

## International News This Month's Focus: SERBIA



Guest columnist, Blake Bailey is a Texas lawyer and author, who recently traveled to Serbia. Bailey was invited to share his knowledge about the Zapatista revolution movement

with Serbian freedom fighters. His photographs and observations are the focus of this month's international feature for Street Zine.

I wrote an historical novel, called *Zapatista*, after the 1994 Mayan revolution. The rebels called themselves Zapatistas after the people's revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, who proclaimed "It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees." Milenko, a leader in a Serbian organization called "Freedom Fight" contacted me about translating my novel into Serbian. The Zapatista movement has achieved international recognition and he felt the novel would be of some inspiration in his part of the world. Freedom Fight is composed of mostly university students. Its two prominent causes are worker's rights and protection of people living in refugee camps throughout Serbia.

I traveled to Petrovaradin, across the Danube River from Novi Sad. NATO bombing had taken out all three of the connecting bridges, but one had been rebuilt. I stayed in a hotel built on a historic fort originally built by the Austrians. It was picturesque. Local artists displayed their work. Milenko met me and we rode back to Belgrade.

We struck up on the idea of doing a film of my visit to bring publicity to my book and to the human rights issues in Serbia. They can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2M8RY2TJ59Q>.



The condition of the refugee camps is shocking. Photographs contrast the dramatic difference between the modern buildings and the pathetic conditions of the displaced. Most of the inhabitants were those fleeing Kosovo and unable to assimilate into the thin Serbian economy. This is even more complicated by the recent declaration of independence of Kosovo from Serbia. Negotiations are underway to accept more displaced people who are living in European Union countries. If these people are moved into this already serious situation, they will be thrown into a dramatically dangerous environment with little help of getting relief.

The problem is that the displaced are citizens of the Serbian country defeated by NATO when it responded to concerns of ethnic cleansing by its then president Milosevic. This puts the "refugees" under the radar of those organizations trying to help refugees. The acceptance of more of the displaced by Serbia is motivated by the promise by the European Union to remove visa restrictions on Serbians—not money to help finance the support of those returning.

It is an axiom of war that those most affected are those least likely to have had power to cause

the conflict. Once again this is true of the displaced in Belgrade. They also are the victims of falling between the bureaucratic cracks for recognition or aid. Freedom Fight is the *Voice Crying in the Wilderness* appealing to the collective conscious of the world, asking for help.

To find out more about Blake Bailey and the Zapatista Revolution, visit [www.blakebailey.com](http://www.blakebailey.com) and [www.zapatistarevolution.com](http://www.zapatistarevolution.com). Bailey is the father of Laura Bailey, who worked at The Stewpot during the summers of 2006 and 2007 as Summer Visiting Youth Director. He lives and works in Tyler, Texas.

Individuals who have traveled the world are invited to share their first hand experiences of global homelessness by submitting essays and photographs to [LeeH@TheStewpot.org](mailto:LeeH@TheStewpot.org) by the 15th of the month for the next month's issue of Street Zine.



Photo by Blake Bailey



Photo by Blake Bailey

**Toronto's Streets to Homes program has tackled panhandling by the homeless directly.**

**Since 2005, Streets to Homes has helped 1,600 homeless people find housing – 88% of whom have not returned to the streets.**

Participants in the program must accept having their rent directly deducted from their social assistance benefits and agree to one year of follow up services from outreach workers.

*"It's extremely expensive to either incarcerate people in jail or treat them in the health care system rather than find them housing... Will it solve every single problem? Possibly not. Will it make an enormous positive difference? Absolutely."*

Toronto Mayor David Miller