

BCR REPORTS

A Publication of the
Social Welfare Action Alliance

Volume XIII, Number 1

March 2002

MY DINNER WITH ENRON

By Robert Fisher

(First printed in the January 27, 2002 Hartford Courant)

I am less sympathetic than most people as to the pain Enron executives have foisted on their employees. The Enron middle managers I met one night prided themselves on keeping at bay the very government regulators who might have saved their pensions.

A few years ago, when I was still teaching at the University of Houston, I was invited to participate in a "Great Conversations" fundraiser. People largely from the business community would pay to have dinner and conversation with a faculty expert. At my table, we were to talk about "community in Houston." I was facilitating a discussion with eight mid-level executives from Enron, all affluent, college-educated, pleasant and, as it turned out, the most narrow-minded group I've ever had the chance to talk with about social problems and public issues.

They believed and uttered the most conservative clichés. Their roots spanned from Utah to the United Kingdom, but they put forward what seemed an inflexible party line: On the subject of poverty, they asserted that poor people were poor because of their own failings. What distinguished the poor from the affluent was that the latter were risk-takers. If the poor were risk-takers,

they wouldn't be poor.

Oh, really? What risks do the upper middle class take that compare to living in a slum or to strategizing each day about making ends meet, protecting children, battling illness without health care?

These Enron executives also argued that there was no role for the public sector except in national defense. Look at the postal service, they said, and the public schools, public libraries and public parks: The public sector was corrupt, inefficient and without incentive. An unimpeded private sector could do everything

better, from running prisons to delivering mail, from schooling children to making national parks profitable.

I was stunned – not by the conservative arguments, which I'd heard before, but by the uniformity of the managers' voices. Their narrow view of the world left no room for other ideas, even moderate ones, about the need in capitalist societies for even a modest role for the public sector, not to mention public regulation of the private sector.

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Editor's Note:

The last newsletter announced the SWAA Steering Committee's decision to replace our annual conference for 2002 with regional "teach-ins" focused on ending poverty. Local SWAA chapters around the country will sponsor these events. The teach-ins will help to address the pressing domestic policy issues surrounding TANF reauthorization, globalization and the future of Social Security. We invite you to join the efforts of your SWAA chapter, or – if there is no local chapter – initiate some *version* of a teach-in in your area (an action as "small" as a video viewing and discussion or an op. ed. piece in your local newspaper can be very effective in getting welfare and poverty into the public discourse in your community). In *this* issue of the newsletter you will find updates from SWAA chapters that are planning teach-in events in the upcoming months. You'll also find some valuable organizing tools, which will help assist you in getting started in your community. We recognize that we cannot engage in these kinds of actions without building alliances with local and national grassroots organizations. Our hope is that these teach-ins will increase SWAA's visibility, build membership, generate activism, and most importantly, create new opportunities for us to stand as allies with those who are most victimized during these unsettled times.

MY DINNER WITH ENRON, *continued*

With daily revelations on the continuing debacle at Enron, not to mention the external threat we face from fanatical religious fundamentalism abroad, that evening seems even more haunting in retrospect. I am horrified by the economic disaster perpetrated by Enron both on the people of Houston and on the world. I am horrified that what seems like an offshore pyramiding scheme financed and influenced so much of American politics. But I am not surprised it all started in Houston.

Houston is the classic free-enterprise city. The fourth largest city in the nation, it sees itself as a zoning-free Mecca for developers. It has the worst air pollution in the United States – in response to which local business executives and former Gov. Bush proposed letting oil companies self-regulate their worst sources of pollution. Of course, free enterprise also means trying to cut business costs and risks. So in fact Houston owes much of its economic success to big government projects, such as the Houston Ship Channel, one of the busiest waterways in the United States; NASA's Johnson Space Center; and most recently, the Houston baseball (Enron Field) and football-rodeo (Reliant) stadiums.

But economic fundamentalism is not limited to Houston. Economic fundamentalism – contemporary laissez-faire economics – is seen worldwide as common sense ever since the Reagan/Thatcher era. Like any fundamentalism, the concept is dangerous because it is too simplistic. You don't have to be John Maynard Keynes to understand the essential place in our economic life for public regulation and initiatives. You don't have to be Karl Marx to understand the need in our post-Sept. 11 world for a vision of public life more complex than simply serving the bottom line.

Best-case scenario? Enron's collapse will break the economic

fundamentalist stranglehold on our cities and nation. Now, that would be a great conversation.

– *Robert Fisher is a professor and the director of the urban and community studies program at the University of Connecticut. His most recent book, "Settlement Houses Under Siege: The Struggle to Sustain Community Organizations in New York City," co-authored with Michael Fabricant, recently published from Columbia University Press.*

HOW TO ORGANIZE A SWAA CHAPTER:

"How to Organize a SWAA Chapter" organizing packets are available by contacting Mel at Communication Services at (518) 438-2826, 50 Colvin Avenue, Albany, NY 12206. The contents of the packets include such things as posters, brochures, book order forms, recent newsletters, copy of by-laws, names of SWAA organizers from the Steering Committee who will help you, and much more! Allow 4 weeks for delivery. ■

Technology Notes

Part II of my technology series will be in our next newsletter as this issue focuses on SWAA's Teach-Ins across the country. However, a few news notes and reminders from SWAA's Technology front.

NEW Website Address: www.swaaction.org Please change your old address on your websites, course syllabi, and your bookmarks to find the new site more easily. Plan to check this site for useful information for planning and hosting your area Teach-Ins.

Usage Notes: Before changing to the new address, we had almost 500 hits to the site, started in July 2001, without this list being promoted to the wider Internet. Please recommend our site for links to other organizations and please comment if there is something OUR site could do for you in your progressive human service work!

E-mail List: Our email list is called *bertha-swaa* and is hosted by Yahoo! Groups, currently for free. You can subscribe by sending an email (that is registered with Yahoo! at their site www.groups.yahoo.com) to: bertha-swaa-subscribe@yahoogroups.com You will receive a confirmation message with additional list information. We can hold live Chats, post photos, conduct Polls, read Archived messages, and include databases using this site. We have several Bookmarks already posted. **Usage Notes:** Our list, started in 2000, supports around 85 to 90 subscribers at any time, about 10% of who are not members of SWAA. Conversely, about 35% of SWAA membership subscribes to the list.

– *Michel Coconis, web/list editor, michel4justice@yahoo.com*

Please forward all contributions for the next *BCR Reports* to:

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Letters to the editor, essays, news items, BCRS Chapter activities, cartoons, etc., are all welcome!

Please note: The deadline for materials submitted for inclusion in the next *BCR Reports* is **Sept. 15, 2002.**

CHAPTER UPDATES:

Atlantic City/South Jersey: The South Jersey SWAA Chapter is in its early stages, and is planning activities that will be announced soon. If you live in this area and wish to participate, contact: South Jersey SWAA Chapter – Laura Rodgers (609) 204-2264 or: ldrogers@csionline.net

Ohio: We are in the planning/meeting stages of planning some form of action and/or teach-in on the issues of economic justice with other progressives in our community. New living wage initiatives and other labor-related events are happening as well as interest in forming a new Columbus area initiative to focus on poverty, justice, and welfare issues. This group, forming with SWAA, NOW, and the Community Organizing Center, is planning some meetings with related groups to begin dialogue and from there we expect plans for more formal Teach-Ins to occur. We have a long-time member, **Keith Kilty**, who has been making news on the anti-war front, co-hosting SWAA sponsored teach-ins at OSU, at the tune of nearly two per week since the beginning of October! In addition, some basic organizing identifying our members, writing to them for contributions of funds and/or participation will occur and efforts to connect the area social work, social justice, and related schools and departments is a focus. Members **Alfred Joseph** and **Michel Coconis** are planning for a local teach-in at Miami University that will likely include a speaker and a film/panel discussion presentation targeted to the MU and broader community.

Philadelphia: Over the past several months, members of the Philadelphia SWAA Chapter/Underground Railroad-Temple Depot have participated in a variety of events to educate ourselves and our communities about economic human rights, building a movement to end poverty, and the roles that SWAA and social workers can play in building that movement. We will be continuing to work with member organizations of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign and SWAA to host more teach in events. We are really excited about the possibilities the teach in gives us to build SWAA and the movement to end poverty!

We have used some of our weekly chapter meetings to do "educationals" for ourselves as well as potential new members of our SWAA chapter. Some of the topics have included economic human rights, the history and organizing models of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union and the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, and reports on the various projects that individual SWAA members have undertaken. Future topics will include welfare reform and child welfare issues.

Several Philadelphia SWAA members have been working with PA State Rep Lawrence Curry to develop a legislative initiative on economic human rights. A joint resolution will be introduced in PA's House of Representatives and Senate calling for hearings on the feasibility of incorporating the principles set forth in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into state law and policy. The "Curry resolution" has been taken up by the NASW Chapter (chaired by one of our members) and is the

primary focus of the annual NASW lobbying day in April. SWAA members developed the resolution, the supporting documents, and teach-in materials. These are being made available through the URR/SWAA office, the NASW Chapter office, and through a series of teach-ins around the state. SWAA members also obtained co-sponsorship of the resolution and, recently, were joined in this effort by the NASW Chapter's lobbying firm.

Once the resolution is introduced and sent to committee, SWAA will be working with the committee staff to set up the required hearings around the state. Whatever the fate of the resolution, these hearings will provide an opportunity for us to ensure that the voices of people living in poverty are heard in the state, that they have an opportunity to come together around their common needs and rights, and that they and their allies continue to build their unity through the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign.

Members of our chapter were also involved with the premier presentation of the Economic Human Rights Theatre, "Corner Wars", which was presented at Temple University in December 2001. This play, written by a member of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, portrayed the realities of the drug war in poor communities, and featured a discussion between cast members and the audience – following the play – about the relationships between the "drug war" and the war on the poor here and abroad.

SWAA members have also participated in educational events sponsored by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union over the past several months, including the Drug War Reality Tours and the KWRU Movie Nights, which combine dinner, movies, and political discussion. The Drug War Reality Tour exposes the realities of the drug war and its impact on poor communities. SWAA members have connected organizers of the tour with NASW-PA chapter, and NASW is going to begin offering continuing education credits for social workers who take the tour.

Another educational opportunity was presented by a very unfortunate, even dangerous turn of events. One of our members reported on her application for social work license renewal, as she is required to do, that she was arrested and charged with "defiant trespass" and other misdemeanors in connection with the performance of civil disobedience with homeless families. A few months later she was notified that the Attorney General had decided not to attempt denial of her license, but they would reserve the right to reopen the file. The chilling effect of this letter and the surrounding procedures are evident. Once again we were able to use our alliance with the NASW Chapter office (Really! Can this be happening???) to take up the issue: The Executive Director communicated the situation to all other chapters with a note re the down side of licensing; the Professional Standards Committee is outraged and consulting with the ACLU and other attorneys about legal strategies to stop this; the member involved will write or be interviewed for a series on clinical practice, social action, and economic human rights for the chapter newsletter.

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You might be wondering if we have plans for any “traditional” teach-ins, and the answer is “yes.” In addition to the campus-based sessions we will be doing on the “Curry resolution,” members will be presenting at the state NASW conference in March. No, we are not deluding ourselves about NASW – or legislative remedies, for that matter – but we are taking advantage of an altogether too rare opportunity in Pennsylvania. If nothing else, we’re learning some new dance steps. But we’re leading.

LATE BREAKING NEWS!!!! THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IS FROM FRED REAMER ON THE MATTER MENTIONED IN OUR REPORT. . .IT’S HIS RESPONSE TO OUR NASW-PA CHAPTER DIRECTOR’S “ALERT”

I was distressed to hear about the social worker’s experience with the board of licensure. Based on the facts you shared with me, it seems very inappropriate for the board (or a member of its prosecutorial staff) to admonish the social worker about past actions and threaten the social worker with sanctions in the event of future civil disobedience. As you suggest, the social worker’s actions on behalf of the homeless (some form of protest, I’m assuming) were probably consistent with several Code of Ethics standards, e.g., 6.01 (social welfare), 6.02 (public participation), and 6.04 (social and political action). Also, language in the “Purpose” and “Ethical Principles” sections of the code support social workers’ involvement in social action and advocacy.

Of course, one could encounter a problem if a social worker engages in serious crimes in the name of social justice, e.g., participating in the physical assault of public officials or setting a bomb in a public office building. But, there’s a big difference between this form of protest and protest that takes the form of marching within so many feet of a public building or trespassing on private or otherwise restricted property (which may violate an ordinance or statute). I’d want to know more about the form that the social worker’s civil disobedience took, but if it’s more like the latter than the former, I am deeply troubled by the board of licensure’s apparently aggressive response. When we wrote the code (I served as chair of the group), we wanted to encourage social workers to engage in reasonable forms of social action and social justice.

– *Frederic G. Reamer, PhD, professor at the School of Social Work, Rhode Island College. Dr. Reamer has served as a social worker in mental health, correctional, and housing agencies, and in a governor’s office. He was chair of the NASW-Code of Ethics Revision Committee, and he lectures nationally and internationally on the subjects of social work and professional ethics.*

Portland, Maine: As part of the national actions on TANF, in Portland, Maine, the Portland Organization to Win Economic Rights (P.O.W.E.R.) and the University of Southern Maine Department of Social Work, is sponsoring a combined day of mourning and action on March 6th. A panel on poverty and welfare will be highlighted by Diane Dujon and Dottie Stevens from Boston as well as POWER leaders, and Chris Hastedt, attorney for Maine Equal Justice Partners. The panel will be followed by a march and vigil.

Portland, Oregon: The Portland chapter is planning a teach-in in mid-May. The exact date and availability of keynote speakers is not known yet, but the Chapter plans to collaborate with several local organizations around the issues of welfare, poverty and housing. For more information, contact Bill Boyd at bikerbillboyd@hotmail.com.

Rochester: The Rochester SWAA chapter continues to maintain an active membership and work in alliance with the Rochester Poor People’s Coalition and SUNY Brockport students. In October 2001, SWAA co-sponsored the second semi-annual speak-out. This was a forum for poor people to voice their concerns around issues related to welfare, housing, health and education. In November 2001, SWAA, the House of Mercy, the RPPC and Erica King (SUNY Brockport House of Mercy student intern) sponsored a “test run” of a local Reality Tour. The tour was given to Social Work majors at SUNY Brockport to help educate students about poverty in the local community and to give them a picture of what it really is like to be in the shoes of a client. The tour took people to abandoned houses, the offices of the Department of Social Services, the new County jail expansion site, homeless shelters and the abandoned underground subway (where many homeless people live). SWAA hopes to continue the Reality Tour as a way to educate and build alliances around the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign.

On February 8th, the Rochester Poor People’s Coalition, SWAA, and several local anti-globalization groups, sponsored a very successful rally downtown in solidarity with the March for Our Lives organized by the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign and KWRU in Salt Lake City during the Olympics. Speakers included folks from the RPPC and EMPOWER welfare rights. On the same date our own Melissa Sydor was arrested with four other protesters who carried the lead banner for the March for Our Lives that took place during the Olympics in Salt Lake City. All of these events were covered well by the Rochester media.

The Chapter will be sponsoring a local teach-in on May 1st and 2nd. This will be a two-day event on the SUNY Brockport campus and in the community. The Chapter will host Frances Fox Piven, Jen Jones, Fred Newdom, and Willie Baptist. We will also include speakers from local groups: EMPOWER Welfare Rights, Rochester Poor People’s Coalition, Public Interest Law Office and Human Service Workers United. We are including a lunch-time panel on globalization, and in so doing we are excited by the outreach and networking we are accomplishing with many local groups who have been working on issues such as the School of the Americas and problems affecting those in Third World Countries.

Seattle: Since there are several TANF conferences going on in Seattle this Spring, Seattle SWAA is hoping to either sponsor or co-sponsor a Teach-In (or Shout-Out) the end of April as a follow-up to these other conferences on action plans for the bottom-line, hard-core issues of poverty. The Chapter has had positive responses so far but need to do more networking before making concrete plans. Anyone interested in working on the Teach-In can contact Marilyn Moch, Seattle SWAA, MochCIHRI@aol.com.

Southern California Chapter: As of the time the newsletter went to press, there were no specific plans, but this chapter intends to organize some teach-in activities. If interested, please contact Christie Coho, 11080 West Olympic Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90064, (323) 913-0865 or cjcoho@yahoo.com

Washington, D.C.: The Washington, DC Metro Area SWAA Chapter has been up and running again for the past year, participating in and organizing a number of activities.

During the weekend of protests against the war on 9/28/2002, the chapter co-hosted with KWRU A Poor People's Forum with speakers from Poor Peoples' movements in the US and other countries. It was a huge success with over 130 people attending at the Multicultural Service Division clinic in Washington, DC. They watched the Kensington Welfare Rights Union's "Battle for Broad" (about last summer's Republican National Convention), networked and shared ideas about future work. [Photos of the forum and demonstrations are available DCSWAA pages at <http://www.redandgreen.org>.]

As part of our housing work, on Feb. 2nd the chapter gave support, technical assistance (and yummy food!) to an organizing meeting of an emerging local tenants' organization in Takoma Park, MD called United Tenantry. KWRU member Mary Bricker Jenkins was "kidnapped" from the NASW conference by SWAA Marilyn Moch and brought to the meeting to make a surprise guest appearance. Mary gave very needed moral support, encouragement and useful ideas to the group! She spoke briefly about what KWRU as well as about the current demonstrations in Utah. She advised UT on how to connect with national and international networks of like organizations, put the group in touch with an experienced tenant organizer in N.Y.C., and offered trainings from KWRU both by sending representatives to work with UT in its territory as well as hosting UT reps in Philly to work with KWRU. Thanks Mary!

UT has worked for four years as a tenant advocacy group, winning every case, in front of judicial commissions, for the tenants that it represented. UT has also succeeded in composing, introducing, lobbying for, and seeing passed into law, four municipal ordinances in the City of Takoma Park, MD that have strengthened the rights of tenants. As urban removal sweeps our increasingly militarized nation, UT has realized a need to expand its peaceful mission and political tactics. It has much to thank D.C. SWAA for in this effort, not the least of which is the commitment to provide some of its printing needs and to assist local organizers in canvassing and literature distribution in addition to sending a representative to UT's by-law committee as the group prepares to file for 501(c) 3 status. Lauren Voloshen, co-chair of United Tenantry is a member of D.C. SWAA.

D.C. SWAA's upcoming goals include helping organize an area wide forum of tenant and housing organizations. We have been in touch with most of the groups in the area and gotten good feedback and support. [See table of organizations at: <http://users.erols.com/wteague/Housing.htm>]

TEACH-IN TEMPLATE

Name: The Politics of Welfare: (Fill in local issue)

Topic Template:

TANF:

- Globalization
- Health Care
- Downsizing
- Drugs/Prisons
- Economy
- Immigration
- Gender and Race

TANF is presented as the point of departure because reauthorization makes TANF particularly relevant at this time. SWAA acknowledges that poverty elimination is the key fight but also acknowledges that rectification concerns around TANF are an immediate need. The topics listed under TANF are there for local Teach-Ins to use to focus in on an issue that is important locally or to help frame the scope of the Teach In. The subtopics were identified with the intention of making clear that you cannot talk about TANF without including those topics in the conversation.

Teach In Objectives:

- 1) Educate and organize around TANF.
- 2) Provide an impetus for local activism in support of welfare clients.
- 3) Serve as a way to build SWAA membership
- 4) Make money to keep SWAA going.

What the Teach-In Should Look Like:

Each location is free to have their event take whatever form that will be helpful to achieve the above objectives for their area, whether the event is one day, three days or a speaker, a conference, film night or reality tour.

Organizers should be aware that it is a SWAA tradition to work with local grassroots groups and help support a local action at every conference it holds. We hope that the teach-ins will operate in a similar way.

Another important theme that may be incorporated is the idea that the struggle to eliminate poverty is one that affects all people: rich, middle class or poor. This is an important message that can be used in promoting the Teach-In and events to people new to SWAA and reauthorization. Also, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be used as an organizing and educational tool. It shows people that we all have the right to basic human needs, which goes well beyond entitlements.

Things To Do:

Below is a list of Ideas that can help for your Teach- In, serve as a list to give to participants about what they can do after, or serve as organizing tools to build the Teach-In, chapter or organizing around political and economic justice issues.

- 1) Report what local areas are doing to the SWAA National Newsletter.
- 2) Letter campaigns to legislators, local, state and national; provide legislator info and issues to address at events. Set up calling, e-mail, or letter campaigns.

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- 3) Make flyer to advertise next local SWAA meeting. (Have at Teach-In)
- 4) Plan a reality tour, drug tour, day in the life of a welfare recipient tour or a tour that shows the differences between the rich and poor areas of your area.
- 5) Join SWAA and other listserves. Distribute flyer with relevant listserves and web pages.
- 6) Pass out things to do list at Teach-In.
- 7) Plan Movie Night, Film Festival, Potluck.
- 8) Document Human Rights Violations.
- 9) Check out University of the Poor web site.
- 10) Join the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign
- 11) Work with local student groups; labor organizations and grassroots groups.
- 12) Tell 5 people what you learned.
- 13) Join SWAA National and Local.
- 14) Videotape the Teach-In to share, put it on community access, and get local newspapers to interview speakers.
- 15) Use art and music!!!!
- 16) Make handouts from Materials Packet. Materials Packet will be mailed to those who are planning teach-ins to use in planning event. It will have Chapter organizing packet, information on PPEHRC and its calendar of events, SWAA brochures and materials around TANF and the subtopics.

TEACH-IN TOOLS

Getting Your Event Covered in Your Local Media

Now that you've been working on getting people to attend and participate in your event, you now want to get coverage of the teach-in and any other related actions. You want to control as much of the message as possible but recognize the limits of commercial television's goals and our goals. Here are some things you can do to work for the best coverage possible.

What you are doing is newsworthy. We think so and you no doubt do too. Now, you've got to get those who report news to cover your event.

Assign someone or a committee to attend the event and cover it yourself. You can use photographs and interviews for POST-event publicity and for planning for future events. Perhaps photos can be incorporated into printed or electronic materials and interview or observations can be included in public hearings and such following the event. This information can be useful for reports about the event and the outcomes. Reports could be formal for newsletters or less formal in the form of letters to legislators or such (you can use your own imaginations here!). A team photographer is a great task.

Select spokespeople for the event and train them if they are new to being such a representative. These folks will be the media contacts for the event when media

personnel have questions or want to interview on-camera, on-radio or on-line.

Know that your event has to have **broad relevance** for most commercial radio or TV broadcasts but developing a relationship with a reporter in advance can help the chances of your event, even your press conference (if you hold one), being covered.

Timing is everything to members of the media. The event itself might be covered live but it is more likely that press conferences will be either taped with brief interviews for key speakers. This may not be the case if you are featuring a high-profile speaker or panel, for example.

Press Release. A sample press release (NOT to be distributed for real) is included in this newsletter. Your committee can determine to whom you will send the press release. It is wise to plan to send 2 days out and the day before if it starts early or the day of the event if after 12noon. You should still send it early in the day. There are programs that allow you to enter fax numbers and send en masse to a group of media. Even better to make the personal phone call to a reporter or to the assignment desk.

Press Conference or Media Event? For press conferences, which many reporters dread, try to be brief and interesting. This event is preferred because you control more of the message. On the other hand, you might choose to stage a media event in contrast. This will probably occur in those instances where there is a high-profile person or a large action event is also scheduled as part of the teach-in.

Live Call-in shows or taped programming (public access). Committee should identify when/which/where/who of the program and "pitch" it. Working on the pitch is essential here and elsewhere to encourage the coverage. Think of connections to other events, policy decisions, and such to create angles for media to consider. Identify this for both commercial, public, and public access (cable access) channels.

Newspaper Interviews. Developing a relationship with a reporter is a good idea here. If you don't know, identify the reporter(s) covering issues about policy, family, politics, and such in your community and neighborhood papers. You can even write your own "Guest Editorials" for many community papers and should be considered EVEN if your event will include an action and an interview will occur with the journalist.

On-line chats or interviews. New on the scene are live chats where you or your invited speaker can participate in discussions on-line.

Is it a slow news day? When is your event – the morning of a weekday, all day on Saturday? Plan for this and the media's timing for inclusion on TV, radio and print calendars.

PROMOTING YOUR TEACH-IN EVENT

You'll no doubt want to give some thought to how you will promote your Teach-In event. Here we are thinking of how you will "get the word out" to all relevant constituencies for your teach-in events. It is likely you'll be incorporating this into your discussions as you plan, but don't assume it.

Assign someone or a committee the responsibility of making/keeping a "running list" of relevant organizations and constituent participants interested in your event. Social service agencies, universities, grassroots, government representatives, unions, political, and faith-related organizations will likely all come to mind. But, don't forget to go 'deeper'. For example, with universities, explore ALL the possible people, departments and locations to publish your event. There are individuals with whom you may be working but there are usually vast ways to consider such outreach campaigns. Don't forget groups that may seem, at first blush or no blush, unrelated such as gay and lesbian or disability advocacy organizations that may not already be a part of your event planning group. If you are with a large organization, there may be staff or a department such as a press office to assist you with publicity.

Assign someone or a committee to develop a list of community media with relevant contact information. This list can be updated as you plan and can be used for future events. You can pass the list down if your planning group is transitional, such as a student-led group in a social work program.

Think of the various forms of media and communication in your community. Each form has its benefits and matching the method with the constituency is a great challenge. There is word-of-mouth; calling folks; sending personal notes; distributing flyers to be posted in public places, including your event in other organization's newsletters, public distribution at bookstores,

coffee shops, grocery stores, laundromats, barber/beauty shops, medical offices and such; mass mailings to your existing or developing list; local email lists (you might want to get permission or ask a subscriber to send the list for you); your or other organization's websites and community calendars at organizational, community, and media websites.

As you consider the type of media you'll be using, you'll want to consider what **BEFORE-event media coverage** you could get with your local media. Consider neighborhood, university/college, and community newspapers as well as television and radio stations in or serving your community. Your community may have access to public access and may be able to create an audio or video spot for replay on their station. Still other communities have local talk shows where you could spend up to an hour discussing your event and issue there. Determine if your local commercial radio or television stations have "spots" for community events or "About the community" kinds of programming certain days of the week and offer for your event to be discussed (you'll have to work the "angle" for them in all likelihood). Lastly, local universities and colleges often have their own stations or networks and they are valuable resource as well.

Of course, whatever **writing promotional materials** you develop should be carefully proofread and include all relevant information as to title, time, place, location of event, costs, contact name and phone number/email but don't forget your co-sponsors or any contributors you may have made such arrangements with. You want this coalition to build and trust and follow-through is an important part of making that happen.

Be flexible and know your participants and community. Learn from this event for the next. Good planning for this event can be of great assistance for the next.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 2

CONTACT:

Bertha C. Reynolds, Director
Fashion Justice Coalition
123 Social Justice Way
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Phone: 123-456-7890
Email: reynoldsb@fashionpower.com
Web site: www.fashionpower.com

Fashion Justice Coalition to Host World - Renowned Silkworm Advocate as Speaker 3

Zanesville, Ohio—Fashion Justice Coalition will host world-renowned writer and activist, Fred Newdom, at the Peace Action Center, on Tuesday, April 18, 2002 at 7:00pm. Mr. Newdom will speak about the importance of wearing silk undergarments as part of the Justice Coalition's area Education Series. 4

"Wearing the right fashions is an important consideration in organizing today," Mimi Anders, a founding member stated. "We are concerned about the production of such garments by workers and insects alike" she further noted.

Following Mr. Newdom's presentation, coalition members will be marching in their worker- and worm-friendly underwear to Veronica's Secret retail store located at 5th and Market Streets in downtown Zanesville. "As social workers we must stand with the workers and the worms of today" noted Newdom in his recent book, *Workers and Worms of the World Unite*. 5

Before giving his speech, Mr. Newdom will be signing copies of his book with proceeds of the sale of the book to be donated to the Social Welfare Action Alliance, the Peace Center, and the Fashion Justice Coalition.

6

[***Note to SWAA organizers:
Key to numeric codes follow.]

KEY TO SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

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5. You may have an event that is followed by an action. Since a teach-in is an educational event and we look for action, you should include information about the action. **IF**, however, your **ACTION** is the key element, put it first and then describe related events in the 3rd/4th paragraphs.
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<http://www.press-release-writing.com>

Organizing for Economic Human Rights

The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC) has a clear and simple vision – that everyone's economic human rights be secured in this country. Simply put, that means ending poverty and every other form of economic injustice in America. A program to ensure that, however, would have to emerge from a massive movement based in the unity and leadership of the poor, but including people from all segments of society.

This was the pervasive theme of the gathering held in New York City from December 8-10, 2001 called "Social Justice Through Human Rights in the USA." Convened by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (www.KWRU.org) and The Center for Economic and Social Rights (www.CESR.org), the conference brought together many of the forty plus organizational members of the PPEHRC network to consider the challenge of coordinating efforts to pursue a common vision. Most of these organizations are led by people living in poverty, working on a variety of issues, representing a range of organizational styles and tactical preferences.

The meetings began with a consideration of the economic human rights framework and language. In the midst of the "war on the poor" – an opening salvo in a larger assault on everyone's rights – it is helpful to remember that there are standards of economic justice toward which nearly all nations have subscribed. The rights to food, clothing, and shelter; to health care; to education and employment – these and others are affirmed in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which elaborated the rights propounded in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United States, alone among industrialized nations, has refused to ratify the treaty based on the ICESCR. Nevertheless, its provisions are considered customary in international law; as such they provide a powerful

framework for educating, organizing, and building unity among people whose immediate interests might appear to be disparate.

These possibilities were underscored when groups in attendance presented their current work – examples included Florida's Immokalee Workers' Taco Bell Boycott; California's Women's Economic Agenda Project's March for Compassion and Spiritual Renewal; Ohio's Deaf and Deaf-Blind Committee on Economic Human Rights' media and internet advances; Pennsylvania's KWRU housing takeovers, drug war reality tours, and international organizing; Utah's JEDI Women's preparations for the March for Our Lives at the Winter Olympics; the recent formation of POWER, a poor people's action group in Maine; the persistent local actions of the Rochester Poor People's Coalition; the Atlantic City Boardwalk rally that exposed the poverty in the midst of the glitz organized by The South New Jersey Citizen's Action Committee with the Social Welfare Action Alliance.

The major work of the campaign involves groups supporting the work of other groups and all groups undertaking coordinated actions. Upcoming coordinated actions include:

- The March for Our Lives – February 8th, 2002 (opening day of the Olympics) in Salt Lake City
- The Taco Bell Boycott (ongoing) and Truth Tour (February-March 2002)
- A series of nationwide hospital sit-ins demanding the right to health care – Spring 2002
- The Independent Media of the Poor conference – September 2002
- A second national New Freedom bus tour – Fall and Winter 2002
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights Day event – December 10, 2002

There were some skill building

and crosscutting educational sessions as well. The University of the Poor – the educational arm of the PPEHRC – demonstrated some of the ways it could advance the work of the campaign's groups. The Media College, the School of Labor, the Department of Internet Empowerment, the Department of Statistics and Research, The School for Young People and their Allies, the School for Student Organizing, the School for Social Workers, and the School of Theologies all conducted workshops or gave reports on activities and developments. Members of the School of Art and Music ensured that the meetings were punctuated with unifying poetry and music. The University is a community-based, web-centered body through which campaign groups can share experiences and knowledge in the interest of supporting each other's work and building the movement to secure economic human rights. It can be accessed at www.universityofthepoor.org.

Although the leadership of the campaign is clearly drawn from the ranks of the poor, social workers were present and active. The Social Welfare Action Alliance (SWAA) is an organizational member of the PPEHRC and was represented by Mary Bricker-Jenkins. Fred Newdom, SWAA's Chairperson and other delegate to the campaign, was unable to attend, but several other SWAA National Steering Committee members were there. Carrie Young, Philadelphia Chapter, reported on SWAA's "Teach-in" initiative, the many forms the teach-ins have taken and could take, and our hope to collaborate with other campaign groups nationally in this effort. Melissa Sydor attended with the Rochester delegation, David Wagner with the Maine group, Laura Rogers with the New Jersey contingent. Sara Frohock, who co-founded northern California's A4DC when she was a welfare recipient, is now a social worker and SWAA member; she co-chaired the meeting of the University of the Poor School for Social Workers with the other co-conveners of the school, Laura Rogers and Mary Bricker-Jenkins.

Continued on next page ♦

Organizing for Economic Human Rights, *cont.*

As the movement to end poverty builds, opportunities are available for social workers to participate at the local, regional, and national levels with the members of the network.

For information about groups in your area, contact KWRU at 215-203-1948, Mary Bricker-Jenkins at mbricker@nimbus.temple.edu, or Carrie Young at youngcarrie@hotmail.com

For information about the March for Our Lives, go to www.kwru.org or call 215-203-1945

For information about the Taco Bell Boycott and when the Taco Bell Truth Tour of the USA will be in or near your town, go to www.ciw-online.org or call the Coalition of Immokalee Workers at 941-657-8311

For information about other national coordinated events and the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, contact Cary Beckwith at KWRU, 215-203-1945 or kwru@kwru.org

*— Report submitted by
Mary Bricker-Jenkins*

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1. Author must be an active SWAA member.
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4. Books will be sold to active SWAA members at a discount from the list price.
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6. Submissions will be considered yearly by January 31st.

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The Combined Impact of Welfare Reform, The Recession, and The World Trade Center Attack

By Mimi Abramovitz,

This article was first printed in "Currents," a publication of the New York City Chapter of NASW.

Advocates of the poor around the nation are demanding that Congress "End poverty, not welfare" when it reconsiders federal funding for Temporary Aid To Needy Families (TANF). In 2002. The New York City Chapter of the NASW has called for an end to the five-year welfare time limits, which on December 1, 2001 cost thousands of New York State recipients their federal welfare benefits. As will be seen below, the sagging economy, and the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center have compounded the adverse impact of welfare reform on the lives of the poor.

What Has Welfare Reform Wrought?

The 1996 federal welfare law, popularly known as welfare reform ended the 60-year federal guarantee of cash benefits for the poor. It limited welfare to five years, imposed strict work requirements, regulated family life, and offered the states powerful financial incentives to reduce their welfare rolls. If shrinking the welfare rolls, supplying employers with cheap labor, and stigmatizing single motherhood equals success than the "reformers" can rightly celebrate victory. Since 1993 the welfare caseload fell more than 55 percent, 47 percent in New York City and 39 percent in New York State.

However, if Congress wanted to improve the well being of poor women and children, welfare reform has failed. TANF ended welfare, but not poverty, added to "welfare racism" and interfered with the effective delivery of human services by non-profit agencies. The recession and World Trade Center disaster have exacerbated these pre-9/11 trends.

Ended Welfare, Not Poverty.

While the overall poverty rate fell slightly in 2000, almost 24.7 percent of families headed by a woman lived in poverty. Even with one or more workers, 21.4 percent of people in female-headed families remained poor, more than in 1993. This is especially true in New York whose low-income community did not benefit from the overall economic boom of the 1990s. Although low-wage workers nationally saw their wages rise by 5.6 percent during the decade, the pay for low-wage workers *dropped* by 5.4 percent in New York State and 9.5 percent in the Big Apple. In 1999, the Empire State ranked first among 10 northern industrial states for its high poverty and unemployment rates.

Not surprisingly, former recipients with jobs in New York and around the nation report that they cannot pay for food, rent, and medicine, that they skip meals because the cupboards are bare. Yet they tell us that welfare workers do not inform them that their below-poverty wages, leave them eligible for Food Stamps and Medicaid. The rolls of both programs have plummeted. Food pantries and homeless shelters report that the demand for service is great that they have to turn people away. Meanwhile the average incomes of the richest 20% were 20 times greater than that of the poorest 20% in New York City and 14% time greater in the State. "Welfare Racism"

The racial unevenness of welfare's caseload decline has exposed what some now call "welfare racism." An Associated Press survey found that white women exited welfare *faster* than women of color in 14 out of 16 states

and that in 33 out of 42 states, white recipients exited welfare in *greater numbers* than their Black and Latino counterparts. From 1994 to 1999, while the proportion of white families on welfare nationwide *fell* from 37.4 to 30.5 percent the blacks and Latina proportions *rose* respectively from 36.9 to 38.3 percent and from 20.1 to 24.4 percent. Gooden and other researchers attribute the changed composition of the welfare rolls to the apparent racial bias of welfare department caseworkers and the discriminatory hiring practices of local employers. Both groups treated recipients with similar welfare and employment backgrounds differently. Interestingly, the same discriminatory operated in the early 1940s; leaving more blacks than white on the Depression-era WPA work relief rolls. **Non-Profit Agency Services to the Poor: In Jeopardy.**

A rarely acknowledged impact of welfare is its impact of the human service delivery system. A NASW study, funded by the United Way and directed by Mimi Abramovitz, recently found that welfare has seriously limited the capacity of non-profit human services agencies to do their best for low-income communities. Welfare reform's harsh sanctions and stiff work mandates have thrown agency clients into more severe financial and emotional crises. Faced with TANF requirements and performance-based contracts non-profit agency workers have had to speed-up, do more with less, and deal with troublesome ethical dilemmas. At the same time, agencies struggle to sustain their focus, their

Continued on next page ▶

programs, and their mission. Instead of helping agencies to provide the housing, mental health, employment, and other services that might increase the employability and well being of distressed clients, welfare reform has effectively limited the capacity of agencies to serve low-income individuals and families.

Since the World Trade Center Attack

It is often heard that September 11th “changed everything.” But few link this to the lives of the poor whose access to welfare benefits, jobs and social service has been seriously compromised by developments since 9/11. If we are not careful, the poor could easily become what Jack Rosenthal, president of The New York Times Foundation recently termed, “the latest victims of the terrorists.”

Welfare Reform.

On December 1, 2001 New York State ended benefits for the first 38,000 welfare families to reach their five-year welfare time limit. Of these, 30,000 live in New York City. Even if the recipients qualify for the state’s highly restrictive and virtually cashless Safety Net Assistance (SNA) program, its work rules will add them to an unwelcoming labor market. During the first half of 2000, the state’s unemployment stood at 6.0 percent, higher than the overall state (4.8%) and national (4.2%) levels. The City’s pre 9/11 rate jumped from 5.8 percent in August 2001 to 6.3 percent in September 2001. Economists now predict that the World Trade Center disaster will cost New York City a staggering 105,000 jobs in the fourth quarter of 2001 due to layoffs (79,500) and firms leaving the city (25,500). This does not include the ongoing loss of jobs due to the current economic slump. The new welfare system has not faced a recession since the 1996 overhaul. Critics warned that true test of welfare reform would be what happened during the first economic downturn following its implementation. The welfare rolls have already risen in

California, Texas, Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Those who end up back on the welfare rolls because they could not find work will be blamed for failing to make it on their own.

Social Service Funding at Risk

Welfare’s Time Limits, the recession, and the World Trade Center increase the need for effective human services. Paradoxically, at exactly the moment of increased need, a funding crunch has hit the social services. The welfare block grants, state and local dollars, and private donations all face shortfalls.

Welfare block grant at risk

The 1996 welfare law funded TANF with a five-year block grant to the states and requirements that the states maintain 75%-80% of their pre-welfare reform spending levels. The current TANF allocation of \$16.5 billion a year (compared the \$15 billion airline bail out) expires in September 2002 and must be reauthorized. Advocates for the poor worry that needed welfare spending will fall victim to temporarily reduced welfare rolls, to a \$1.35 trillion tax cut (over ten years), and unanticipated spending for emergency relief, corporate bailouts, and a military build-up.

Purchase of service contracts, shaky

The 1996 welfare law generated surplus welfare funds for the states. The dramatic caseload declines, combined with federal funding pegged to the higher pre-welfare reform (1994) caseloads, and no benefit increases left New York State with a \$6.7 billion “TANF surplus.” During the last five years, the State and the City have used these “extra” dollars to underwrite the earned income tax credit (EITC) as well child care, child welfare, employment, pregnancy prevention and other services provided by non-profit human service agencies. Prior to the TANF windfall, state and/or local revenues funded these programs. If Congress does not fully reauthorize TANF funding and if the welfare rolls rise, the state and city will have to find

other funds for private social service program, (not that likely), raise taxes (not popular), or cut public assistance and social services. The bare bones state budget and the 15 percent cut ordered for City agencies suggests the route the public funders will take. The non-profit sector has already begun to cut programs and lay off staff. Once again, services for the poor will be hardest hit.

Private donations for non-profits dropping.

Private funding for social services may also dwindle. Along with government cutbacks, private funders shocked by shrunken stock market portfolios have also pulled back. At the same time, the World Trade Center disaster unwittingly diverted important dollars from the charities that typically fund non-profit service agencies to disaster relief efforts. With enormous generosity individuals, firms, and foundations, poured huge sums into a wide range of 9/11 funds targeted largely to those with a direct connection to the World Trade Center attack. The \$43 million received by The New York Times 9/11 fund was more than five times the record \$8 million raised last year by its 90-year old Neediest Cases Fund. In sharp contrast, virtually overnight, donations to charities that fund non-profit service agencies have slowed to a trickle. Both in and outside of New York, direct mail campaigns and fund-raising events have brought in less than expected. Some major givers have reneged on their pledges, sending contributions to disaster relief instead. Things may change, but for now many non-profits – especially those serving the poor – are feeling the pinch.

A Louder Voice

The human service community must raise its voice louder and become even more active participants in the debates about welfare reform, disaster relief, and terrorism for they will shape anti-poverty policy for years to come.

Social Welfare Action Alliance Book Order Form

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The Journal of Progressive Human Services (JPHS) is available to members of SWAA at a substantial discount. It can be ordered through SWAA using the application in this issue of the *BCR Reports*. Neither the JPHS collective nor SWAA are involved in subscription fulfillment, that is the responsibility of our publisher, Haworth Press. If you are a subscriber and have not received an issue, contact Kathy Rutz at 1-800-HAWORTH. To submit an article to JPHS, send four copies of your manuscript, including a short abstract to: David Prichard, JPHS Collective, University of New England, School of Social Work, 716 Stevens Avenue, Portland, ME 04103. It is important that your name and any other identifying information not appear on three of these copies. We also welcome submissions of short (500-1000 word) opinion pieces for our Soapbox column, letters to the editors, and poetry. The Table of Contents of the early Spring 2002 issue (12/2) and the Fall 2002 issue (13/1), appear below. We have just about finalized issue 13(2), the table of contents of which will appear in the next issue of *BCR Reports*. Stay tuned!

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