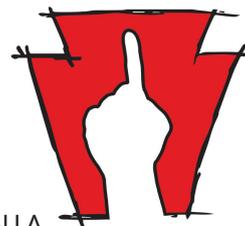


THE KEYSTONE



A NEWSLETTER BY THE MEMBERS OF PUT PEOPLE FIRST! PENNSYLVANIA



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**A publication of the
Put People First! PA
Media & Communications Team**

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Put People First! PA's Spring Campaign Update

Ratified in February, in full swing by April

At the Winter Steering Committee Retreat in February, Put People First! PA ratified our 2019 campaign plan with three main planks:

- 1. Expand the Nonviolent Medicaid Army**
- 2. Research and Take Action Against Profiteers;
Build Support for a Public Healthcare Advocate**
- 3. Hold Powerholders Accountable to our
Platform + Policy Vision**

Just two months later, led by our Healthcare Rights Committees (HRCs), we're already making progress.

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Spring 2019 Campaign Updates

Expanding the Nonviolent Medicaid Army:

Our leaders in Norristown, Montgomery County and West Mifflin, Allegheny County are laying the groundwork for new HRCs by knocking on doors to organize people in their communities. The Lancaster HRC is using its organizing against the closure of UPMC Pinnacle to organize new people into the HRC and build clear, competent, committed and connected leadership together. This spring and summer the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival congress in Washington DC and our preparations for the Week of Action in September will be big opportunities for us to continue to organize people into the Nonviolent Medicaid Army.

Holding Powerholders Accountable

To hold public powerholders accountable, HRCs have begun meeting with state legislators to ask them to sign onto our policy pledge:

- Take a public stand for healthcare as a human right and a public good.
- No cuts, no hurdles or exclusions to/from Medicaid and CHIP
- Restore adult dental benefit in Medicaid that was cut in 2011

Create a Public Healthcare Advocate

The Lancaster HRC has met with the Lieutenant Governor and two state legislators to discuss our proposal, and had a victory at the local level when the City Council unanimously passed a resolution in support of a Public Healthcare Advocate.

Johnstown has also met with two state legislators, and the Pittsburgh HRC is doing its legislative visits. Our 2019 goals include each HRC holding 3-5 legislative meetings and getting at least 30 legislators to sign onto our platform, so legislative meetings will be a priority through the rest of the year.

Researching and Taking Action Against Profiteers and Building Support for a Public Healthcare Advocate

As we build toward our Week of Action against profiteers in September, the Lancaster, Pittsburgh, and Johnstown HRCs have begun investigating UPMC and other healthcare profiteers. At the Leadership Institutes, the Campaign Team will facilitate a workshop on researching profiteers, which will begin a four-month effort with all HRCs to research a local profiteer to target in the Week of Action.

Meanwhile HRC and Campaign Team members had a second meeting with staff from the Office of Governor Tom Wolf to discuss our proposal for a Public Healthcare Advocate. The meetings have been promising. His staff seems open, but have also made clear that they will not push the Public Healthcare Advocate for us. We will need to organize long and hard to force public officials to take action. In the coming months we will need to meet with more legislators to find legislative champions, learn where legislators stand, and build support; work with our partners at the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) to publish a policy paper detailing our proposal; and continue to use our demand for a Public Healthcare Advocate to organize our people and build our base.

Lancaster Healthcare Rights Committee takes on UPMC

By Tammy Rojas



The Lancaster Healthcare Rights Committee (HRC) with Put People First! PA has come a long way in a short period of time. There were times that we struggled throughout 2018 with becoming a collective force in our local committee. But once we took action against UPMC for the closure of the UPMC Pinnacle Lancaster Hospital, things rapidly began to change for the Lancaster HRC.

Collective planning and organizing became a task that was no longer a chore but rather a natural course to take in order achieve success.

In December of 2018, the news was announced that UPMC Pinnacle would be closing the hospital in Lancaster (formally known as St Joseph's Hospital) in March of 2019. The news came out as I was in North Carolina with other PPF members, Katrina and Phil representing Put People First! PA at a gathering of people from different organizations who are all a part of the Poor People's Campaign: a National Call for Moral Revival.

We decided that the best way to take action in that moment would be to address Lancaster City Council at the final Public City Council meeting of 2018. That gave us a little over a week to prepare for the action. Members of the HRC started working together and keeping in constant contact through messenger, phone calls, and emails.

We began to research by reading recent articles as well as checking out websites, social media posts, and media coverage on the issue. We discovered that the UPMC Pinnacle closure would leave the city with only one hospital, which was already over capacity. The community expressed concern, so we knew that we needed to take action and speak out. It was the right thing to do.

We immediately reached out to the Put People First! PA statewide Campaign and Media & Communications volunteer teams for help and guidance on this action. Because of their assistance we delivered powerful, clear remarks and received tremendous media coverage. We began to build relationships with our local media.

At the first City Council meeting, we learned some new things about taking action and made it a point to carry those lessons forward to each of the actions we've taken since.

Through follow ups with those we connected with during our actions and reaching out to people on social media, we grew our base and found a new more personal source for research on our healthcare profiteer target, UPMC.

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The research we discovered about UPMC and their actions that are hurting communities across the state of Pennsylvania was bad enough, but when we heard the stories of the people who are directly impacted, it brought a whole new perspective on the matter. It makes the fight all that more powerful.

The media coverage throughout these actions has been great. Our HRC has built relationships with some of the reporters, which has helped us continue getting coverage around this issue of the hospital closing and how it is affecting Lancaster County.

We are still continuing our fight to “Take Back St. Joseph’s” hospital by continuing to take action, keeping it on the media’s radar, and meeting with local and state officials. We still have a long way to go in our fight, but we are already making progress on the local and state level.

We discovered through our research that UPMC is a prime example of what is wrong with our current healthcare system. We are using that knowledge to push the state of Pennsylvania through our local government by proposing a city resolution for legislation on a Public Healthcare Advocate for the state.

The Lancaster City Government agreed to the city resolution that states they enthusiastically support legislation for a Public Healthcare Advocate position to be created for the state of Pennsylvania. By reflecting on what the Lancaster Healthcare Rights Committee has been able to accomplish up to this point, I see potential in targeting UPMC statewide. This could help push our statewide healthcare legislation goals.

Many different organizations and government officials have taken actions against UPMC, but they’ve only focused on issues specific to certain localities in Pennsylvania. What if we unified statewide?

If Put People First! PA takes on UPMC statewide, we have the power to tip the scale in our favor. We can move towards our campaign for the Public Healthcare Advocate and a universal healthcare system in Pennsylvania that states healthcare is a human right.



It won't be easy. It will require lots of work, but if we are clear, competent, committed, and connected we can make this happen! It will be the first time an organization such as Put People First! PA has ever taken on UPMC statewide and it will surely be noticed.

With each action the Lancaster HRC took against UPMC, every event we planned and every time we spoke out, we grew our base and developed our leadership - not only within our local Healthcare Rights Committee but also within the organization as a whole. Our efforts to “Take Back St Joseph’s” began December 2018 and it gave the people in the community something to fight for. We are continuing our fight by holding both UPMC and our elected officials accountable.

UPMC and WellSpan

By Kim Atland



On Feb 23 and 24, 2019 I attended several events to protest the closing of Lancaster Regional Hospital formerly St. Joseph's Hospital.

The closure of this hospital adversely affects the people and city of Lancaster. First the only remaining medical care in the city is Lancaster General, a facility working beyond its maximum capacity. Second people must travel to Lititz to reach medical care - a longer and slower trip. Third people without cars may have to forgo medical care until it becomes an emergency. This habit by large medical corporations to put profit ahead of people's care is not limited to UPMC and Lancaster.

Here in York County, WellSpan at Edgar Square Behavioral Health Facility chose to stop seeing people with Medicaid and Medicare. This occurred after WellSpan partnered with Philhaven, a Mt. Gretna based behavioral health facility. In my opinion this decision to abandon patients falls squarely at the feet of WellSpan's board of officers Dr. Hess, Dr. Mosser and Mr. O'Connor (just to name a few.)

Many people receiving care at Edgar Square have mobility problems or walk to appointments. Now they must go to the overcrowded Meadowlands facility. These people must take Rabbit Transit adding an additional 45 to 60 minutes travel time and bus fares each way. Add to this the fact that no new group therapy sessions were added at Meadowlands to replace the ones lost at Edgar Square.

Edgar Square is now used as a for-profit facility catering to private insurance. The therapy groups remaining are primarily for drug and alcohol treatment and are paid for by employers and private insurance. What becomes of people with behavioral health problems like depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder now that their behavioral healthcare is limited or gone? What benefit is WellSpan providing to the people and York? Both of these companies are considered non-profit corporations. This does not mean they cannot make a profit - it means they cannot have stockholder whose welfare in theory could be put above the care of people. However these companies have excessively large and complex boards of officers who receive extravagant salaries.

In my opinion, the first test of a non-profit should be what good it provides to its local community. If it is limiting access to its facilities or placing profit above people we should reevaluate that facilities non-profit designation.

Winter Reading Group Reflection

Reigniting MLK's Poor People's Campaign

By the Political Education & Leadership Development Team

As part of our ongoing work to promote political clarity in PPF-PA the Political Education and Leadership Development Team (PELD) and PPF members statewide participated in a January 2019 Winter Reading Group (WRG), reading of four chapters of the forthcoming Kairos Center book, *A New and Unsettling Force, Vol. 2, Reigniting Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's Poor People's Campaign*.

The chapter essays are co-authored by leaders who draw from both scholarship and the lessons of existing struggles of the poor and dispossessed on many fronts of today's conditions of crisis. Together they reflect on economics, history, religion and social change, drawing from their diverse experiences and backgrounds. The following are reflections written by HRC members from Lancaster and Johnstown who took part in this year's five insightful weekly readings and discussions.



The winter reading group really opened my eyes to how throughout history the poor have been set up to fail. From the oppression of the empires years ago to today. The way systemic racism has been used to keep minority groups in poverty. How the system uses the working class and how charity is their way of dealing with our problems. Instead of fixing the root lying issues that cause poverty, the rich just work to divide the poor to keep them under foot and profit off the backs of the workers. It was a great group and I am looking forward to the next one.

Matt, Lancaster HRC

I learned a lot from the readings' insight with taking a hard look on the way charity is used as a way to cover up inequality. Like providing a band-aid for a broken leg. People's struggles are being treated like individual cases rather than failures of the system we live in. All the while making rich people using charity as spectacle to make them look like saviors and generous. This critique highlights four functions of charity; ideological, political, moral, and material.

Maddy, Johnstown HRC

The winter reading was a clear explanation of the dynamics of class, revolution, how the ruling classes maintain control through things such a charity, and Dr. King's beliefs. It brought me to a clearer understanding of where I stand in relation to the crises of the day, and educated me in Dr. King's true viewpoints, as opposed to the revisionist history of King that is usually upheld. The working class must remain unified, and that is only through being politically educated, and understanding how we're divided by the ruling class's manipulation of us by hiding behind our spirituality, or cloaking their intentions through charity.

Akilah, Johnstown HRC

The Birth of the PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

By Nijmie Dzurinko, PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival Co-Chair and National Steering Committee member

The Poor People's Campaign of 1968 is the last thing that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did before he was assassinated. Although the civil rights movement made great strides in ending segregation and gaining voting and other political rights for African Americans, King famously said "We won the right to sit at a lunch counter but we don't have enough money to buy a hamburger."

During this time, King made three key pivots: from a fight against racism to a fight against the inseparably linked issues of racism, poverty and militarism. From civil rights to human rights, and from reform to revolution. And he spoke of three revolutions - liberation movements around the world, the revolution in weapons of war and the revolution in technology. Because of these pivots, the traditional base of the civil rights coalition - African American organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), church leadership and white liberals, turned away from King. Liberals had no interest in taking on the war economy or the economic foundations of our society.

At the outset of the original Poor People's Campaign King brought ethnic groups and movements from around the country into a formation of poor and dispossessed people in a manner that hadn't been done before. The intention had been to bring thousands of poor people to the national mall, followed by mass nonviolent civil disobedience and then a phase of economic boycotts. Unfortunately, King was assassinated before the launch of the campaign - and every level of the State was implicated in his assassination.

The campaign went forward, with leadership from Ralph Abernathy, the National Welfare Rights Organization and others in King's inner circle. They erected a "Resurrection City" with thousands of poor people from around the country for 42 days on the National Mall, and some civil disobedience actions took place. Some victories were achieved, but overall the campaign was never completed.

Fast forward to 2004, and the creation of the Poverty Initiative at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The Poverty Initiative was founded in the lineage of the original Poor People's Campaign and building on the experiences of the National Union of the Homeless in the 1980s and 1990s and other efforts of the poor organizing the poor. It launched the Poverty Scholars Network - a network of poor leaders and organizations across the country - for relationship building, joint study on history, political economy and liberation theology, and immersion courses. This process of identifying, training and uniting leaders of the organizations of poor and dispossessed people set the stage for the re-igniting of the Poor People's Campaign in the anticipation of the 50th anniversary in 2018. Amongst the co-founders of Put People First! PA were leaders in the Poverty Scholars Network. And the network put out the call to re-ignite the campaign some 10 years before the 50th anniversary.

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The Birth of the PA Poor People's Campaign

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Simultaneous to the development of the Poverty Scholars Network, Rev. William Barber II and others were building the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina over the course of 10 years. This statewide movement was anchored by the NAACP. Rev. Barber started Repairers of the Breach after leaving his position as the head of the North Carolina NAACP.

Out of a partnership between the Kairos Center (formerly the Poverty Initiative) and Repairers of the Breach emerged a call for organizations in states across the country to formally commit to a new Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. Our campaign addresses five interconnected evils: systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation, and the distorted moral narrative. People in 40 states came forward to volunteer themselves and create coordinating committees.

From the beginning, Put People First! PA has been a leader in the PA Poor People's Campaign. Because we built our statewide organization for six years before the launch of the campaign, we had significant statewide infrastructure to help anchor the campaign. We welcomed in other organizations deeply rooted in struggles of poor and dispossessed people, with a focus on base-building, political independence, leadership development and political education. Additionally, our organizing model is based on the strategy of the original campaign: uniting the poor, across color lines and all other lines of division, as leaders in a movement to end poverty.

In PA we formed our Coordinating Committee in December 2017 with organizations like the Movement of Immigrant Leaders in PA (MILPA, founded by Desi Burnette, a PPF co-founder),

Anthracite Unite (founded by PPF member Jamie Longazel), ACT UP, Global Women's Strike/Payday Men's Network, March on Harrisburg, the Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration (CADBI), Philadelphia Jobs with Justice, Unitarian Universalists and others, and launched the campaign in February 2018.

We had a strong showing for the 40 days of action - with actions on six consecutive Mondays in Harrisburg beginning on May 14 and going through the end of June. Over 1500 people from more than 30 counties in Pennsylvania rallied at the capitol, and 76 moral witnesses engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience. Our largest number of moral witnesses was during Week 4 on the right to healthcare and a healthy planet, which PPF-PA anchored, with 31 arrests. Our actions engaged over 60 organizations, faith communities and unions. Taking action together over the six weeks helped us to build and strengthen relationships, and deepen our commitment to long-term power-building in every corner of Pennsylvania, across all communities.

Based on our successful first year, we are building broader and deeper in 2019. We worked collaboratively over five and a half months to create a set of PA demands, building on national's. We delivered these demands to the legislature on March 19th. We have been fighting for the preservation of General Assistance against bipartisan proposals to cut and/or gut it. Our organizing tour of Northern PA counties happens in May, followed by the Poor People's Moral Action Congress in June. We have brought new groups into our coordinating committee including Better Path Coalition and the Sunrise Movement. Forward together, not one step back!

A Member Reflection: HCHR Campaign & Organizing Model

By Farrah Samuels



The Health Care is a Human Right (HCHRC) campaign is the public vehicle through which PPF recruits new members, develops leaders and grows our organization. It's through this campaign that I first got involved with Put People First! PA and became an active member, now in my 3rd year. Our PPF Campaign Strategy is a tool that requires all the different Healthcare Rights Committees and teams to work together to connect, develop, and support the collective action of the poor and dispossessed in their regions using the same blueprint, towards shared

statewide goals. The HCHR campaign unites people of different backgrounds. Everyone wants to live their best life and get the care they need. Illness does not discriminate no matter who you are or where you're from. The HCHR campaign is really a unifying cause that almost anyone can get behind supporting because healthcare affects every individual and intersects with so many other societal ills we are fighting against as part of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. (e.g., racism, poverty, environmental degradation and the war economy.) Everybody's got a right to live, right?

Here's my personal story with PPF, which I hope helps provide a concrete illustration of why this campaign is so important and timely. When I was first introduced to PPF in 2016, I was struggling to get insurance approvals for the medication and ongoing care I needed to treat a very rare form of Stage IV sarcoma cancer (one that I was told I would die from within 3 months of initial diagnosis). I wrote a Facebook post calling for help from any friends and colleagues in the media that could bring attention to my story. A local newspaper reached out and so did Nijmie Dzurinko, one of the founders and volunteer leaders in PPF. She told me about the organization's HCHR campaign and it was so well aligned with what I was experiencing and trying to bring attention to. She offered to have PPF stage an action targeting my local insurance company, IBX, which was also the insurance provider for many other PPF members experiencing similar issues. Within a month or so, we staged a rally outside their downtown Philadelphia headquarters. I and another PPF member told our stories and attempted to deliver letters to the CEO. For the first time I felt heard and cared for, and I understood what PPF means when we speak of making the invisible visible. The action was a prime example of one of our campaign strategies, which is targeting profiteers like insurance companies that have dominion over an entire local market or community such as Philadelphia.

That was just one of a series of ongoing actions targeting not just IBX but other profiteers that affect the lives of Human Rights Committee (HRC) members and PA residents across the state.

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Our Lancaster HRC, one of the smallest but also most powerful, has gained traction and received a lot of press coverage lately for their attempts to prevent the closing of a local hospital operated by UPMC, a healthcare profiteer. That hospital was one of only two hospitals serving the entire city of Lancaster. While that hospital is now closed and the one remaining hospital experiencing overcrowding and a lack of capacity in its ER Department, the Lancaster HRC continues its fight by testifying at City Council hearings to call out local non-supportive elected officials, to advocate for City Resolutions concerning our HCHR campaign, to provide commentary to the media, and to meet with state legislators, which is another main campaign strategy - conducting legislative visits to garner political support and will for our HCHR campaign.

After signing up with IBX through the healthcare marketplace, I spent hours on the phone going in circles, trying to resolve interdepartmental issues at IBX that prevented me from getting the care I needed. This is where it really would have helped to have someone at the state level that I could've called to intervene and advocate on my behalf. In 2016-2017, PPF fought for and was able to win a series of public hearings across the state with the State Insurance Department (the first ever held) so other voices like mine could be amplified and their stories made visible. Folks testified from across the state who were having similar accountability issues with their insurance and medical care providers that often went unresolved, some of them resulting in needless death.

More recently in 2018, PPF expanded its campaign strategy to explicit fight for the establishment of a Public Health Care Advocate, who would be "resident-centric," and not beholden to the whims of politics, the insurance marketplace, and corporate greed. I've been part of a PPF specialized workgroup that has met with representatives from our Governor's office to advocate for the creation of this state level position, who would be an ombudsman for people like me whose lives are often held in the balance by profiteers. This work continues and included the second meeting in a series of advocacy, policy and planning sessions held on April 2, 2019 with Governor Wolf's Secretary of Policy and Planning and Deputy Chief of Staff. A future meeting with a larger delegation of representatives from state government is projected to occur in July 2019 to keep pushing this campaign strategy. Recently, the Lancaster HRC and Campaign team member, Karim Sariahmed, met with PA Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman and were able to secure his interest in assisting PPF with this campaign strategy and his public support for the establishment of a Public Health Care Advocate.

In 2015, at the most critical point in my cancer journey, I was working as an Adjunct Professor making \$5,000 a year, and on Medicaid. I know it saved my life because I would not have been able to afford the expensive copays for weeklong inpatient chemotherapy and prescription costs for all the life sustaining drugs I was prescribed. Medicaid covered the costs of everything. When my disability payments from Social Security Administration kicked in, I was no longer eligible for Medicaid, even though I was still struggling financially. We know that Medicaid is the life raft that many poor and working class people depend on to save their lives, just as I did. So another part of our HCHR campaign strategy is building the Nonviolent Medicaid Army so that more folks can get this vital insurance coverage safety net for the most vulnerable and impoverished among us. Through the PPF base-building team and the Poor People's Campaign, we continue to recruit new members of the non-violent Medicaid Army and to argue for the restoration of the adult dental benefit.

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Underground Railroad & the Fight Against Family Separation

By Jennina Rose Gorman & Phil Wider

For almost a year and a half Put People First! PA has been a leader in the PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. We've joined with other organizations of the poor, trade unions, environmental and democracy groups, faith leaders and folks from all walks of life in building a movement to end systemic racism, poverty, militarism and the war economy and ecological destruction. Organizations and leaders emerging out of poor communities across PA have been critical in setting the tone, direction and discipline of this statewide effort. We have brought intellectual, political, moral and organizational resources to the PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.



On Mothers Day weekend (May 10 - 12) we plan to hold an action in Blair County against all forms of family separation, including DHS, the mass incarceration system and separations of immigrant families. To find out more, please contact Jennina via email at t.s.gorman88@gmail.com.

Yet building this movement, a politically independent movement led by the poor and dispossessed as a "new and unsettling force," is no small task. The leadership and base of our organizations and movement face serious crises on a regular basis (medical, mass incarceration, detention and deportation, employment, housing, financial, emotional, etc.). Any serious model of the poor organizing the poor can not ignore these crises and challenges.

The "nonviolent army" and "freedom church" of the poor that we aim to build through the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival will need to be resourced with deep supply lines. Yet we will not be able to rely on corporate foundation dollars to support such an endeavor. To sustain our movement we understand that it's imperative we create an independent statewide resource infrastructure that supports leaders emerging from the ranks of the poor in making it through the all too routine crises we face. Towards this end, about half a year ago the PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call or Moral Revival established a team to build a Statewide Resource Network or what could be called a modern day Underground Railroad across PA.

As an initial project, the PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call or Moral Revival Underground Railroad Team took on support for PPF and PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call or Moral Revival leader Jennina in her fight to be reunited with her four children who were taken from her over four years ago by Blair County CYS for reasons of poverty and false allegations. The team has strategized with leaders fighting family separation across the country, organized call in days, written letters and rallied people to attend hearings.

On April 4, Jennina had a status hearing on all four children. All the children remain detained under horrendous conditions, traumatized by being moved from one restrictive institution to another, while Jennina has been prevented from seeing them at all despite the court ordering visitation last October. Nine of us from the Poor People's Campaign and Put People First! PA across the state came out to attend this hearing and to show the court that Jennina has support and that our eyes are on them.

On March 28, 1979, Three Mile Island has a nuclear meltdown.

By Katrina Raser, Harrisburg

My mom is less than five miles away. She is scared. Scared and pregnant. The crisis ends three days later when it is determined that there is no risk of explosion. But the damage is already done. It's estimated that two million people were exposed to radiation. To me that number will always be two million plus one.

Fast forward six weeks. My brother is born. He seems happy and healthy. The government claims no adverse effects in human, animal, or plant life are directly correlated to the meltdown.

Fast forward through infancy and on into early childhood. My brother cries all night long. My parents try to console him. They spend hours attempting to rock a wailing child to sleep.

Fast forward to my brother's sophomore year of high school. My brother still suffers from severe, chronic headaches. He's now an honor student. A goofy teenager. And a jock. During some sporting event he suffers head trauma and is sent to the hospital. The doctors find a brain tumor the size of a golf ball.

Fast forward to summer, 1995. My brother undergoes brain surgery. His temperature spikes. His brain swells. He suffers permanent brain damage. He spends the summer recovering in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. His roommate dies. I've never seen my parents so scared.

Fast forward about a year. My brother is back in school. One of the lasting effects of his traumatic brain injury is a sleep disorder which causes him to fall asleep behind the wheel of his Jeep. He drives off the road and flips midair. He lands in a tree.

His license is revoked. My brother can no longer drive himself around. He is upset. We get into a fight. This is not unusual. What is unusual is that he doesn't react. My brother who used to tease me and constantly fight with me, my brother who would never give in, my brother who would always fight back, that brother is gone. Now he's just a scared teenager.

Fast forward another year. Post-surgery, my brother has lost his short term memory. It is with great effort from him, my parents, a tutor, and the school, that he graduates. His friends have all fallen a way. Maybe they don't know how to interact with him. Maybe they see him as a reminder of the other friend who was lost to unusual cancer. He does not go to college. He does not live independently.

Fast forward to today. My brother still requires life sustaining medication. His meds cost over \$100,000 a year. Without insurance, we could not afford to keep him alive. For this reason he is stuck in a low-paying job that exploits its workers to the extreme. He routinely works 6-7 days a week so he can be insured. He works grueling hours so that he has insurance.

Without insurance, he will die. To an insurance company, he is a high-risk; a pre-existing condition. They don't see a brother, a son, or an uncle. They don't see an athlete or an artist, a lover or a fighter. They see a bottom line. My brother is not a profit or a loss. He is a HUMAN being. And he is why I fight for healthcare as a HUMAN right.

Learning from the California Homeless Union

By Phil Wider, Political Education & Leadership Development Team



In Put People First! PA we've noticed that as our members take on more organizational responsibility and lead campaigns for our human rights, their thirst for political education increases. Of course one very important source of political knowledge is the struggle itself. Since our founding we've stated that the struggle is a school. We want to ensure that we take the time to reflect upon our experience, sum it up and share the lessons of our work with others across the state and country. We also want to learn from the hard won experiences of other organizations of the poor and dispossessed.

We were very fortunate that this past March Put People First! PA and the PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival were able to host Anthony Prince, a leader of the California Homeless Union (CAHU) and the California Poor People's Campaign. Anthony was active in the original National Union of the Homeless of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which at the time boasted over 20,000 members in two dozen cities. Today he is at the forefront of a revival of the National Union of the Homeless across the US with chapters sprouting up in North Carolina, Massachusetts, and New York.

We held a number of meetings in Philadelphia and Lancaster where Anthony shared with us the story of the CAHU and its growing number of chapters across California. Anthony pointed out that "Homelessness is just the most extreme expression of poverty in America." He continued that "in our country while poverty and homelessness are legal, the struggle to survive is illegal."

Unable to obtain steady jobs that pay livable wages and come with benefits, and unable to find truly affordable housing, many people who are homeless have been forced to find refuge with each other in collectively run and regulated encampments across California. Corresponding to the proliferation of these tent cities has been their criminalization and subsequent demolition by local authorities.

As the poor we don't have the money, media, and might of those forces we are up against. As the poor we do have our numbers. One hundred forty million of us have been impoverished and dispossessed in this country, yet our numbers only weigh in the balance of history if organized. It is exactly through their campaigns that the homeless are building their organization.

The CAHU has seen much of its growth in small towns and rural areas across California (like Salinas and Marysville) where well-paying jobs and adequate social services are scarce and the poor make up one third to half the population. In these towns they've seen the possibility of building an organization that has real political influence, not just amongst the homeless, but amongst the poor more broadly.

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The National Struggle for Universal, Publicly Financed Health Care

By Ben Palmquist & The Campaign Team

We work closely with our partners in the Healthcare Is a Human Right Collaborative—the Vermont Workers' Center, Southern Maine Workers' Center, and National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)—who share our commitment to build a member-led poor people's movement for human rights. We also work in broader coalition with allies all over the country. One group we've been learning with is the Campaign for New York Health (CNYH). They're publishing a report inspired by



Put People First! PA's 2016 report, *Beyond Coverage: Putting People First in Pennsylvania's Healthcare System*, and their members inspired our campaign to abolish \$1.5 million of medical debt in Pennsylvania. They're also leading the way with their legislative fight: last year CNYH came just one vote shy of passing their bill for universal, publicly financed health care, and they're organizing again to try to pass the bill this spring.

At the federal level, universal, publicly financed healthcare (usually referred to as "Medicare for All") is now on the national political agenda. This is entirely due to grassroots organizing by people's movements. For decades power-holders in both political parties have resisted popular demands to get insurance companies out of our healthcare system and instead create a universal public program that meets everyone's needs, but our movement has finally forced politicians to pay attention. Medicare for All bills have been introduced in the House and Senate by Representatives Pramila Jayapal and Debbie Dingell and Senator Bernie Sanders. The House bill has more than 100 co-sponsors and the Senate bill has 14, and there's a big coalition of national organizations and unions building support for both bills. Though neither bill will be able to pass this year, building support behind the bills is a way to build power and change what's politically possible in the 2020 election and beyond. PPF-PA members are currently deciding whether to officially endorse the bills.

In addition, the Campaign Team has been working with the office of Representative Ro Khanna to strengthen and build support for the State-Based Universal Health Care Act, which would smooth the way for states to use federal Medicare and Medicaid funds to finance state-based universal health care. We expect the Act to be introduced in the House in June.

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Highlights from Across PPF



A New Healthcare Rights Committee (HRC) is Born!

By Jen Cox

A new HRC is being born in Montgomery County in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Montgomery County, to the north and west of Philly, ranges from older industrial communities like Norristown, Bridgeport and Conshohocken on the Schuylkill River to suburban communities like King of Prussia and Springfield to historic towns such as Valley Forge, Pottstown, and Collegeville.

As we launch the new Montgomery County HRC, we are focusing on Norristown, which is the County Seat. Norristown is a deeply working class community, home to people of every race, and of many cultures, nationalities and religions who are all struggling to survive and to secure healthcare for themselves and their families.

Norristown is an old industrial town which for generations has drawn poor and dispossessed working class people from various parts of the region and even other parts of the world looking for jobs and ways to support their children. Norristown today is a very multiracial community with a large number of immigrants from Latin America. Across all of their differences, the people of Norristown share a common struggle to take care of their families and to meet their healthcare needs.

In our two door knocking sessions and in ones of ones with local community members and in other experiences in the community,

we have found a lot of working class people of all different racial and cultural backgrounds who are eager to get involved in the fight for healthcare as a human right. We have heard stories of the horrors that people have experienced in the for profit healthcare system, and have had multiple people express to us a belief that healthcare should be a human right and an interest in joining us to fight for it.

We believe that there is a lot of potential in Norristown and eventually in other communities in Montgomery County for building a strong base of committed, conscious, connected leaders from among our base in working class people from many different racial, national and cultural backgrounds.

We will be continuing to reach out to communities through door knocking and local events, by talking to community members whom we already know and are looking forward to holding our first HRC meeting in April!

We welcome anyone who is in Montgomery County or knows anyone in their area to join us or reach out!

Highlights from Across PPF



Welcome PPF's Newest Staff: Hope Koss, Fundraising Coordinator

Hope Koss is a Coordinator of the Johnstown Healthcare Rights Committee and currently helping out on the Steering Committee and Basebuilding team. Hope is also heavily involved in the PA Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

As a navy veteran, this campaign speaks close to her feelings. In Johnstown, Hope has helped lead many fundraising opportunities, including basket parties, multiple fundraisers with subs and pizza sells, shopping passes for a local store and tabling. We are so happy to have a local leader as PPF's new Fundraising Coordinator!

Congratulations Hope!

Love, Savannah & your PPF Family

Baby time!

From Laycee in Johnstown HRC: My daughter. Her name is McKenna Elizabeth Norton. She was 5'11 18 inches long I had her c-section at Conemaugh Memorial Hospital.

New Lancaster HRC Member, Max

My name is Max Lederer and I am enjoying the good fortune of learning about and joining the Put People First! PA statewide organization. I can see that they are a positive, motivated group standing up for and supporting the people that need it the most. I am planning on continuing my membership and contributing to this movement.

PPF Building in New Areas

The Pittsburgh HRC has been doorknocking in Mon View Heights, an apartment community in West Mifflin, PA in the Mon Valley where Denyne Pollard, a PPF member lives. She led the effort to reach people to "educate the community and have a call to action."

When door knocking, we invited everyone to a political education session April 5th where we shared stories and invited everyone to the Leadership Institute to learn about organizing for healthcare as a human right and a public good. We also discussed the Poor People's Campaign, and the Public Healthcare Advocate campaign. Denyne said, "We had a good turnout, and we hope they will show for the Leadership Institute. They haven't had any hope in such a long time that they have trouble believing we can change things."



Leadership across Difference / El liderazgo cruzando líneas diferencia

The following is an excerpt from an interview that was conducted with Put People First! PA's Nijmie Dzurinko, Phil Wider and Borja Gutiérrez. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

UPoor: What are the ways that it makes sense for Put People First to be involved in the Poor People's Campaign? Where is there alignment between the Campaign and Put People First?

Phil: Put People First! PA comes out of the same organizing tradition and network that many of the other groups that are at the core of the Poor People's Campaign nationally come out of. In particular I'm thinking about the National Union of the Homeless in the mid 80s, late 80s, early 90s; the history of welfare rights organizing; and previous significant experiences of the poor uniting across these lines of division in the history of this country, whether it was all the way back to Bacon's Rebellion or whether it's the mine wars in Appalachia or the Southern Tenant Farmers Union or the Black Panther Party's original Rainbow Coalition or the Bonus Army. We chose the Healthcare Is a Human Right Campaign relatively early in our history. But we knew from the start that we weren't a single issue or a single constituency organization. The Poor People's Campaign enables us to work with others in the state who are hurting on a broader agenda.

UPoor: One of the central themes of the PPC is uniting the poor and dispossessed across lines of division. Can you elaborate a little bit on what those lines of division really look like for you all in Pennsylvania and how you're trying to bridge the divide?



Traducido del inglés por Anna Cibils. El siguiente es un fragmento de una entrevista con Nijmie Dzurinko, Phil Wider, y Borja Gutiérrez, todos miembros de Put People First! PA. La entrevista fue editada para longitud y claridad.

UPoor: ¿Cuales son las formas que tiene sentido que Put People First esté involucrado en el la Campaña de la Gente Pobre/ los Pobres (Poor People's Campaign)? ¿En donde hay alineamiento entre la Campaña y Put People First?

Phil: Put People First! PA (PPF) tiene su origen en la misma tradición y red de organización de muchos de los otros grupos al núcleo de la campaña nacional del Poor People's Campaign (PPC). Particularmente estoy pensando de la Unión Nacional de Personas Sin Hogar (En inglés: National Union of the Homeless) de mediados a finales de los años ochenta y al comienzo de los años noventa; la historia de organizar para los derechos de personas usando beneficios sociales (en inglés: welfare rights); y significantes experiencias anteriores en la historia de este país en que el pueblo pobre se unió cruzando líneas de diferencia, sea remontando a la Rebelión de Bacon o sean las guerras de las minas en los Apalaches, o la Unión de los Medieros del Sur (en inglés: Southern Tenant Farmers Union), o la Coalición de Arcoíris (en inglés Rainbow Coalition) del Partido de la Pantera Negra (en inglés: Black Panther Party), o el "Bonus Army" de 1932. Nosotros elegimos la Campaña "El Cuidado de Salud es un Derecho Humano" en las primeras etapas de nuestra historia. Pero sabíamos desde el comienzo que no éramos una organización enfocada en un asunto único o en solamente un subconjunto de la población. El Poor People's Campaign nos habilita trabajar con otros en el estado que están sufriendo por una gran variedad de problemas.

UPoor: Uno de los temas centrales del PPC es unir la gente pobre y desposeída a través de líneas de división. ¿Puedes elaborar un poco sobre como aparecen estas líneas de división en Pennsylvania (Pensilvania) y que están haciendo para superar estas diferencias?

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Nijmie: The ruling class pushes the narrative that the working class is synonymous with white men. There is a historical reason why that shorthand is used (namely the legacy of slavery and racial exclusion of Black workers and other workers of color from particular occupations as well as organized labor). However we know that the working class is made up of people of every racial and ethnic background, of every gender, of different sexualities, ages, abilities, regions, languages, documentation statuses and religions. A few years ago we recognized we needed to develop and produce some of our own knowledge about difference...that's distinct from what comes out of the ruling class and its institutions—for instance, the academy. So I and others developed this theory or approach that we call “Leadership Across Difference.” For us it's a combination of political education and political activity. People have to be working together and be in contact and community with each other to be engaging in this work.

Borja: In addition to the notion of “Leadership Across Difference” that is so central to PPF, I think that difference is also a tremendous source of strength. The unity of all of our differences is going to allow us to make systemic change a reality.

Phil: In Pennsylvania specifically, the form that the plantation politics or divide and conquer takes is pitting the big urban areas against the small-to-midsized towns and rural areas largely in the center part of the state. PPF - since its origins - has been really committed to connecting people across this political geography. The campaign work, organizing work, and all the other pieces of the work that we've been speaking to that bring people together across these divides in the fight for survival is very critical. In many cases the most fertile areas that we've found for organizing the unorganized have been those areas that are least inundated by the nonprofit industrial complex and by the progressives and funders. People are thirsty—they're just looking for something to connect with and to break their isolation, something that's real.

Nijmie: La clase que gobierna fuerza la narración que la clase obrera es sinónimo con hombres blancos. Hay una razón histórica por la cual se usa esta simplificación (específicamente el legado de la esclavitud y la exclusión racial de obreros negros y otros obreros de color de ciertas ocupaciones y del sindicato). De todos modos sabemos que la clase obrera está compuesta de gente de todos los fondos raciales y étnicos, de todos los géneros, de todas las sexualidades, edades, habilidades, regiones, idiomas, estatuses (estatuses) de documentación, y religiones. Hace unos años reconocimos que necesitábamos desarrollar y producir nuestro propio conocimiento teórico sobre la diferencia...uno que es distinto a lo que proviene de la clase que nos gobierna y sus instituciones – por ejemplo la academia. Entonces, yo y otros desarrollamos la teoría o el enfoque que llamamos “El liderazgo cruzando líneas de diferencia” (en inglés: Leadership Across Difference”). Para nosotros es una combinación de educación política y acción política. Nuestra gente debe estar trabajando junta y estar en contacto y en comunidad junta para dedicarse a este trabajo.

Borja: Adicionalmente a la noción de “El liderazgo cruzando líneas de diferencia” que es tan central a PPF, yo pienso que la diferencia es una fuente tremenda de poder. La unidad de todas nuestras diferencias nos va a permitir hacer que cambios sistémicos se hagan una realidad.

Phil: Específicamente en Pennsylvania, la política de la plantación o “divide y vencerás” lleva la forma de enfrentar áreas urbanas contra ciudades y pueblos más chicos y áreas rurales en el centro del estado. PPF – desde sus comienzos – se ha comprometido a conectar la gente cruzando esta geografía política. El trabajo de la campaña, del trabajo de organizar, y las otras partes de nuestro trabajo de las que hemos estado hablando que une la gente cruzando/tras estas divisiones en una lucha para la supervivencia es muy crucial. En muchos casos, las áreas más fértiles que hemos encontrado para organizar personas desorganizadas han sido las áreas que tienen menos inundación de las agencias sin fines de lucro (en inglés: nonprofit agencies) y donde no están presentes los progresivos (progresistas) y las fundaciones.

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UPoor: Something else that a lot of people within the Poor People's Campaign are struggling with is how do you unite people across party lines without compromising any values or ending up becoming a pawn of any particular political party. I'm wondering if you guys have any experience with that in Pennsylvania?

Nijmie: Most people are not participating in the formal political process. How we try to lead in Put People First! PA is really acknowledging that voting is important, voting rights are very important, participation in the political process is important, but we also see that people need to be organized 365 days of the year to really make meaningful their participation on one day of the year.

Borja: Staying away from [partisanship] is a necessary element; not getting tied up in it is essential. Creating a sphere in which we're not necessarily in collaboration with either of the two parties allows us to be able to raise awareness of the problems that exist in our society amongst all the individuals that we're working with in the various organizations that make up the PPC, in PPF, and across the Commonwealth and to emphasize that the strength to change the system lies not in the parties but in the body politic, the individuals that make up the nation. We are the ones that need to make change happen, given the inertia of our so-called leaders.

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Se puede decir que la gente tiene sed – están buscando conectarse con algo y quieren poner fin a su aislamiento, quieren algo real.

UPoor: Otra dificultad que mucha gente dentro del Poor People's Campaign están enfrentando es como unir personas de diferentes partidos políticos sin comprometer su valores o terminar como un peón de cualquier partido político. Me pregunto, ¿ustedes tienen experiencia con esto en Pennsylvania?

Nijmie: Muchas personas no están participando en el proceso político formal. En Put People First! PA nosotros tratamos de guiar de una manera que reconoce que votar es importante, los derechos de votación son muy importantes, participar en el proceso político es importante, pero también vemos que la gente necesita organizarse 365 días al año para que realmente sea significativa su participación ese un día del año.

Borja: Alejarnos del [partidismo] es un elemento necesario; es esencial no enredarnos en eso. Crear un ámbito en que no estamos necesariamente en colaboración con ninguno de los dos partidos nos permite despertar conciencia de los problemas que existen en nuestra sociedad entre todos los individuos que están trabajando dentro de las varias organizaciones que forman el PPC, en PPF, y a lo largo del estado y para enfatizar que el poder para cambiar el sistema se encuentra no en los partidos políticos, sino en el pueblo, los individuos que constituyen la nación. Nosotros somos los que necesitamos hacer que ocurra algún cambio, dado la inercia de nuestros supuestos líderes.

Dispatches from Hazleton

By Jamie Longazel

In early February, a video of a white school police officer brutalizing a student of color at Hazleton Area High School (HAHS) went viral. The video shows the officer punching the already-restrained young woman in the leg before he grabs her by her ponytail and slams her head against a cafeteria table.

Anthracite Unite released a second video a month later from a separate incident showing the same officer punching a male student on the side of his head.

As of early April, despite strong and persistent demands from community members and a coalition of organizations, Hazleton Area School District (HASD) has taken no action. The officer still has a job “policing” students. When I graduated from HAHS in 2001, Latinx immigration to Hazleton was just beginning. In 2000, 95% of Hazletonians identified as white. According to 2017 estimates, over 54% of the population now identifies as Hispanic or Latino.



As I write about in my book – *Undocumented Fears: Immigration and the Politics of Divide and Conquer in Hazleton, Pennsylvania* – it’s essential to look at local and global economic conditions to understand these demographic shifts. After its coal industry sunk, Hazleton turned to manufacturing in the 1950s. But neoliberal policy changes in the ‘80s increased cross-locale competition to attract manufacturing firms. Realizing the local economy wasn’t going to be able to tread water much longer, developers responded by offering massive tax breaks to companies like Cargill and Amazon using the state-level Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) initiative. Notably, the Hazleton Area School Board (HASB) signed off on this, agreeing to forfeit about \$1 million per year from its budget. New employers tended to offer lower wages, poorer conditions, and positions that were temporary, not permanent.

For many immigrants who originally settled in and around New York City – mostly folks from the Dominican Republic, among other Latin American countries wounded by global capitalism and U.S. imperialism – these jobs and Hazleton’s relatively low cost of living looked desirable in comparison to other options. Which is all to say, poor and working class whites and poor and working class Latinx folks began living side-by-side, both disaffected by the same economic processes.

In 2006, Hazleton gained national notoriety for passing the racist Illegal Immigration Relief Act (IIRA). The law was spearheaded by Mayor Lou Barletta, who, as we know, is now a familiar name across Pennsylvania after his failed Senate campaign last year. Barletta (who also supported KOZ) played on local anxieties about demographic change and economic decline. His racist logic was that the IIRA would, in his words, “eliminate illegal aliens from the City of Hazleton,” and therefore reduce crime. Immigrants became the scapegoat, and the economic backstory was conveniently removed from the debate.

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So, as Hazleton's population began to shift, the demographics of the district's employees unsurprisingly did not. Today, 51.1% of HASD students identify as Hispanic (5,731 students) and 44.8% identify as white (5,021 students). Yet 98.6% of HASD teachers identify as white – just a one percent improvement in teacher diversity since 2013 – and, in all, only five teachers (0.6%) identify as Hispanic. The HASB has been pushed on this for years, yet they remain stubbornly opposed to the idea of proactively recruiting more Latinx and/or bilingual teachers.

The viral videos thus exposed far more than two disgusting incidents of police abuse. They also exposed more elite indifference to poor and working class young people in our community. Especially their willingness to perpetuate the continued criminalization of poor people of color, particularly Latinx youth. While many districts are dropping the term "School Resource Officer" because it's problematic to have "officers" in a learning environment, HASD still uses the phrase "School Police Officer." In 2015, Hispanics and other students of color (52% of all students at the time) accounted for 72% of HASD's in-school suspensions, 69.1% of its out-of-school suspensions, and all eight (100%) of the students the District expelled.

Thanks to the efforts of community members and a coalition of activists and organizers, the room was packed for the first school board meeting after the first video circulated. Superintendent Brian Uplinger began the meeting with an official statement that failed to address any of our concerns. Not once did he express disappointment for the officer's actions, despite twice reprimanding violence among students. As community members – especially Latina moms – spoke their truths about this sort of thing being business-as-usual at HAHS, Board members were visibly inattentive. The President of the Board even picked up his coat and left mid-meeting without explanation while a young Latina mother and recent HAHS graduate shared her experiences with racism from when she was a student.

Despite the Board's behavior, the meeting was inspiring. The people demolished the decorum of the meeting, making it so incredibly evident who the Board was supposed to be there to serve. The empowerment experienced by those who spoke up was palpable.

We clearly had momentum; at least until the press came after us.

The next morning, the Standard-Speaker, Hazleton's local newspaper, published an editorial calling the activists at the rally "carpetbaggers." They accused those of us who traveled to Hazleton from outside the city of seeking stardom; from their view, we were only there to make Hazleton the next Ferguson. A few weeks later the paper delivered another blow. Their first story featured a lengthy interview with Ed Harry, the HASD Director of Security & Police Services. Harry had the nerve to speak for the Latinx community, including the victim's mother, telling the reporter that after coming in to watch the full video of the incident, she began crying in disbelief that her child would behave that way. Even though we had just heard about a dozen powerful accounts to the contrary (which the reporter writing the story was there to witness), according to him, this is a common occurrence.

We got our momentum back to an extent after the release of the second video, but within a matter of weeks it had all but disappeared.

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Arts Page

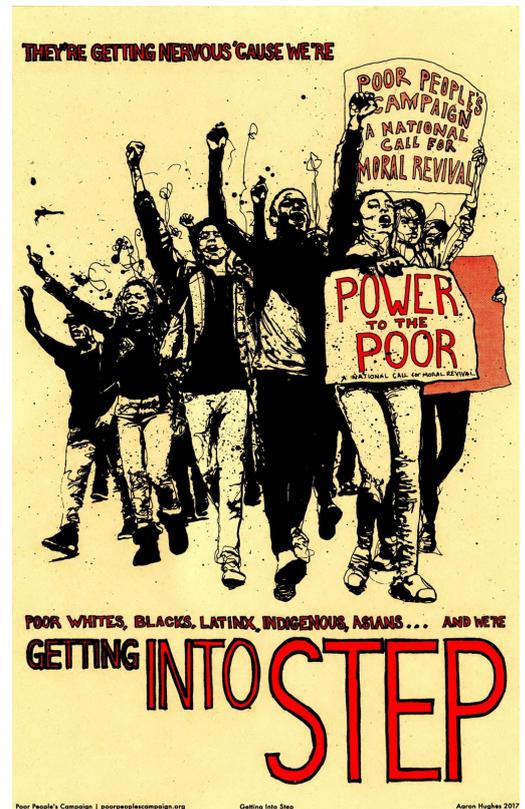


Above: Mural at MST School in Brazil

Below: Painting by Quinha, Philadelphia



Top right: "Mistica" performance at Membership Assembly.
 Middle right: Farrah and Jacob perform "Wading in the Water" at Membership Assembly.



Above: Graphic "They're getting nervous 'cause we're getting into step" by Justseeds

Take It to the streets
 Yes, tonight I heard whispers
 Take it to the streets

Haiku by Tammy Rojas

A Member Reflection: HCHR Campaign & Organizing Model

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As a member of one of Put People First! PA's healthcare rights committees (HRCs), the Fayette Justice HRC, I've been working with the other HRC members, Jacob Hope, Richard Mosley, and Gabriel Rocha to bring attention to and shut down a state prison, SCI-Fayette, that was built on over 50 million tons of dumped coal ash. Since the prison was first built in 2003, prisoners and locals in the area have been getting sick and dying. The drinking water and air is so contaminated that they bring in bottled water for prison guard dogs while the inmates are forced to drink contaminated tap water. There are power holders such as the health care company that's contracted to serve the inmate population for all state prisons in PA, WellPath formerly known as Correct Care Solutions, who prioritize profit over human lives. Fayette Justice HRC intends to focus our PPF-PA September week of action targeting profiteers on WellPath.

The Fayette Justice HRC disseminates a biannual newsletter that we mail to inmates, family members, like-minded advocacy groups, legislators and power-holders to continue bringing attention to the plight of inmates at SCI-Fayette and other prisons like it across the state and the country, and demand that this prison be shut down. We've also participated in public actions such as the "Fight Toxic Prisons Conve-PArgence." This represents another campaign strategy, which is doing research and holding power-holders accountable for ensuring healthcare is a basic human right.

One of the things that makes PPF-PA unique as a model is its focus on organization vs mobilization. Mobilization is a more short-term effort aimed at getting people to show up in numbers at particular events. Where mobilization falls short is that it often doesn't lead to a sustainable effort and consistent engagement in the way that true organizing does. PPF-PA works consistently to engage members in ongoing ways through their participation in HRCs, on Teams, and on working groups within Teams (e.g., the group working with state government to advocate for a Public Healthcare Advocate.) Put People First! PA has created a family-like atmosphere where everyone is very intentional about our commitment to developing ourselves and each other as leaders from within through annual convenings that offer political education and teach members about "Leadership Across Differences." When we get members to work collectively in support of a campaign and help them grow as leaders, it sustains their commitment to the struggle over the long haul. These are not going to be immediate wins we are fighting for but rather real, lasting and meaningful change. I've grown so much as a leader and an organizer through my participation with PPF-PA. I know that I am part of a new and unsettling force that is putting healthcare as a human right and other human rights issues on the local and national moral and political agenda.



Learning from the California Homeless Union

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Anthony stated that millions of us are one healthcare emergency, one natural disaster, one government shutdown, or one paycheck away from homelessness. He stated that “in their struggle to survive and build a movement to end homelessness, the homeless are walking point for the rest of our class.” The California Homeless Union is a deeply instructive experience of the poor organizing the poor and holds many valuable lessons for PPF and other organizations across the country.

It is very inspiring for fighting organizations of the poor to find and meet with other fighting organizations of the poor. Our organizations crave lessons that we can learn from each other. We have found such organizations in the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. Going forward it will be critical that our leaders get the opportunity to compare notes and exchange experiences with other efforts of the poor organizing the poor. We will need to take the time to report back to one another on the lessons learned from these exchanges.

The National Struggle for Universal, Publicly Financed Health Care

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The outpouring of support for Medicare for All is historic, but so is the opposition. The insurance, hospital, and pharmaceutical industries have banded together with other corporate allies to form a new lobbying group called the Partnership for America’s Health Care Future. They’re already spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on advertising and lobbying to spread misinformation and use scare tactics to create

opposition to Medicare for All. The effects of all the conflicting messages people are hearing is visible in polling. On the one hand 72% of people say they would support Medicare for All if it guarantees health insurance as a right for all people. On the other hand 60% say they would oppose it if it led to higher taxes. Profiteers are telling people their taxes would increase without explaining that taxes would replace and entirely eliminate premiums, deductibles, copays, medical bills, and all other medical costs. Financing our health care system collectively through taxes instead of individually out of pocket would require corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share and would make sure no one would ever again be denied care or have to pay more than they can afford.

How do we overcome this? Organizing. We need to build enough popular power to overcome industry opposition, and we need to forge a new moral common sense that says that healthcare is a human right that we have a moral obligation to guarantee for everyone. Put People First! PA focuses our organizing on holding State power-holders accountable because this is where our statewide base can most effectively exert our power. But of course everything happening in Washington and in other states matters. Our long-term vision is for a health care system that meets the needs of everyone in the country, not just in Pennsylvania, the politics playing out beyond our borders have a big influence on what is politically possible here. Just as importantly, we’re not alone in the struggle: we’re part of a larger national people’s movement for universal, publicly financed healthcare. We draw inspiration and solidarity from our partners in other states, and in the same way people in other states are now looking to and learning from PPF-PA.

Leadership Across Difference

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UPoor: What did the activities of the Poor People's Campaign look like in Pennsylvania?

Nijmie: I think we all feel like it went really well here in PA for the 40 Days of Action [40 days of nationally-coordinated action in dozens of states and D.C. that launched the Poor People's Campaign]. It's a lot of work, a lot of people involved. It gave us something to really rally around. It was unifying. And there were some great actions, really great civil disobedience actions during the 40 Days. The largest one was the fourth week around the right to health care and healthy environment. There were 31 arrests that day, and that week it that was the largest civil disobedience of any state in the country. PPF ourselves mobilized over 50 folks to the capital from all over the state. So that was a great day.

Borja: The way that we've looked at political education is that it's been fundamentally focused on advancing our base-building and organizing work: political education as an instrument to raise awareness of the four evils that the Poor People's Campaign is tackling —systemic racism, poverty, the war economy and ecological devastation, along with the distorted moral narrative; political education to raise awareness of the obstacles that we're facing whether it be through power analysis or by studying the political economy within Pennsylvania; but also political education as a way of bringing in new members into the Poor People's Campaign. We've seen it as an incredible way of informing the strategic, tactical and policy work that we do, as both something that is counter-hegemonic, but also counter-educational, in the sense that we view it as helping to teach us what we weren't taught in our various educational institutions.

El liderazgo cruzando líneas diferencia

Continúa de la página 6

UPoor: ¿Cómo fueron las actividades del Poor People's Campaign en Pennsylvania?

Nijmie: Yo pienso que todos sentimos que nos fue muy bien en Pennsylvania para las 40 Días de Acción [40 días de demostraciones coordinadas nacionalmente en decenas de estados y D.C. que lanzaron el Poor People's Campaign]. Es mucho trabajo, hay mucha gente involucrada. Nos dio una razón por solidarizarnos. Fue unificador. Y hubo demostraciones buenísimas, muy buenas demostraciones de desobediencia civil durante los 40 Días. El más grande fue la cuarta semana sobre el derecho a el cuidado de salud y un ambiente sano. Hubo 31 detenciones ese día, y esa semana fue la desobediencia civil más grande de cualquier estado en el país. Nosotros dentro de PPF movilizamos más de 50 personas de todo el estado a la capital. Entonces eso fue un día excelente.

Borja: La manera en que hemos acercado la educación política es con fundamentalmente enfocarlo en la meta de avanzar el crecimiento de nuestra base y nuestro trabajo de animar y organizar; la educación política es un instrumento para despertar la conciencia de los cuatro males que el Poor People's Campaign está afrontando – racismo sistémico, la pobreza, la economía de la guerra, y la devastación ecológica, junto con la narración moral distorsionada; la educación política para despertar la conciencia de los obstáculos que estamos enfrentando sea a través de un análisis del poder o sea con (por) estudiar la economía política de Pennsylvania; pero también educación la política como una manera de introducir nuevos miembros a la campaña del Poor People's Campaign. Hemos visto que es una manera increíble de informar el trabajo estratégico, táctico, y legislativo, ambos como algo que va contra la hegemonía, pero también como algo que va contra lo educacional, en el sentido que nosotros vemos que nos está ayudando a aprender lo que no nos enseñaron en nuestras instituciones educativas.

Dispatches from Hazleton

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I wouldn't chalk it up as a loss, however. We're now starting to build a longer term strategy. The process politicized some people; it gave existing leaders a chance to grow; and having a chance to work together intensely for weeks tightened up some interpersonal bonds that can't be loosened by a smear campaign. There's even four Latina mothers, angered by what happened, who are now running for a seat on the HASB. I thought about Put People First! PA and the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival lot during these weeks, especially when things weren't going well. First, the distinction we draw in PPF between mobilizing and organizing jumped out. While we were very successful at mobilizing, at least initially, we still have a long way to go in terms of organizing. We just didn't have the capacity to keep our resistance up over the long term.

I kept thinking about the importance of building working class power across racial and ethnic lines. Working class whites in Hazleton despise the local elite. We know how they work. We know they are corrupt. We know they look out for one another and couldn't care less about the rest of us. We've been through the system and seen it firsthand. And now here we were, alongside our working class sisters and brothers who they've taught us to hate, seeing them go through it too... only worse.

But this was a hard conversation to have amid a struggle over police brutality. The idea of also trying to organize working class whites around this received pushback from national organizations from the get-go. The linkages, however, were certainly there. Coal barons exploited child labor in the mining days, corrupt judges sent young people - including many young white people - off to prison for profit, and now this.

This isn't to say the risk of "centering whiteness" isn't real. There were plenty of occasions where people on our side problematically lost sight of who was most impacted. Rather, it is to say that when we don't organize across racial and ethnic lines and when we don't make connections across issues, the vision of those who don't see themselves as directly affected begins to narrow.

I winced several times reading online commentary from working class white folks I went to high school with. They called the young people "animals," attacked working class parents for not doing a "better job" raising their kids, and so on. Because for them, this was simply a case of the officer versus the student. And in a sociopolitical context where they are socialized to see themselves and their interests as white rather than as working class, of course they are more likely to see themselves in the officer. To see themselves as potential targets of activist scrutiny, to see themselves as one day being in a position of having to use force to defend themselves against "those violent invaders." As was the case with the IIRA, economic issues leave their field of vision. Questions of who has power, why, and how they wield it leave their field of vision. And, ultimately, the possibility of rising up and fighting back alongside their Latinx comrades leaves their field of vision. They aren't "too stupid" to see or "irreparably racist." Like I said, they despise the powerful, too. They've got class instincts. It's just that divide and conquer tactics – perpetrated by demagogues, yes, but often well-meaning liberals, too – pull the wool over our eyes, allowing powerful people to abuse us all with impunity.



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