



It's Time for an Upgrade

By KaeLyn Rich

It's been almost exactly a year since Governor Cuomo's 2013 State of the State address, during which he announced his plan to "restore New York as a leader in women's rights" by introducing and passing the Women's Equality Act. The Women's Equality Act, or WEA (pronounced /wi/), is a groundbreaking bill that would:

- Safeguard reproductive health
- End pregnancy discrimination
- Strengthen human trafficking protections
- Support domestic violence victims
- Provide fair access to housing
- Stop employment discrimination
- Expand access to justice
- End sexual harassment
- Secure equal pay

As an intersectional feminist, I found it thrilling to work on WEA, a bill that finally addressed gender discrimination and inequity as an issue of multiple oppressions. Many activists and social change agents eventually come to the conclusion that it's a lack of a wide range of resources that keeps the poor from gaining wealth over time.

"Intersectionality" is the idea that discrimination, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, and classism, do not act independently of one another but actually weave together to create a system of injustice and social inequality. In order to create an equal society, all forms of oppression should be addressed and dismantled. Doing all this -- tackling the roots of poverty -- seems an insurmountable goal. It means we have to dismantle a structure that is fundamentally patriarchal, sexist, racist, ablest, classist, ageist, and on and on.

WEA will not bring down the whole system. But it tackles the issue of gender inequality as multi-faceted, touching many issues that we have tried to legislate for years and, in some cases, decades.

The fight for women's rights has been long. It is far from over. The fight for gender equality will not be over after we pass WEA. However, WEA is an enormous step in the right direction. Intersectional feminism demands that all experiences of oppression and discrimination are inextricably linked to gender equality. While WEA certainly does not address all experiences of oppression and discrimination, it shines light on issues that many had not thought of, or didn't think still existed. It links the issue of housing fairness to the issue of pregnancy discrimination to the issue of human trafficking. It links people and communities.

We did not win WEA in 2013, but we celebrated many successes. In just six months, we built a statewide coalition of over 850 organizations, businesses, nonprofits, and groups. We built localized steering committees and coalitions across the state. In the Finger Lakes region, which includes Rochester and surrounding counties, we had over 50 coalition members and a strong steering committee. Metro Justice joined the steering committee with the Genesee Valley Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood of Western and Central NY, Greater Rochester National Organization for Women, YMCA of Rochester



KaeLyn Rich at the WEA Rally last June. Photo by Annette Dragon

and Monroe County, Alternatives for Battered Women, and the League of Women Voters of Rochester Metropolitan Area, and the Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation to lead the local fight.

We held rallies. We collected petition signatures. We built social media campaigns. We staged visibility demonstrations. We went to legislators' offices in district and in Albany. We brought a busload of folks to Albany to rally and demand passage. We wrote letters-to-the-editor and op-eds and held press conferences. WEA was in the news, locally and statewide. If you were engaged in any type of activism in Rochester, you knew about WEA.

The very last day of the NYS legislative session, we came (Continued page 6)

Metro Justice, Inc.

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Founded in 1965, Metro Justice, an affiliate of Citizen Action of New York, is Rochester's leading grassroots, member-driven, progressive organization working for social and economic justice. When we join together to demand a more fair and just society, our individual voices are louder, our efforts more effective, our power greater.

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 Dignified Retirement
 Education
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 Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA)

Metro Justice Council meets on the third Monday of the month at 7pm. Meetings are open to the public. If you would like to address Council, please contact Sami Sheehan at 325-2560 or sami@metrojustice.org.

organizing director's report



Jim Bearden speaking with the local media in solidarity with fast food workers on strike.

Fight for 15 to Solve Rochester's Poverty

By Colin O'Malley

In mid-December the Rochester Area Community Foundation and ACT Rochester released a report that to many in the Rochester-area wasn't particularly surprising. The report states that Rochester is the 5th poorest city in the country. Rochester is the 2nd poorest city among comparably sized cities in the US. It's also the city with the third highest concentration of extremely poor neighborhoods.

Bryan Hetherington from Empire Justice, at their press conference made one of the most important points. He reminded everyone in the room that poverty wasn't simply an accident, but the result of concrete decisions and a structurally created reality. This shouldn't surprise anyone when they look at the geographic spread of poverty, finding the top impoverished cities largely in the Rust Belt. Might past trade policy and anti-union hysteria have an impact on poverty?

While the national poverty rate stands at around 14%, the Rochester rate is 31% - more than double the national average. But when we look at employment, Rochester's unemployment rate is barely higher than the national average. This tells a

pretty obvious story: people are working, but in poverty jobs.

Luckily there are answers to this problem: unions. Over the last few decades major structural decisions have been made to weaken unions and their ability to organize new workers. Helping to bring millions of new low-wage workers into unions is the linchpin to reducing poverty.

Right now, thousands of fast food workers in cities throughout the country are showing us how it's done. These workers are going out on strike demanding \$15/hr and a union. That victory would be a giant leap forward in reducing poverty and solving massive wealth inequality.

Maybe it's time to start thinking about how Metro Justice can help that fight to win in Rochester? The RACF's report would say that victories like this are overdue here. ■

GROW TO WIN

About seven years ago, on a typically overcast day in Rochester, I was in Webster, along with Jon Greenbaum and others going door-to-door and encouraging residents to write to their local county legislator to have them approve a law that would require the testing for lead before housing units could be rented. As a RCSD teacher, I had seen firsthand the devastating effects of high lead levels on children's ability to learn and to concentrate.

It was my first real Metro Justice action, but not my last. It was the kind of thing that Metro Justice does: work on an issue that may be ignored by others but has a great impact on many. We won that fight, getting the county to approve the needed regulations. There have been many other fights, efforts and campaigns: work against wars, in support of Social Security, efforts in solidarity with our union brothers and sisters, and campaigns to fund education at higher and more equitable levels.

For nearly 50 years, Metro Justice has been doing this work. Quietly at times, louder at others. We are able to do this work because we have the resources like an office, staff, and technology that keep us organized and move us forward in the Fight for Economic Justice.

We have these things because we are supported by close to 700 members. But we want to do more, and we want to last another 50 years. We want to hire more staff, use better technol-

ogy, and increase our resources.

In order to grow, we have goal to reach 1,000 members by our 50th birthday (next year). It seems like a big goal doesn't it? I have good news, you can help us. I have one task for you:

1. Become a member. Becoming a dues-paying member helps us remain viable keeps you connected to Rochester's Progressive Grassroots Organization through our online updates and quarterly newsletter. Contribute a minimum of \$30 dollar dues today.

2. Gets others to join. Are you already a member? I challenge you to recruit one of your friends/family members/co-workers and get them to

join Metro Justice. After you are finished reading this month's newsletter, give this to the person you have in mind. You'll be surprised how many of your friends and relatives haven't heard of us! If everyone one of our members recruited just one new member, we would double in size!

Thank you so much for your continued support! We are excited to continue our membership drive throughout the year. **If you would like join us and reach out to more than just your contacts, go to: metrojustice.org and sign up to join our membership outreach committee!**

~ Paula Hansen

Grow to Win!

Yes! I want to Join Metro Justice and support the important work it does.

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Who told you about us? _____

If you would like your contribution to support our campaigns and lobbying work, make checks payable to "Metro Justice." If you would like your contribution to be tax-deductible, please make check payable to "Metro Justice Education Fund", then send to:

Metro Justice Membership
167 Flanders Street, Rochester, New York 14619



campaigns and task forces



Catherine Lennon owns her home at last! Photo by Wanda Alicea.

Victory for Catherine Lennon!

By Jake Allen

On November 15th, Rochester's housing rights movement won an enormous victory as Bank of America conceded completely to the demands of Catherine Lennon, a widowed grandmother, and relisted the deed to her home back in her name—without a mortgage.

Lennon, whose husband passed away unexpectedly in 2008, left her without a will and their mortgage in legal limbo. After five years of fighting against various banks and brokers, Take Back the Land and Metro Justice developed a strategy of mass mobilization, eviction blockades, and community organizing that brought Bank of America, one of the most notorious recipients of government money during the bank bailout, to its knees. Lennon's case caught national attention, former Obama Administration official Van Jones called Lennon "the Rosa Parks of the foreclosure crisis," and the strategy developed by TBTL became the model for much of the ongoing eviction defenses across the country—creating a national movement.

What this victory proves is the potential for strong movements to force even the most powerful institutions in our society, institutions like Bank of America, to yield to the demands of poor and working people. We can build strong movements like this only by the consistent work of an organized, committed people. Metro Justice is committed to Housing as a Human Right—bringing together the homeless, the landless, the renters, into an organization that can harness our collective power to fight for our common future. If you are interested in joining us in our Housing is a Human Right Campaign, contact Colin at Colin@metro-justice.org.

Racism vs. Equity: the How and Why

By Pat Mannix

In December 2013, the Rochester Area Community Foundation and ACT Rochester released a report outlining the devastating statistics of poverty in the nine county Greater Rochester areas. The study revealed that Rochester is the second poorest among comparably-sized cities in the US, with the

third highest concentration of extremely poor neighborhoods. The facts were assembled using 2010 census data and setting bar for "poverty" at those living below the government poverty level, or \$23,550 in 2013 for a family of four. This figure is very low in actuality.

The chart showing the breakdown of who is poor by race shows clearly that we are not post-racial. The percentage for Blacks is 34% and Latinos is 33%, compared with a 10% ratio for Whites. There are many reasons for these discrepancies, and they have long histories in our community and nation. While current economic conditions always play a part in poverty, for communities of color there is an added dimension in the institutional racism that can be traced back to the founding of US society.

It is important that we learn how the effects of institutional racism have contributed to today's statistics. We need to understand how historical legislation and discrimination led to current inequities. We need to learn how people of color were shut out of post-WWII programs that led to the growth of the white middle class and subsequent white suburban flight. We need to examine how the issues of urban education, incarceration, unemployment, transportation, housing, safety, health care, and food insecurity create insurmountable barriers to escaping poverty, generation after generation.

In these days of New Year's Resolution, Metro Justice Members can pledge to learn more about institutional racism in our Rochester community. In our Racial Justice workshop, we examine the how and why of racial disparities. We also look at steps to overcome them and achieve equity. If we are to build a better Rochester, we must examine and change the things that hold us back. In our next Racial Justice workshop on February 22 from 9AM to 5PM, we examine the how and why of racial disparity. We will also look at steps to overcome them and achieve equity. Pre-registration is required and you can sign up by calling 469-8249 or e-mailing me at girafepm@aol.com. Or call us to conduct a session for a group you belong to. We guarantee you will be glad you did.

Reformist or Evolutionary Toward Single Payer or Medicare for All?

By Bill McCoy

While the battle over the Affordable Care Act goes on, health care consortia have quietly developed across a broad spectrum of public institutions, mainly school districts. There are 26 school districts, 17 parochial schools, 4 private schools and 13 colleges or satellites in Monroe County. Seventeen of those districts and 2 BOCES have joined a consortium and saved \$67 million on their health care premiums starting in 2009.

It is a wonder that all the educational institutions have not enthusiastically joined the consortium. According to the website of the Monroe County School Board Association, the savings are attributable to pooling of resources, purchasing leverage, and spreading the risk among a larger pool of people, all of which argue for an expansion of the concept into a universal health care system ("single payer" or "Medicare for All"). The downside of a consortium is that private for-profit insurance must still be purchased or an insurance company must be hired to administer a self-insured program (at minimal cost) or the administration must be borne by the consortium.

According to the Monroe County Council of Governments website, only eight of the 20 towns, 9 villages, and the city have joined their health care consortium in spite of the \$5.1 million savings (8%) to be realized over 3 years. Again, it is a wonder that all the municipalities have not enthusiastically joined, even though the Rochester Housing Authority and the town of Victor in Ontario County joined!

One of the battles over the ACA is the unfair treatment for multi-employer health insurance plans. These plans provide continuous insurance for workers switching jobs or during unemployment. This is another argument for "Medicare for All." The battle is over one of the details of the act that taxes benefits of union plans while it subsidizes the benefits of non-union workers, creating a significant disadvantage for union businesses. This disadvantage goes away with "Medicare-for-All".

Is "Medicare for All" such a threat to the "1%" because of the loss of their ill-gained profits, or does it signify something deeper about human rights and the extension of equal access to education, housing, jobs, and economic and political rights?

If you want to learn more about Single Payer healthcare and would like the Healthcare is a Human Right committee to present at one of your groups or organizations, please call the office (585-325-2560) or email action@metrojustice.org.

Rice and Beans Dinner Date: Hold the Coke

By Bob Kaiser

ROCLA's annual Rice and Beans dinner is planned for Friday, March 14th at Gates Presbyterian Church.

ROCLA will present the International White Dove award to Ray Rogers, who has directed the Campaign to Stop Killer Coke since 2003. This cam-

paign seeks to hold bottlers and subsidiaries in Colombia and Guatemala accountable for acts of violence against union leaders and their families.

The Rochester Labor Council will receive the Local White Dove Award in recognition of its long-standing commitment to equal rights for all workers in this country and around the world.

ROCLA's monthly meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month at the Downtown Presbyterian Church, 121 N. Fitzhugh St. The February 5th meeting will feature Nelson Carasquillo, who will discuss "Food Justice and Immigration." Early 2014's focus is immigration issues and the need for reform.

Dignified Retirement Next Stage of Activism

By Jo Cummings

The Dignified Retirement for All committee has been hard at work all winter fighting for the expansion of Social Security Benefits. A few

Ciudad Hermana



"Well project in the community of San Fernando, outside of El Sauce, Nicaragua. Pictured is Ciudad Hermana member, Tim McMahon, second from left, and Ciudad Hermana Nicaraguan staff person, Martha Rojas, next to the two gentlemen. CH partnered with the Nicaraguan NGO El Porvenir, to fund and build this well, in a very remote rural area. Note "Hermanamiento Rochester"...sister city...on the well."

months ago, Committee Members met with Senator Schumer's office, urging Schumer to co-sponsor bills introduced in the past year that would protect and strengthen Social Security. An aide subsequently noted the Senator would not be cosponsoring bills that expand Social Security.

As a response, the committee has been working on a petition drive to push for expanded Social Security benefits. MJ members joined us for a petition day at the Rochester Public Market in November and again at the Alternative Fair in December where we talked with many people who agreed to sign our petition cards that demand SS be protected and expanded. As extended outreach, we mailed petition cards to our members and asked if they could get friends, family, and/or coworkers to sign. Thank you to all who have sent back signed cards. If you still have cards and would like to send them in, please do so soon, because we want these to get to Senator Schumer.

Next month, we are presenting our Dignified Retirement for All presentation: "Social Security: Past, Present, and Future," at OASIS (259 Monroe Square, Rochester, NY 14607) on February 12th at 1:30 pm. If you are interested in the presentation or would like the committee to present at one of your groups or organizations, please call the office (585-325-2560) or email action@metrojustice.org. ■



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Zora Gussow and Crescenzo Scipione, a third generation Metro Justice member, at the WEA rally in May 2013.

(Upgrade continued from page 1)
close. The Assembly passed the 10-point bill. The Senate passed their own versions of the 10-point agenda as 10 stand-alone bills, passing 9 of the 10 on that last day. Unfortunately, WEA did not pass.

On January 8, 2014, the NYS legislative session began. We will continue to fight for the WEA. Our coalitions have stuck together and grown stronger over the session break. And it's time for New York to upgrade.

We need an upgrade because pregnant workers can be pushed out of their jobs for requesting a modest, temporary accommodation. Common examples of appropriate modifications for pregnant workers include requesting a stool to sit on, more frequent restroom breaks, or an altered uniform. When employers fire pregnant workers, it causes economic instability at a time when families can least afford it. Many pregnant women have to make a choice they should never have to make while preparing to grow their family—choose between their health and their paychecks. Three-quarters of women entering the workforce will be pregnant and employed at some point in their lives.

We need an upgrade because women deserve equal pay for equal work. **Women make up almost half the workforce but earn far less than men: on average women's earnings are 84% of men's; for Latina and Black women, the figures are 55% and 66%, respectively.** Men are 32 times more likely to become a CEO of a Fortune 500 company than women. In 2009, the earnings of women

one year after college graduation was 82% of what their male counterparts were paid.

We need an upgrade because women are more likely to be living in poverty. Twenty-six percent of households headed by women in New York live below the poverty level. Poverty rates are highest for families headed by single women, particularly if they are black or Latina. In 2010, 31.6 percent of households headed by single women were poor, compared to 15.8 percent of households headed by single men and 6.2 percent of married-couple households that lived in poverty.

We need an upgrade because landlords often refuse to accept tenants with housing vouchers, the vast majority of whom are women. Female headed households receive 76% of all "housing choice vouchers," and 71% of public housing units are occupied by female-headed households. More than 70% of housing discrimination cases filed in New York State on the basis of sex are filed by women. Since January 1, 2005, of 1,060 housing cases were filed, 772 were filed by women. Additionally, landlords can legally refuse to rent to families escaping domestic violence, 85% of whom are women.

There are too many barriers holding women back. It is time for an upgrade. If you agree, email action@metrojustice.org to join the Metro Justice WEA campaign committee. We need you to help us upgrade NY. ■

Deep-six the Trans-Pacific Partnership

By Jack Bradigan Spula

Our ruling classes have impeccable timing.

The latest reminder: As they throw a 20th anniversary party for the North American Free Trade Agreement, they've proffered the gift of a NAFTA-like newbie, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

And the TPP will continue an anything-but-grand tradition.

Look at what NAFTA has wrought: since the day the agreement went into effect – January 1, 1994 – it's hurt working people from one end of the continent to the other. Our economic overseers see the damage as “progress,” of course, with megabucks changing hands and brisk crossborder commercial traffic snarling the bridges, etc. But the underlying realities contradict the boosterism.

The Washington-based watchdog group Public Citizen notes, for example, that NAFTA has resulted in a \$181 billion trade deficit with partners Canada and Mexico, the net loss of a million US jobs, numerous factory relocations and closures, and an agricultural trade imbalance that's severely harmed Mexico's (and our) small farmers. What's more, the deal has provided rich soil for crossborder operators who disdain the public interest – and never have met a loophole they didn't like.

“We cannot have any more such deals” as NAFTA, said Public Citizen's Lori Wallach in observing the 20th anniversary.

But corporate Washington begs to differ. Hence the TPP.

Public Citizen is not alone in calling this new creature a “NAFTA on Steroids” – but in today's world of genetic engineering and unaccountable production practices, the cliché takes on a new dimension.

For one thing, TPP, though it began with just a dozen signatories and negotiating members, could expand to include most nations on the Pacific Rim from Australia the whole way around to Chile. And, coupled with similar agreements either in effect or under consideration, TPP would be a huge advance in con-

structing a 21st Century global architecture for corporate dominance and popular disempowerment.

How could this be? Part of the answer lies in our inability to answer fully. TPP is being stitched together behind not just closed, but procedurally locked doors. And were it not for WikiLeaks and other whistleblowers, the veil of secrecy would be more like a lead shield. But what we do know gives us plenty of reasons to demand that the deal be shredded.

Same goes for future “partnerships” of this type.

Says economist Dean Baker of the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research: “These deals are... primarily about putting in place a structure of regulation that will over-ride national and sub-national governmental bodies. In some cases, such as with intellectual property protections, these regulations are 180 degrees at odds with free trade. They will raise prices and reduce the flow of goods and services.”

Baker continues: “In other cases, the regulations will likely restrict the ability to impose legitimate health, safety, and environmental regulations. For example, they may make it more difficult to regulate fracking to ensure that oil and gas companies don't pollute groundwater. They may also make it more difficult to impose restrictions that would have prevented the sort of chemical spills that have denied much of West Virginia drinking water [this January]. These deals may also limit the ability of regulators to rein in the financial sector to prevent the types of abuses that fed the housing bubble and led to the financial crisis.”

Things like TPP do create winners, of course. It goes without saying that the “defense” industry would benefit under the terms of such a deal. But those who control valuable intellectual property could hit the jackpot, too.

One solid fear is the effect TPP would have on the global costs of pharmaceuticals. Big Pharma surely has an interest in keeping drug prices well above what R&D or production costs could justify. That's Capitalism 101. But such machinations can force people in need of life-saving medications to do without – and can prevent competitors, especially in the Developing World, from producing low-cost substitutes or generics.

Recently, Senator Max Baucus (D-Montana), notorious for his trashing of single-payer and the “public option” during the pre-passage politicking over Obamacare, joined a House colleague in introducing “Fast Track” legislation

for TPP. Fast-tracking, just one dubious hanger-on from the Nixon era, is the perfect complement to “free trade” deals: in the name of efficiency and effectiveness, it takes power from the people and leaves things in the hands of the executive branch and “negotiators” drawn from the usual elites.

Thankfully, at this writing it looks like fast-track for TPP is stalling out. Too many Congresspeople have steered very wide of the bill.

But as the saying goes in the world of gambling, “Hey, you never know!” Senate veteran Baucus has announced he won't seek another term, but Barack Obama has nominated him to be the next ambassador to China, which initially was stand-offish but is now showing some interest in TPP.

And when it comes to trade issues, China is even more super-sized than the Baucus ego. Thus the old drill: contact your reps, then join Metro-Justice in fast-tracking TPP into Davy Jones' Locker. ■

Metro Justice Campaign Priorities

Health Care: Because we believe that every person should have access to quality, affordable health care, we are working with our partners across the state to get a single payer system of health care adopted in New York State.

Housing: Because we believe that housing is a human right and that people should not be punished for Wall Street's unscrupulous practices, we are fighting the foreclosure crisis by demanding that the City of Rochester change its policies that enable big banks to put people out of their homes.

Education: Because all students have the right to quality public education that serves them and their communities, we are rebuilding our campaign to fight for meaningful progressive reform of the Rochester City School District.

Dignified Retirement: Because we believe that every person has a right to a safe and secure livelihood after retirement, we are developing a new campaign to protect Social Security and fight for Dignified Retirement for all!

Racial Justice: Because we believe that poverty and structural racism are interwoven in our society, combating institutional racism is a central part of our fight for economic justice.



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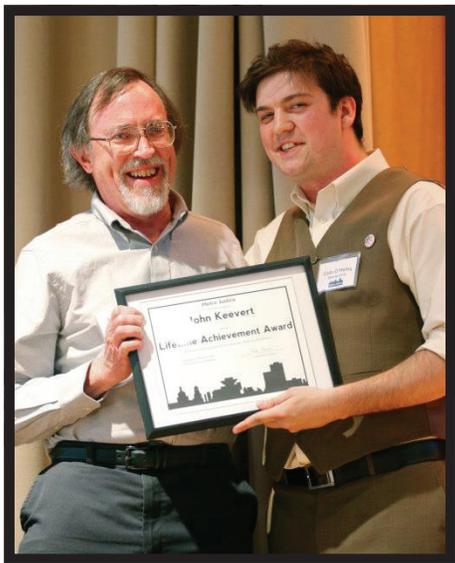
Grow! Join Us

This year, we need you to help us in the largest membership drive in Metro Justice history. Email Action@MetroJustice.org to learn how you can talk to your neighbors and build Metro Justice.



Listen! Speaker's Bureau

Do you want MJ to come to speak to your community group? Email Action@MetroJustice.org to arrange a presentation on Social Security, Healthcare, or Racial Justice.



Eat! Save the Date

The Metro Justice Annual Dinner will take place at Temple B'rith Kodesh on Sunday, May 4. For more information on tickets and sponsorships, please contact Sami Sheehan at sami@metrojustice.org.