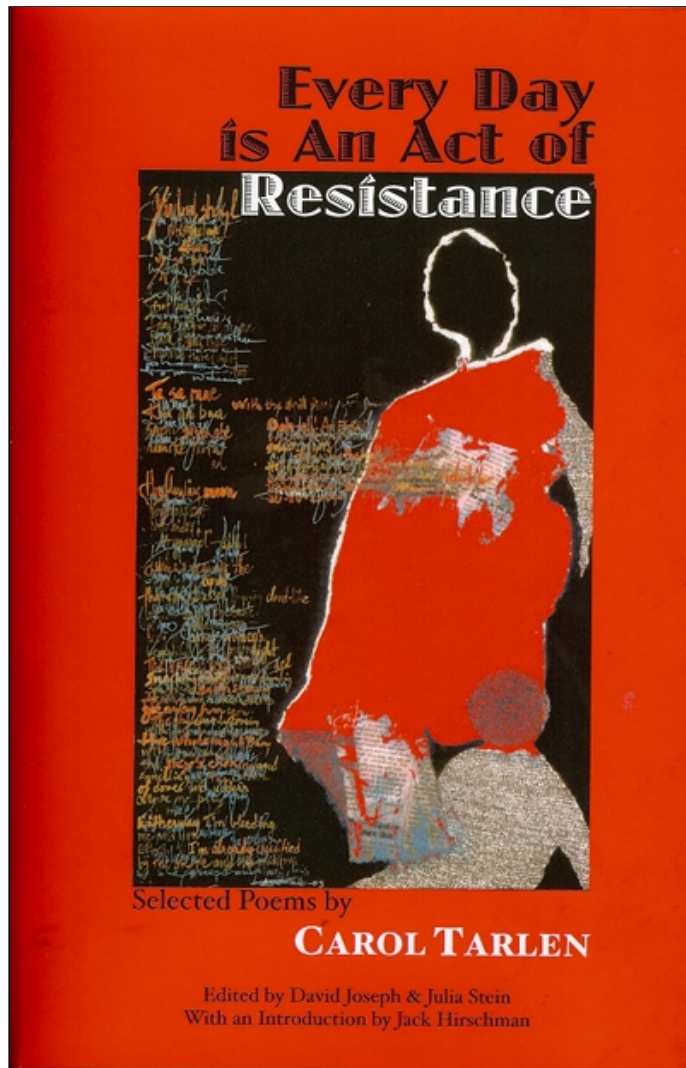


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Every Day Is An Act Of Resistance



By **Lew Rosenbaum**

Carol Tarlen's poems recently published in *Every Day Is An Act of Resistance* cry out at the reader that resistance is necessary but not enough. These poems describe the daily deaths that workers endure to survive. They refuse to accept those daily deaths, and reflect on a vision of what is possible. Every poem in this collection sings. While we should be glad to see this volume come out, we should also be angry that no one saw fit to publish a book length collection of hers while she was still alive.

An Injury to One is an Injury to All

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from the People's Tribune's sister publication, the Tribuno del Pueblo.

ARIZONA—On June 25 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the onerous provision of the Arizona state SB 1070 law called “show me your papers.” This measure requires local police to determine the legal status of anyone they apprehend, no matter how minor the infraction.

Though the Supreme Court struck down three other repressive provisions of the Arizona state law, the door is now open for reintroducing them, or for other states to do copy cat laws.

The undocumented are criminalized for seeking what every other American worker wants: the right to contribute to society and seek a better life. They are scapegoated because the corporations that run the government don't want to guarantee a decent standard of living for any American worker they can't exploit. In truth, the undocumented are not the cause of our financial problems, nor are they a drain on our social services. An attack on the undocumented deflects anger from the real problem—corporate control of government.

Today, work as we know it, is being eliminated by modern technology. At the same time, it is creating an unheard of material abundance. Yet that abundance is not getting to those who need it because of the profit motive. As a consequence, we are witnessing the most drastic polarization of wealth and poverty ever seen in this country. We are on a slippery slope when we allow workers to be stigmatized and hunted down, reminiscent of the Nazi pogroms of Hitler's time. The finger is pointed in the wrong direction. When the government, courts, and police are doing the corporations' bidding and not insuring a decent standard of living for all Americans, that is a formula for fascism. An attack on the undocumented is an attack on us all.

Poem

If you don't make it on the bus
it won't be enough to save you.
And if you make it to the ocean

Carol Tarlen died in June, 2004 from complications of diabetes. Her “Recovery for the Red Hearted Masses” is at once a poem about herself and about the system within which her health deteriorated. It is populated with the San Francisco characters she knew and loved well, like Crazy Mary. “On payday I give her some quarters, /A piece of fruit, a candy bar./A redbrownd smile burns in her face./ Dirt splatters ripped hands that hold/ A battered quart of half empty milk.” The narrator’s failing heart leads her to bypass surgery and three months later she’s out on the streets. Crazy Mary’s gone, instead she sees drunken exiled suburbanites : “Bill Gates leaks out of their half dead eyes./Escaped inmates from Phi Beta Puka.” Suburbanites who don’t see the daily deaths or joys that happen to ordinary people. In the midst of being discouraged she meets her friend Jack from Specs café who gets her some water, tells her he is pleased to have sold 6 People’s Tribunes. Cause for celebrating: “My aching heart,/ My breaking heart./ My still beating/ Red red heart.”

The poems are direct, the language is direct, and whether poems of love or poems of rebellion they are deeply sensual, inviting the reader in because the images are things and places we have been or want to be. “Sisters in the Flames” evokes the stark images of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and the drama of workers who leaped, embracing each other, to their somehow tender, transcendent deaths.

Tarlen was blacklisted because of her commitment to writing about the working class, and because she insisted on using her art to aid in furthering the working class struggle. She was arrested for feeding the homeless, was active in the union movement, the movement for women’s rights. The images that stand out in her poetry draw the commonality of class interest in all these struggles. And everywhere stream forth couplets that provoke us to dream and build, as in the last lines of this book: “I trust in the mystery of future/which is always beginning.”

The book is beautifully introduced by Jack Hirschman, with a sensitive biographical essay by Julia Stein, both poet colleagues. Available in bookstores or from Mongrel Empire Press \$14 ISBN 978-0-9833052-9-3.



May Day rally in Michigan. Undocumented workers are stigmatized and hunted down, reminiscent of the Nazi pogroms of Hitler’s time. An attack on the undocumented deflects anger from the real problem—corporate control of government. Photo/daymonjhartley.com

the tide may not turn in your favor

It's only a matter of time before human volcanoes erupt
So tell me does your revolution
end with your coffee cup?

Society got down but it need not fall.
And we the forgotten ones shall
heed the call.

And as old world crumbles
and the air screams out a thousand cries
we shall not bend or break,
we will only rise.

--Chase Cinder

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PO Box 3524, Chicago, IL 60654, 800-691-6888
info@peopletribune.org
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