's daughter died in 2000 from an electrical accident in the kitchen. Tbilisi, Georgia / September 28, 2023 / Eric Nomburg**



Ceasefire Now!  
Sacramento, CA, 2023  
glenda drew & Jesse Drew



Into The Streets of Sacramento  
Sacramento, CA, 2024  
glenda drew & Jesse Drew



Kayakers displaying signs saying "Jews for a ceasefire" on Lake Merritt in Oakland as part of a rally organized by anti-Zionist Jewish groups at the Lake Merritt Amphitheater on 22 December 2023.  
Sharat G. Lin



Palestinian flags wave directly in the faces of the Hayward City Council during deliberations on a resolution to divest from four companies in the city's investment portfolio that are on the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) list for their roles in enabling Israeli Apartheid. Overwhelming public comments in favor of the resolution persuaded city council members to pass the measure in a 4-3 vote on 23 January 2024.  
Sharat G. Lin

# HISTORY & POLITICS

Photographs of Portsmouth Square - A Tribute to Paul Strand



**By David Bacon**

In presenting these images of Portsmouth Square, in San Francisco's Chinatown, I've tried to keep in mind some of the ideas of Paul Strand, the great modernist and realist photographer.

Strand was a radical, a founder of the Photo League in New York City in the 1930s, and a teacher who guided its work. After World War Two, as McCarthyite hysteria gripped the country, and especially the world of media and the arts, he was put on a blacklist (along with the Photo League itself) by the U.S. Justice Department. He went into exile in France, never returning to live in the U.S. For the next three decades he photographed people in traditional communities, and in newly independent countries during the period of decolonization and national liberation.

Strand was one of the founders of modernism in photography - the idea that photographs had to be connected with the world and depict it cleanly and simply. He combined those visual ideas with social justice politics, not in a dogmatic or simplistic way, but in an effort to create socially meaningful art with its own philosophy and set of principles.



Strand's books were documents about place, presenting people in the context of their physical world. The subject of this set of photographs is also a place, one very familiar to me over many years - Portsmouth Square in San Francisco. These photographs were taken over 20 years. I've sequenced them, as Strand might have done, I think, in an order that emphasizes their social, as well as visual, content.



I was an organizer for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s. We set up a Garment Workers Center on Commercial Street, a block from the square. The workers who came into the center were Chinese women and men who worked in shops all over the city, from outer Third Street to Chinatown itself. I was just beginning to take photographs in a conscious way in those days, and because I was a union organizer, there was never a possibility that the sweatshop owners would let me inside to document the conditions. I was a union militant, interested and committed to documenting work, so this was a big regret. But walking through Portsmouth Square every day gave me a sense of the lives of people in this community, in the hours they spent outside the sewing shops.



In those years the number of unhoused people on the streets was much smaller than today. I would see perhaps one or two people sleeping on the sidewalk in the twenty blocks I walked between our union's central office and the square, and rarely anyone sleeping in the square itself. Today that has changed. Like any San Francisco park, Portsmouth Square has been made a home, or at least a sleeping place, by several people with nowhere else to go. The first series of photographs shows a few of these individuals, in their relationship to the facilities of the square, including its benches, castoff cardboard boxes, and the sidewalk itself.





As an organizer I came to realize that Portsmouth Square is home to many activities, and has many levels of meaning to the people of Chinatown. They relax, play cards and enjoy themselves on the benches whenever the city's notoriously uncertain weather permits. Over the years I've often returned to take photographs and been struck by how many people play games here.

On one level, it is a place where people get together, in a community where many live with many family members sharing small apartments. Portsmouth Square means space to breathe, to be noisy and extroverted, to play the games people were taught by mothers and fathers in the generations that came before. It is a deep expression of the history and culture people share.



Organized cultural events also take place in the Square. On a recent walk I was pulled towards the performance space by the music of the erhu and other traditional Chinese instruments. An ensemble of musicians, organized by A Better Chinatown Tomorrow, had assembled to give a concert for the card players and the families wandering through the square. One woman sang while another danced – stylized voice and motions in humble street clothes.



The culture of Chinatown includes the social movements in which people organized support for revolutions in China itself, and protests over the oppressive conditions and discrimination that people have faced at work. It is an old history. A few blocks away, in St. Mary's Square, a statue of Sun Yat Sen by Beniamino Bufano honors the fact that part of the Revolution of 1911, which overthrew the dowager Manchu empress, was planned by Chinese exiles, including those in San Francisco.



Chinatown is one of the politically most vibrant communities in San Francisco, and Portsmouth Square has always provided space for demonstrations, marches, meetings and leafleting. When the bombing began in Afghanistan, and the media began its deafening war drumbeat that preceded the invasion of Iraq, Chinatown's internationalists gathered in Portsmouth Square. There they held signs calling for peace, and for spending on human needs instead of bombs. After listening to speeches in Chinese, the contingent marched down to Market Street and joined thousands of others from homes across the city, protesting what became a 20-year war.



Perhaps Strand, who took his photographs slowly and deliberately with a large view camera, might have had conflicting feelings in seeing these photographs. In taking them I took advantage of the mobility of a small camera, moving much more freely than he could with his large apparatus. He carefully constructed his images, seeing them on the large ground glass at the rear of the camera. I try to be conscious of the image and its elements as I take my pictures too. But sometimes I feel that not everything happens on a conscious level. Working quickly, I depend on a less conscious part of the brain to order the visual pieces of the image. Perhaps that was also true for him.



But what I take from Strand, and what he might have seen as a commonality in our work, are his aesthetic and political principles. In his idea of dynamic realism a successful photograph has to encompass three ideas. It has to be partisan - committed to social change and seeing that change as necessary and possible. Especially after he left the U.S. during the worst of the Cold War years, he worked in collaboration with radical, often Communist, activists. They brought him to the communities he photographed, and wrote text accompanying the photographs.

Strand was a committed realist, but he believed that a successful photograph had to do more than just record the reality in front of the lens. Mike Weaver says in his description of Strand's philosophy, "Certain realities of the world had to be made clear. To be deeply moved was not enough." Strand's concept of specificity meant that an image of a particular person had to go beyond her or his individuality, to encompass a more universal truth. Commenting on a Dorothea Lange photograph he said, "The cotton picker is an unforgettable photograph in which is epitomized not only this one man bending down under the oppressive sky, but the lot of thousands of his fellows."

Strand did not deny the individuality of the people in his images. None could have had more dignity, or been photographed with greater care or in more detail. But without being able to see beyond the individual to greater universality, "photography collapsed into record making, emphasizing the exceptional at the expense of the universal ... One person who has been studied very deeply and penetratingly can become all persons. Therefore it seems to me that art is very specific and not at all general."

Strand's third principle was dimensionality, referring both to the qualities of the image itself, and how they resonate with its social content. In an image different elements have a relationship to each other, just as the photograph has a relation to the reality it depicts. That relationship, within the image, has to have a sensation of movement, he believed. Even a very still, posed photograph has to have "a sensation of movement through the eye ... simply a reflection of the material fact that everything is in movement ... It is the reflection that in the world things are actually related to each other, even though sometimes we cannot readily see it."

These images of Portsmouth Square been assembled into a sequence, as Strand did in his careful juxtaposition of the images in his books. Some were taken twenty years ago and the most recent just a few weeks back. Over this period of time I was able to work, and see Portsmouth Square, as an

activist myself — an organizer and participant, or sometimes a supporter at a distance, of some of the community's social movements. The images document the reality of people enduring the pain of marginalization, of the social networks and culture centered on this place, and the efforts to change social reality and fight for justice.

Whether the images succeed in attaining Strand's goal of specificity, or universality, and how well they work as images internally, is up to the viewer to judge. But taking and sequencing them has forced me to reexamine my own process as a photographer. I've always considered myself a realist and materialist. I've paid a lot of attention to the relationships that make my work possible, and I hope socially useful. But I've given less thought to the aesthetics or the principles behind their conception. It's seemed enough to say that a photograph either works or it doesn't.

Strand, however, demands a greater commitment. He voiced a political philosophy that provides a coherent way to analyze photography that is deeply connected to the world. That forced me to give more attention to the way politics and aesthetic ideas interact in my own work. Here's his reaction to the unconsidered and unthought realism (photojournalistic and otherwise) of his day (he died in 1976):

***"We must reject both this venal realism as well as the mere slice-of-life naturalism which is completely static in its unwillingness to be involved in the struggle ... towards a better and fuller life.***

***"On the contrary, we should conceive of realism as dynamic, as truth which sees and understands a changing world and in its turn is capable of changing it, in the interests of peace, human progress, and the eradication of human misery and cruelty, and towards the unity of all people. We must take sides."***

Thanks to "Dynamic Realist," by Mike Weaver, in "Paul Strand, Essays on his Life and Work", Aperture, 1990

# THE DARKROOM

By Ronald Orlando



Two ways of creating double exposure photography are in camera by an individual photographer, and in the darkroom using multiple negatives. A third way is swapping film with another photographer. This third way is the way my friend Ernie Luppi and I created our photos for 'Show and Tell,' East Bay Photo Collective's online meeting.

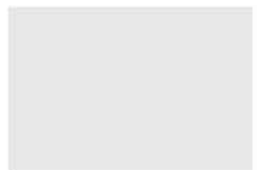
We both used a 35mm camera and Ilford Delta 400 black and white film. Other camera formats can also be used along with different types of film. The process began with me shooting the roll first. When I was finished I mailed the the roll to Ernie since we live in different parts of the country.

Upon receiving the roll, Ernie shot it. Neither one of us knew what the other was photographing. When he was finished, he developed the roll, and scanned it for editing and processing. He then mailed the roll to me also for the same.

There were some things we had to do to ensure that both images showed in the negative, and that all images were properly exposed.

- We both had to under expose the shots, and this varied based on shooting conditions.
- We both had to make sure that the scene we were photographing contained something black or dark, so both images would show.
- An optional step for ensuring that the frames lined up as close as possible is to mark the film leader, so the second photographer would know how far to wind the film while loading the camera.

The fun thing about a film swap is that the outcome of the photo shoot is totally random and unpredictable.

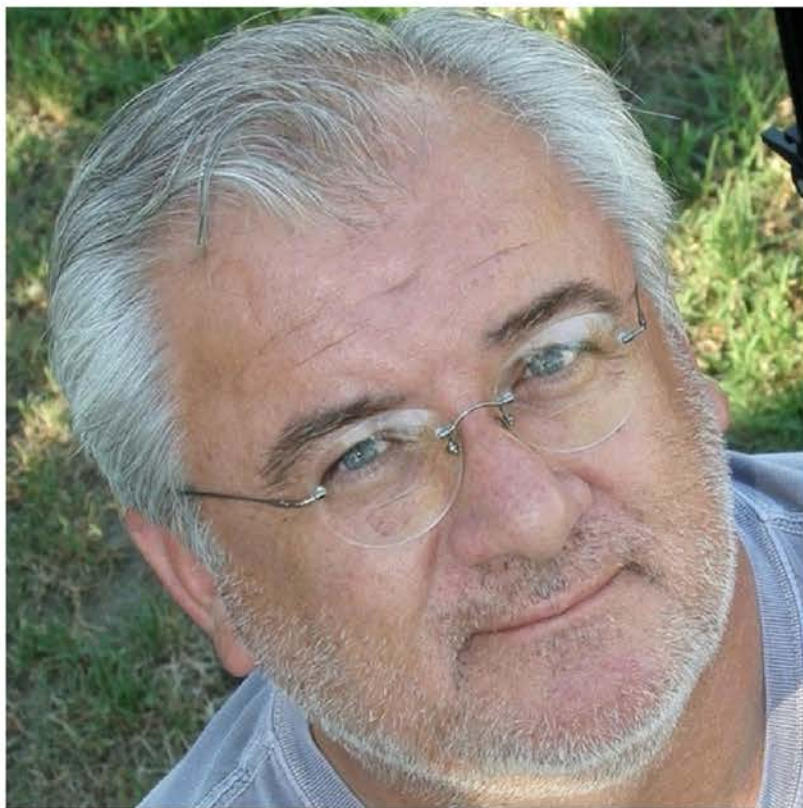


# IN MEMORY

**Slobodon Dimitrov**

**By Catherine Hess**

Catherine Hess is the curator of Slobodan's archive of labor-related images for the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment.



***"The dignity of the person and the need for civil society are recurring themes in much of my work."***

He was everywhere, with his camera at the ready. Slobodan Dimitrov—who passed away at the age of 71 on July 23—was seemingly at every County Federation of Labor event, as well as at labor-related marches, demonstrations, book signings and celebrations. Photographer, artist, and Labor supporter—Dimitrov captured some of the images for paid jobs while others resulted from his role as self-appointed documentarian.

His commitment to Labor and working people may stem from his interest in the progressive ideals of his native Serbia and his close relationship to San Pedro, where the Port of LA is located—the busiest seaport in the Western Hemisphere with one of the highest densities of union members in the nation.

Slobodan Dimitrov's dogged activity as the official and unofficial photographer of the labor movement—especially in the years before the 21st century—is all the more critical because his were often the only images to document aspects of Labor's history in the region.

Can we even imagine a world without cell phones, without our ever-present digital cameras...a time when there were no selfies, no TikTok recordings, no George Floyd video? That was our world less than one generation ago when history was captured by the odd record keeper, writer or photographer. Without them, history can slip away.

***Slobodan was a super power  
on behalf of workers.***

**-Goetz Wolf**

The chronicling of Labor in Southern California is important because its history is so unusual within the US context. In the first half of the 20th century, Los Angeles was more hostile toward unions than the rest of the country. Nevertheless, organizing efforts were more successful here, making the Southern California story worthy of focus and study. Dimitrov's images help make this possible.

Why was organizing so successful here? Starting in the 1970s, Los Angeles was the first stop for many immigrants, especially from Mexico and Central America. In the 1980s and 1990s, Latino union leaders—such as Umberto Camacho, Maria Elena Durazo, Mike Garcia, and Miguel Contreras—began successfully organizing these mostly undocumented immigrants.

Labor membership expanded from these efforts and more generally among the low-wage workforce (in hospitality, homecare, janitorial, security, nursing homes, classrooms, among others) while overall union membership dissipated nationwide. This trend and related political efforts have continued and moved the state to the political left. (It is easy to forget that before 2011 California was not a blue state). Photographs that document this process help us understand trajectories and celebrate brave participants.

Slobodan's indefatigable activity and his superb artistic eye in capturing the often-beautiful essence of a scene make his work vital and engaging. As a portraitist, Dimitrov's stunning images focus attention on the subjects' personality and identity, and all are treated with the same humanity and importance, whether that person is a famous public figure or a port laborer. In the tradition of the Farm Security Administration photographers Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Gordon Parks, Dimitrov's work straddles the craft of photojournalistic documentation and fine art.

His artistic formation derives from various sources, including his weekly visits to the Louvre with his mother while in Paris as a child and his time in the US Army in the 1960s, where he developed his photographic talents. Dimitrov went on to study photography at Santa Monica College and then began a Religious Studies major at Cal State Long Beach. During this time, he continued to nurture his passion for photography and Leica and Rolleiflex cameras. In 1984, Dimitrov began working as an artist at Angels Gate Cultural Center in San Pedro where he exhibited artwork as recently as 2022.

***[He had an] overriding quality of steadiness, of kindness—of deep humanity and curiosity... He was vastly knowledgeable on everything from the grit of union strategy to religion in all its forms.***  
**-Kathleen Clark**



**Member of Piledrivers Local 2375, Port of Los Angeles.  
Photo by Slobodan Dimitrov; collection of Slobodan Dimitrov.**

Dimitrov's images have been exhibited widely, including a 20-year-long project to photograph the Piledrivers in LA Harbor that was on view in the lobby of the Carpenters' Local Union 2375 in Wilmington; and a photographic mural—"The Longshore"—installed at 255 W. 7th Street, San Pedro, in 2010 with support from CRA/LA. He received several commissions from the LA Public Library and has been a contributing photographer to *The Dispatcher*, *LA Weekly*, *The Building Trade News*, and *Random Lengths*. His work has appeared in *The Nation*, *The Carpenter*, *Solidarity*, *America at Work*, *The Progressive*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, and *The Economist*, among others.

# VIEWFINDER



Class Conscious Photographers member Eric Nomburg installing public photo show on Housing at the Fremont Main Library, Fremont, CA. Photo by Sharat G. Lin



Class Conscious Photographers work as part of WE ARE ESSENTIAL installation at the Golden 1 Center, Sacramento, CA. Photo by glenda drew

## WHO WE ARE

Class Conscious Photographers is a project for helping the work of socially-conscious photographers. Images have the power to help working people understand their world and its power relationships, and to appreciate their own power and movements for change. Our perspective is that photography is an important tool for radical social change, if it is produced by photographers who are part of the social movements they're documenting, and if their perspective is to expose the abuse of the system, to show how it can be changed, and by who.

Our group meets monthly on Zoom, and we share images, give presentations on events and artists from photographic history, share technical knowledge, and discuss practical, historical and theoretical concerns related to the politics of class-conscious photography. We have had numerous photo shows in public spaces in the last few years, centered on the working conditions of "essential" workers during the pandemic, as well as the housing crisis we currently face.

Design and Editing: glenda drew & Jesse Drew  
Cover Image: Najib Joe Hakim

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING

This is our third newsletter. Our newsletter will come out several times a year so make sure you sign up to be on our newsletter list!

Since our last newsletter, we have had exhibitions in Fremont, Milpitas and Sacramento, and our work was presented in a talk at the Chicago Center for Photojournalism. Many of us have been photographing demonstrations supporting ceasefire in Gaza.

**SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER:**  
[classconsciousphotographers.org](http://classconsciousphotographers.org)

**We currently have around 60 members in our group, ranging from Northern and Southern California, to Ohio, NY, Mexico, and beyond. Come join us if class-conscious photography is what you do!**

**A WORKING LENS, WINTER 2024**