

A Triangle coalition hopes to unify progressives

By Bryce Lapping

The Triangle Unity May Day Coalition held a “Triangle People’s Assembly” Saturday, the third such event since President Trump’s inauguration. The assembly hosted representatives from a variety of organizations at The Palace International, a Durham restaurant started by two Kenyan natives.

The Triangle Unity May Day Coalition formed in 2015 to organize a rally for International Workers’ Day, May 1. The event was a success, and the new-found coalition remained intact. Now, they hope to increase their membership and fight for progressive causes.

“There needs to be a front and a coalition on this end to create a voice for the people,” said Moses Ochola, a lifetime Durham resident and Palace employee. At the moment, people are disenchanted with the Democrats and Republicans, he said.

At the assembly, speakers and members alike agreed consistent activism is needed and they criticized protesters who only participate when it is convenient.

Ochola compared the current progressive fight to what the Tea Party did eight years ago, but at the other end of the political spectrum.

The Triangle People’s Assembly allows organizations to unite around a variety of causes, including immigrant rights, worker and union rights, fighting against Islamophobia and standing with Black Lives Matter.

The leaders speak

Manzoor Cheema, the founding member of the North Carolina organization Muslims for Social Justice, spoke to the assembly about tolerance and love throughout the community.

“This is a time where a people’s assembly is more important than ever before,” Cheema said. “We are seeing attacks on all people. People especially of color, workers, Muslims and immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ, women... are under attack.”

Cheema placed great emphasis on the union of the progressive causes that gathered for the assembly.

“This is a time where we don’t have the luxury to be isolated,” Cheema said. “Our movement cannot be fragmented.”

Angaza Laughinghouse, a leader with Black Workers for Justice, set urgency as a condition for success.

“How many of y’all think that there’s a serious crisis?” he asked. “If not, I don’t think this assembly’s gonna take us where we need to go.”

Laughinghouse advocates for deeply rooted change as opposed to short-term fixes and called out affirmative action as a policy that falls short of a solution.

“We’ve got to decide what is our agenda, how we’re going to fight for our agenda, and how we’ll move these questions forward in terms of making some sort of transformative change,” he said. “We can’t continue just to fight for reforms.”

Loan Tran, a Durham resident and director at the Youth Organizing Institute, attacked systemic issues and their relation to the marginalization of people throughout Durham, North Carolina and the United States.

“Poor people, particularly black working-class people, are made to feel like they are to blame for all of the issues that we’re seeing,” Tran said. “The reality is that it’s much deeper than that.”

Working-class minorities are being economically displaced, Tran said, resulting in unemployment or underemployment. Tran invited a broad critique of the country to explain this phenomenon.

“I think that what’s really crucial to remember, especially in this period, what folks are experiencing – whether it be unemployment or police brutality,

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Manzoor Cheema

or other forms of violence – that that’s the result of a deeply – a deeply faulted economic and social and political system.”

Tran hammered the necessity for individuals to realize the unfairness of such systems.

“It’s not just about what an individual person is able or unable to do,” Tran said. “It’s about an entire system that’s been set up to favor people who are white, people who are heterosexual, people who are upper-class.”

Tran urged those affected by systemic issues to remain positive about themselves.

“Trust your experience and trust that what you’re going through is reflective of a deeply flawed system, and it’s not any character flaw of your own,” Tran said.



Manzoor Cheema, representing Muslims for Social Justice, was the opening speaker at the Triangle People’s Assembly. (Staff photo by Brian Lapping)