INTEGRATED ECONOMIES AND FRACTURED LIVES: SOCIAL WORK AND IMMIGRATION IN THE NEW CENTURY

Gregory Acevedo, PhD

The historical impact of immigration and migration is embedded in the very foundations of social work. The influx of rural-to-urban and foreign-born migrants moving into U.S. cities, and the social problems that resulted, eventually gave rise to the formalized efforts of the Charity Organization and Settlement House movements. Immigration increasingly became associated with concerns regarding poverty, deviance, family functioning, and cultural assimilation, and motivated much of early social work practice.

These concerns—immigration, poverty, family functioning, and cultural differences—remain, and have, in fact, intensified in the current era. Is social work capable of addressing the current needs of immigrants and refugees?

One dimension where social work can certainly assist is in working with immigrants and refugees to negotiate cultural barriers and the stress of acculturation into a new society. Issues related to language, identity, and family functioning may affect socialization, social support, and protective factors.

However, the most crucial area for social work with immigrants and refugees is in assisting this population’s incorporation into the host society’s economic realm:

Ultimately, the labor market. The dynamics of migration are related to political, economic, and cultural factors. Some of the by-products of political and economic development that immigrants and refugees struggle with are high rates of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, low wages, and low levels of educational attainment. Families vulnerable to these socioeconomic instabilities may disintegrate. As a result, social problems like crime, violence, and drug addiction often develop within the communities where they live.

The political, economic, and cultural factors that shape social conditions have been fundamentally altered in an era of globalization. Within this maelstrom, the nature of immigration has changed, but the primary issue instigating immigration is the same as it was a century ago: Migration increases individual and household opportunities. Migration and alternative household formation are rational responses to globalization and its requisite mobility and flexibility. Immigrant networks and remittances create linkages that span cities, regions, states, and nations.
From the Chair

Ramon Salcido, DSW

For the last year, I have been part of the Poverty and Social Justice Specialty Practice Section Committee. During this time, I have had the opportunity to work with passionate and committed committee members. We are diverse ethnically, geographically, and in gender. We have a wide range of interests, but share a commitment for peace and social and economic justice. I want to thank all of the members, especially Mary Bricker Jenkins, for her work as editor of our Specialty Section Newsletter, and for her leadership and many hours of volunteer time.

The Poverty and Social Justice Section Committee would like to be a resource for you, whether you are just beginning to explore this field or are actively seeking information about our issues, initiatives, and other sites with similar interests. We encourage you to examine our newsletters and explore the Poverty and Social Justice Web site at http://www.socialworkers.org/sections/, where we post newsletters, updates, announcements, and have an online forum for section member dialogue and discussion.

Ramon Salcido, DSW
Chair, Poverty and Social Justice Section

POOR PEOPLE’S MARCH FOR ECONOMIC HUMAN RIGHTS

Saturday August 2nd-August 30th
From Marks, Mississippi, to Washington, DC

• Start in Marks, Miss., the starting point of Dr. King’s Poor People’s March, on August 2nd
• Arrive in Washington, D.C. on August 23rd
• Establish a week-long tent city in Washington, D.C., including educational material and protests

Join poor and homeless families this August for the Poor People’s March for Economic Human Rights, to document and protest economic human rights violations. Commemorating the 35th anniversary of Martin Luther King’s Poor People’s Campaign, we will be marching through the South, retracing the steps planned by King in his last days. See the first issue of the Poverty and Social Justice Newsletter for background. For updates and more information, check http://www.kwru.org (the Kensington Welfare Rights Union Web site) frequently.
WE OPPOSE THE CONTINUING U.S.-LED WAR AGAINST IRAQ: A STATEMENT FROM NATIVE UNIVERSITY AND TRIBAL COLLEGE PROFESSORS

Nelrene Yellow Bird, LCSW, LAC

A group of more than 40 Native university and tribal college professors joined together to compose, sign and distribute a statement that opposes the US-led war against Iraq. An excerpt of that statement is included below. The full text with signatures is posted on the Poverty and Social Justice Section online forum—available at www.socialworkers.org/sections. Click on Poverty and Social Justice and go to the online forum page.

“We Native professors, from many different tribal nations, educational institutions, and academic disciplines, unequivocally oppose the continuing U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. As Indigenous academics, we believe that one of our major responsibilities is to contribute to the intellectual conscience of our tribal nations, and the world community, by providing honest and intelligent assessments of what is truthful and just, and what is not.

We find no plausible moral or political justifications for this U.S.-led war and join millions of people of conscience worldwide who stand with courage in opposition to this illegal, unprovoked, and inhumane attack upon a sovereign nation.”

“... We believe that the United States has engaged in an illegal and brutal war against innocent Iraqi Peoples. Iraq has done nothing to the United States and this is a war of choice not necessity. It is an unprovoked attack that is causing untold suffering. Many throughout the world, and here at home, continue to strongly condemn the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. Feelings of mistrust, hatred, and fear of the United States continue to rise as the U.S. has claimed the right to “preemptively strike” at anyone who is suspected of being a threat to American security or interests. Moreover there are strong concerns about the possibility of U.S. pre-emptive aggressions toward Syria, Iran, Libya, and North Korea.

As the children of Indigenous Peoples who survived, and continue to face, the oppressive policies of the United States, we have much to teach this nation about the horrors of war, racism, hatred, and inhumanity. We are courageous peoples who have provided proportionally more military service to this nation than any other group. We are also peaceful peoples whose ancestors created some of the most sophisticated and effective forms of peace-making and peace-keeping the world has ever known. We have much to teach this nation and the world about peace, acceptance of differences, and justice. As people of conscience, and people who have been on the receiving end of American imperialism, we call for the end of the U.S.-led aggression and occupation of Iraq, along with immediate humanitarian and rebuilding efforts. We ask our tribal nations to join us in condemning and resisting all unjust, illegal wars and aggressions and instead use the wisdom of our tribal traditions to promote policies of peace and diplomacy throughout the world.”

Nelrene Yellow Bird, LCSW, CAC, currently teaches in the Social Work Program at Minot State University in Minot, North Dakota. Nelrene is an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes (Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikara) in North Dakota. She is also a member of the Poverty and Social Justice Section Committee.
For more than a decade, the Mattaponi Tribe of Virginia, direct descendants of Pocahontas’ father, Chief Powhatan, struggled in an intense legal battle, to preserve the delicate balance of the ecosystem upon which their livelihood depends. The battle began when the city of Newport News proposed damming the Mattaponi River, upon which the tribe’s reservation is situated, to create the King William Reservoir. In 2001, the State Office of the Army Corps of Engineers denied the city a permit for the dam. James Gilmore, the incumbent governor, appealed the decision to the ACOE Mid-Atlantic office, with full support of the city’s government and U.S. Senator John Warner. In late 2002, high-ranking officials of the Corps were close to deciding upon the appeal to grant the permit to Newport News.

Leaving the issues of environmental impact to the Sierra Club, legal issues to Georgetown University’s Institute for Public Resources, and engineering concerns to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Virginia Chapter of NASW joined with the tribe, limiting its focus on this issue to the impact the project would have on the tribe’s culture, heritage, and spirituality, according to Mary Anne Nulty, ACSW, LCSW, Virginia Chapter delegate and committee member of the Private Practice Specialty Section. Cultural impact, she noted, would play a central role in the final decision.

“The Virginia Chapter joined with the tribe because promoting social justice is central to the mission of our organization and is what differentiates NASW from other health professions,” Nulty wrote, in a letter addressed to NASW Executive Director Elizabeth Clark, Terry Mizrahi, NASW president, and several other members of the association. “Because this issue has risen from the state level to the national level within the U.S. Corps of Engineers, and because NASW has recently acquired official policy regarding indigenous populations, as well as a resolution addressing environmental justice, I believe it is time that our national office speak out on behalf of the tribe in their struggle for survival.”

Following is the full text of a letter sent on March 21, 2003, to Virginia Governor Mark Warner and Donald Walsh, the regional administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, from Dr. Elizabeth Clark, Executive Director of NASW, outlining the tribe’s struggle and supporting the Virginia Chapter’s role in the ongoing fight to preserve its culture and heritage.

Four years ago the Virginia Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) joined with the Mattaponi Indian Tribe in their efforts to maintain what remains of their culture and heritage. During the last decade, the Mattaponi Tribe of Virginia have been fighting a legal battle with the City of Newport News in its pursuit of building a reservoir, which would irreversibly alter the delicately balanced ecosystem upon which the Mattaponi depend for their livelihood.

The Virginia Chapter of NASW has limited its focus on this issue to the impact the project would have upon the tribe’s culture, heritage, and spirituality. The Chapter supports the tribe’s position because promoting social justice is central to the mission of our organization.

The ability to have control over one’s environment is basic to emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Within this context, indigenous people could make choices in accordance with their own values. The Mattaponi people, whose reservation sits on the Mattaponi River, which was to be used for the proposed reservoir, were objecting
because it would adversely affect and perhaps ruin their fishing; flood burial sites and other sites of historical and spiritual significance to the Tribe; and destroy wetlands, wildlife animals and plants (some of them medicinal).

The National Association of Social Workers supports the efforts of the Virginia Chapter in advocating for the Mattaponi people and the protection of their cultural heritage.

As a result of the combined efforts of the NASW Virginia Chapter, the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club, and Georgetown University’s Institute for Public Resources, the Virginia Marine Resource Commission denied Newport News the permit to build the King William Reservoir. This decision cannot be appealed. “I am elated for the tribe and very proud of both NASW’s Virginia Chapter and the national office for their respective roles in supporting the tribe’s position,” Nulty said. “It is an excellent example of advocacy from the perspectives of both social and environmental justice.”

A FOCUS ON THE FOREIGN-BORN

Ramon M. Salcido, DSW, Vincent Ornelas, MSW, and Toby Hur, MSW

This article focuses primarily on demographic changes related to the relative increase in the number and proportion of foreign-born persons living in the United States. In this article, foreign-born is defined as a person who emigrated to the U.S. from another country, and was not a U.S. citizen at birth (Schmidley, 2001). In general, the last three decades have brought significant changes in immigration patterns. For example, while the most significant numbers of immigrants previously came to the U.S. from Europe, the numbers of immigrants from other regions, like Latin America and Asia, have increased, so that the nation’s immigrant population is now characterized by a predominance of Asians and Latinos.

What does the 2000 Census inform us about the foreign-born?

According to the 2000 Census, the foreign-born population in the U.S. has now reached approximately 28.4 million. This is the highest level since the turn of the century. In contrast, in 1900, the country’s foreign-born population numbered 10.3 million (Gibson & Lennon, 1999).

What is the educational level of the foreign-born?

With regard to education, 86.6 percent of native-born citizens over age 25 have a high school diploma, as compared to 67 percent of the foreign-born, according to the 2000 Census. Specifically, 94.9 percent of foreign-born from Africa reported having completed high school or more; those from Canada, 85.5 percent; from Asia, 83.8 percent; from Europe, 81.3 percent; from South America, 79.6 percent; and those from Mexico, 33.8 percent (Schmidley, 2001).

What countries do the foreign-born come from?

According to the 2000 Census data, about 91 percent of the foreign-born originate from three regions: 51 percent, or 14.5 million, are from Latin America; 25 percent, or 7.2 million, from Asia; and 15 percent, or 4.4 million, are from Europe. By contrast, 52 percent of naturalized citizens are from Europe; 47.1 percent from Asia; and 28.3 percent from Latin America (Schmidley, 2001).
Overall, the top 10 individual countries, in descending order, that account for immigrant growth in the U.S. in 2000 are: Mexico, China, the Philippines, India, Cuba, Vietnam, El Salvador, Korea, the Dominican Republic, and Canada. In 1900, the largest number of immigrants came from: Germany, Ireland, Canada, Great Britain, Sweden, Italy, Russia, Poland, Norway, and Austria (Gibson & Lennon, 1999).

What are the age and labor force characteristics of the foreign-born?

The 2000 Census reported that the median age for the U.S. native-born population is 34.5, and the median age for the foreign-born is 38.1. With regard to age distributions, 28.3 percent of the U.S. native-born population is under 18 years, and 41.7 percent are 25 to 54. In contrast, of the foreign-born, 10 percent are under age 18, and 58.7 percent are ages 25-54. The largest proportion (38.6 percent) of foreign-born aged 65 and over emigrated from Europe (He, 2002).

Of the national labor force of 140.5 million people, 12.4 percent (17.4 million) are foreign-born. Of the overall foreign-born population, 66.6 percent are in the labor force, as compared to 67.3 percent of native-born citizens. Regarding gender, 79.6 percent of foreign-born males are in the labor force, versus 73.4 percent of native-born males. Among females, the opposite is true, with 61.6 percent of native-born and 53.7 percent of foreign-born women in the labor force (Schmidley, 2001).

Where do the foreign-born reside?

Nine states are home to a higher proportion of immigrants than the country as a whole. Nationally, the foreign-born make up an average of 10.4 percent of the population, but, in California, 25.9 percent of the total state population or 8.8 million are foreign-born; in New York, the foreign-born account for 19.6 percent of the state’s population, or 3.6 million; and 18.4 percent of Florida’s population, or 2.8 million, are foreign-born. Interestingly, immigrants make up 16.1 percent of Hawaii’s total population and 15.2 percent of Nevada’s population. In addition, a large number of immigrants also live in New Jersey (14.9 percent), Arizona (12.9 percent), Massachusetts (12.4 percent), and Texas (12.2 percent). In general, among the foreign-born, 39.9 percent live in the West and 26.8 percent live in the South. Foreign-born immigrants are most likely to live inside central cities of metropolitan areas (Schmidley, 2001).

What languages do the foreign-born report as speaking?

The 2000 Census reports that, nationally, 54.3 percent of foreign-born persons five and over speak a language other than English. Of the foreign-born, 52.3 percent speak Spanish, about 21.9 percent speak an Indo-European language, and 21.6 percent speak an Asian/Pacific Island language. Interestingly, about 73.5 percent of these persons report that they speak English less than “very well.”

What are the reported income and poverty rates for the foreign-born?

Median earnings for full-time, year-round work for foreign-born males are $27,329, and $22,139 for foreign-born females. By contrast native-born men earn $37,528, while native-born women earn $26,698. With regard to the poverty rate, 11.2 percent of the native-born population live at or below the poverty line, while 16.8 percent of the foreign-born live below poverty (Schmidley, 2001). This suggests that most foreign-born persons earn less, and have higher below-poverty rates, than native-born persons.
What does the Census data on the foreign-born mean for social work services and action?

Census data suggest that a large number of foreign-born immigrants speak a language other than English, live at or below poverty levels, and represent an emerging immigrant group that is more Latino and Asian than European. On a service level, social workers should develop cross-cultural services to this emerging group. Some foreign-born have been victims of racial profiling and anti-immigrant sentiments. Social workers should collaborate with other immigrant rights groups in combating injustices against the foreign-born. The NASW Code of Ethics delineates our basic values and provides guidelines for practice with regards to our clients, colleagues, and broader society. These standards provide a threshold for all practitioners’ professional activities.

NASW Code of Ethics

1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity

(a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures.

(b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients’ cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients’ cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.

(c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, and mental or physical disability.

Social workers can take certain steps to ensure the most competent services are provided to non-English speaking, immigrant populations:

1. Utilize resources available in the community, such as free interpretation services provided by nonprofit organizations.

2. Actively engage community-based organizations that serve the target population in consultation and coordination. Incorporate their services into your own programs serving the target population.

3. Pay special attention to women, children, and the elderly among the target population—they often face greater difficulty accessing available services and economic opportunities.

4. Get involved with local planning authorities (city and county-wide) to advocate for cultural competency and language proficiency in the provision of all services.

5. Help organize the target population for better jobs, better living conditions, and better futures for themselves and their children. Work with unions and community advocates to amplify the impact of local organizing.

6. Advocate with NASW chapters at the state level for the rights of the target population. Influence the legislature with the united voice of social work professionals.

7. Launch a media campaign. Get the local media to carry stories about the target population.

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EroSion of civiL LibErTies

Marilynn Moch, PhD, ACSW

“Throughout this country’s history, the phrase ‘national security’ has often been used as a pretext for massive violations of individual rights. In the name of national security, President Wilson authorized the rounding up and deportation of thousands of foreign-born suspected ‘radicals’ during the Palmer Raids; President Franklin Roosevelt interned 120,000 Japanese Americans. The Cold War era brought loyalty oaths, blacklisting and travel restrictions. None of these measures were actually necessary to preserve national security; all of them violated civil liberties.” (ACLU, 2002).

The current spate of national security legislation began with the Anti-terrorist and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Act of 1996 (welfare reform), the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (1996) and the Immigration in the National Interest Act of 1995 (passed in 1996, but the rules were not promulgated until the end of 1997)—all of which have been of concern to social workers.

The “antiterrorist” aspects of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act and the Immigration in the National Interest Act are more anti-immigrant provisions than anti-terrorist provisions. Among them are the automatic deportation of any non-citizen convicted of a felony crime, an expansion of what constitutes a felony, a no-time-limit retroactive feature for when the crime was committed, and a clause excluding judiciary review. As a result, legal immigrants have been arrested and often held for many months in INS facilities for minor crimes they committed years previously, and which may not even have been felonies at the time they were committed. They are then deported to their country of origin, whether or not they had any connection to that country or knew the language.

At least two social work students have barely escaped deportation for minor, but felonious, crimes they committed many years earlier. In one case, when her husband was convicted, a student was also convicted of being an accessory to drug dealing. Although the 1997 law specifically states that no judicial review
is allowed in deportations authorized by the law, her attorney found a loophole, which resulted in the INS court's agreement to authorize a review. The court cancelled her pending deportation when her clients, the town mayor, city council president, and congressional representative arrived at her hearing to testify to her character and good deeds she performed. However, INS could still re-arrest her and initiate deportation proceedings again. The Committee for International Human Rights Inquiry (CIHRI), a social work organization, raised the funds to pay her legal expenses (CIHRI, 1997).

The other student received only community service and probation when the court accepted her plea: That she was unaware she was carrying drugs, when a friend gave her a package to deliver to another friend she was visiting. Nevertheless, when this student filed for citizenship, she was notified she would be deported due to the felony. Advised of her rights and options by CIHRI, she appealed to the governor of her state for a pardon, which was granted, voiding her pending deportation. Several state governors with large immigrant populations granted such pardons upon request and review.

The felony deportation laws cruelly impacted adoptees, in particular, who are often adopted in infancy from Asian or South American orphanages by U.S. citizens. At the time, unknown to the adopting parents, adoption proceedings did not automatically include U.S. citizenship for the child. If these children committed (or had, at any prior time, committed) a crime defined as a felony under the Anti-terrorist Act, they were deported. Congress revised the Act in 2002, to provide citizenship for foreign-born adopted children. This was too late for many who had already been separated from their families and deported to countries they did not know. United States Attorney General John Ashcroft has refused to reconsider the cases of those already deported, stating reviewing the cases would be too great an administrative burden for the INS.

Though there have been efforts in Congress to remove the retroactive provisions of the 1996 Act, none has been successful. Today, most non-citizens in prison on felony convictions are taken directly to INS detention facilities upon their release. Most countries will accept such deportees. However, INS detains released prisoner, as well as those arrested for prior convictions, whose home countries refuse to accept the cases. Such indefinite detention has been challenged in the courts, but the issue is unresolved. Attorneys have also ceased the common practice of advising their clients, if they are not citizens, to plead guilty to some level of felony when plea bargains are offered, because these pleas will result in deportation.

The most hopeful rollbacks of the Anti-terrorist Act have come from the courts’ ruling against the provisions that preclude judicial review. Some court jurisdictions, for example, have ruled that they have a right to review the law, and have then gone on to rule against its retroactive provisions.

Social workers are often unaware of this danger of deportation to their clients. Any non-citizen who has ever had a felony conviction is at risk, even if that person did not spend a day in jail.

Since the enactment of the USA Act of 2001 (the Patriot Act), the Justice Department has increased legal pressure on immigrants and U.S. citizens considered dangerous to national security. The Patriot Act authorizes the government to enter homes to “peek,” without notifying the occupants; to apply for warrants in any jurisdiction; to spy on citizens and non-citizens alike; to provide the resulting information to the CIA, NSA, INS, Secret Service and military without judicial review or evidence of a crime; and to detain non-citizens indefinitely.

It creates the new crime of domestic terrorism with an expanded (political) definition of terrorism, reduces privacy of student records,
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and expands wiretap authority with greatly reduced judicial oversight. There are also ancillary laws, rules, and regulations. The following are, therefore, some illustrative examples of particular interest to us as social workers (not a comprehensive analysis).

We are all aware of the detention of Arab men after 9/11. Actually, the process has been so secretive that we don’t know who has been detained. The Justice Department continues to refuse to provide their names. We have been told that many have been deported, but not why. Presumably, some had visa violations, and some were deported under provisions of the 1996 law.

Also well known is the order for all non-citizen, immigrant males to re-register with INS. When they do so, if there is any visa anomaly, they have been summarily detained/deported. Also commonly known are the visits, sometimes by the FBI, sometimes by local police directed by the FBI, to the homes of Arab men to question them, thus terrorizing Arab families and communities.

Somewhat less known are the activities of U.S. authorities in the Muslim Somali communities throughout the United States. The government has shut down Somali commercial establishments, taken Food Stamp authorization away from the all-important halal (properly religiously-prepared) food markets, and deported Somalis to Somalia, despite the lack of any functioning government to agree to their return. Courts have reversed many of these actions, but not before markets failed and people died (Davila, 2002; Hate Free Zone, 2003; Jamieson, 2002).

Civil liberties advocates, and some state and local jurisdictions, have argued that the Patriot Act and other laws, rules, and regulations purporting to fight terrorism have provisions that impinge upon states’ rights. As a result, the Justice Department and the FBI have worked hard since 2001 to assist Patriot Act advocates to pass state-based anti-terrorism legislation through state legislatures. Currently, 33 states have enacted such legislation, ranging from relatively benign to draconian. In Oregon, for example, the proposed supportive legislation defines a terrorist as anyone who “engages in activities that significantly disrupt the functioning of government,” punishable by up to life in prison. Such disruption would include sit-ins for any purpose. The Utah State Legislature passed anti-terrorist legislation prior to the Winter Olympics that took place there—in part to prevent a peaceful demonstration by a coalition of scores of poor peoples’ organizations using the public forum of the Olympics to publicize poverty in the United States. The demonstration was carried out.

To date, local police departments, either on their own initiative or supported by mayors and city councils, have refused to participate in many repressive measures. Police in several jurisdictions, for example, refused to call in Arab men for questioning. When federal agents wanted to jail Cheri Honkala, a leader of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union for two years, for her participation in a peaceful activity during the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, the municipal court retained jurisdiction and released her. With state enabling anti-terrorism legislation, local police and courts could be bound to enforce federal policies.

Closer to home are the U.S. citizens, not all of immigrant origin, being held by the U.S. government on terrorism charges on the basis of “secret evidence” that the government refuses to divulge, even to judges. An American citizen from the West Bank, who grew up in Kuwait, is currently being held in a federal prison without any charges at all (Egan, 2003).

Social workers, because of their activism and, sometimes, their published articles, have also been visited by the FBI. One social worker who participated in a “die in” in Washington, D.C., was detained by Delta Airlines
based on computer data and told that she should rethink her activities if she wished to fly. When she missed her flight, Delta couldn’t manage to rebook her for her trip, and she did not receive a refund. Delta is implementing CAPPS II, the airline profiling system, before it is made a law (ACLU, 2003).

Attorneys who defend unsympathetic clients, such as political radicals and charged terrorists, are now coming under fire themselves, setting a precedent for undermining attorney-client privilege. The case of Lynne Stewart, former attorney for Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, convicted mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, is illustrative. The National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers has an excellent supporting brief in this case (National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, 2001).

The Patriot Act has a sunset clause for 2005. In response to Democratic efforts in the Senate to enact curbs to the power of the Justice Department under the Patriot Act, Senator Orrin Hatch introduced an amendment to terminate the sunset clause. The resulting furor left the Patriot Act unchanged, for now. Additionally, the Justice Department circulated a draft proposal for what has been dubbed “Patriot Act II,” increasing its powers for domestic surveillance under the Act. Again, the resulting furor caused the Justice Department to withdraw the proposals, for now (Lichtblau, 2003).

I have recently heard riffs on Martin Niemoeller’s famous words. Here is my own: First they came for the illegals, and I did not speak up, because I was here legally. Then they came for the criminals, and I did not speak up, because I had never been to prison. Then they came for the legal immigrants, and I did not speak up, because I was a citizen. Then they came for the activists, and I did not speak up because I was afraid. Then they came for the defenders, and I did not speak up because I had never needed to be defended. Then they came for me, and by that time, there was no one to speak up.

Marilynn Moch, PhD, ACSW, is commissioner for North America, for the Human Rights Commission of the International Federation of Social Workers, and an adjunct lecturer at University of Washington’s School of Social Work. She is also a member of the Social Welfare Action Alliance, the Committee for International Human Rights Inquiry, and the National Association of Social Workers. Dr. Moch can be contacted at: MochCIHRI@aol.com

References


ORGANIZING FOR ECONOMIC HUMAN RIGHTS

Lauren Rudisill, MSW and Jennifer Netherton, MSW

The National Association of Social Workers-PA Chapter (NASW-PA) has joined with the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign and members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in a long-term effort to secure economic human rights for all residents of the commonwealth. The diversity and inclusiveness of this collaboration speaks to the project’s core conceptual and organizing principle – that securing economic human rights for everyone is an issue that affects all of us either directly or indirectly.

The Allies and the Activities

The Economic Human Rights – Pennsylvania Campaign came together in the fall of 2001 when two MSW students at Temple University and their faculty/field instructor approached the state NASW chapter and a state legislator, Rep. Lawrence Curry (D -154th Dist.), with leaders of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, the local member organization of the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign. Their request was straightforward: propose a house resolution that would require the legislature to study the feasibility of integrating the principles of economic human rights into the laws and policies of the commonwealth. Representative Curry agreed, and the “Curry Resolution” passed the house unanimously in the spring of 2002. Reciting the story this way cannot begin to convey the complexity, vision, and excitement generated through this alliance.

The Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC) is a national network of approximately eighty organizations organized and led by poor people. The campaign uses the United Nations’ 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to frame the issue of poverty and related conditions as direct violations of human rights. While the many constituent organizations of the campaign have different programs and organizing agendas, they come together to promote economic human rights (EHR) in a variety of ways, including educating and organizing around EHR concepts.

The Kensington Welfare Rights Union, based in Philadelphia, spearheaded the development of the PPEHRC several years ago, and Temple social work students have had field placements in the organization. Since last year, some students have been “detailed” to Rep. Curry’s office to work on the resolution and the hearings that followed its passage.

For the NASW chapter, joining the alliance was an opportunity to implement the overarching goal of its Policy Committee—ending poverty. The Chapter, through its Policy and PACE Committees, helped to develop and sponsor training for social workers in the concepts of EHR and their use in practice, lobbied for the passage of the resolution, and identified members and community advocates to testify at the legislative hearings on EHR. The members identified clients – people whose rights were being violated – who were willing to tell their stories to the legislators. These efforts continue and will be expanded next year.

Representative Curry is a Democrat whose constituency is primarily Republican and well-to-do. The likelihood is that he won no votes through his promotion of economic human rights. But he is an historian, and he understands social movements. He appreciated immediately that the purpose of the resolution was to provide an organizing opportunity to build a movement to end poverty. Using his legislative authority to investigate the need for legislation, he worked with NASW and KWRU to organize a number of hearings around the state to explore people’s experience of hunger, homelessness, and the needs for housing, transportation, employment, and health care. With the resolution passed (and reaffirmed in the new session), he continues his work as the
ranking Democrat on the Special Committee established under the resolution.

Our role – and the role of the students who will follow us – is to educate social workers about economic human rights and their use in practice, conduct research for Rep. Curry, and help organize the hearings. This year we traveled the state, training over 500 students and practitioners. In the future, we anticipate that local Economic Human Rights Committees will be established around the state to organize at a local level; in fact, the nucleus of several already exists where hearings have been held. As the committees evolve, the MSW students and their faculty will work with KWRU members to provide consultation and support to them.

Assumptions of the Campaign

As we have worked on this campaign this year, we have carried some assumptions and objectives into our work and tested them in our travels. In the next paragraphs are a few that have kept us motivated and that we now carry into our future as we prepare to graduate.

One of the objectives of the EHR-PA Campaign is to challenge the stereotypes of poverty and related conditions. There is a myth of meritocracy in our society that maintains the belief that the poor get what they deserve. Our society adopts this “blame the victim” ideology that is further exacerbated through the media. Part of the EHR-PA Campaign involves telling poor people that they should not be blamed for their poverty. Poverty is not a result of a personal failure but is impacted by systemic forces in the environment. In addition, we have found that poverty is not just a black/urban phenomenon, as the media may emphasize. The movement unites the poor across color lines. Poverty is hidden but present in rural pockets all over Pennsylvania and in fact, most poor people are white. We know of people who are living in the Appalachian areas with no running water or electricity. We have heard stories from people who live in old school buses. These people have jobs yet they still cannot afford basic necessities of life that most people do not even think twice about. These are the truths that are not being heard and this false image of the “welfare queen” and “lazy poor” people must be acknowledged, discussed, and changed in order for the movement to progress.

The EHR-PA Campaign works to reframe the debate on poverty and related conditions. This perspective views poverty as a direct violation of economic human rights. It says to people living in poverty and others who are economically vulnerable, “A legitimate document exists which guarantees our basic human rights. Having food, water, housing, education, health care, and a job are not privileges, they are rights — rights that need to be reclaimed by those of us who are suffering. In the richest country in the world there are people living on the streets, there are children starving to death, and there are millions of people without healthcare. This is unacceptable and a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights1.”

We need the people who are directly affected to lead this campaign to end poverty. This view stems from our historical analysis of social movements. All past social movements were led by those people who were directly affected by oppression. For example, the abolishment of slavery was in response to a movement by the slaves. The women’s suffrage movement was led by women. In The Trumpet of Conscience (HarperCollins 1989), Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “There are millions of poor people in this country who have very little, or even nothing to lose. If they can be helped to take action together, they will do so with a freedom and a power that will be a new and unsettling force in our complacent national life.” In order for social change to happen, we need a huge social movement led by those who are directly affected. We look to the people who are directly affected by poverty as the experts and follow their lead.

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The Role of Social Workers

Social workers in the movement are aligning themselves with people who are living in poverty. We offer a new framework for working with people who are in client status. In the EHR-PA campaign social workers are entering into what we call an alliance with our “clients” – one based on solidarity, not service. This new relationship allows us to work together rather than one person working “for” another. Rather than viewing poor people as passive victims we find that they are the real “experts” of their conditions.

One of the ways in which we are attempting to unify social workers and people whose economic human rights have been directly violated is through town meetings and legislative hearings organized at the local level. This process provides an opportunity for people to tell their stories about human rights violations. These stories are powerful and helps break the silence of poverty. In addition, new relationships are being formed among poor people, social workers, legislators and other allies. These new relationships form the basis of local Economic Human Rights Committees, which can then study and act on local issues in a national and, indeed, global context as part of the PPEHRC.

The EHR-PA Campaign has embarked on a huge project of collecting documentation of economic human rights violations across the state. Social workers are in an ideal position to talk to people and record the violations. In addition, this is a great project for poor people organizing in welfare offices, downsized workers and union members, and students. Some social work professors are using the documentation for class projects. The documentation includes written stories, photographs, video recordings, poems, songs, paintings, etc. We are looking for cases that represent the diversity of issues reflected in the UDHR such as the violations of the right to food, clothing, housing, education, health care, and living wage jobs. We also want to show the diversity of constituencies experiencing economic human rights abuses in this country.

You can gather evidence of violations from doing face to face interviews with people. This is also a great way to organize people and involve them in the campaign. Use any source of news or records you have access to. Possible sources include national and local newspaper articles, TV news reports, legal cases, medical records, official statistics, the internet, and local organizations. The point of this project is to learn as much as you can while doing interviews and research and most importantly conveying to people that their story is worthwhile and must be told. Asking people for their story helps to break their isolation and ends the silence of poverty. This activity is inexpensive, calling only for creativity and a commitment to social justice.

Looking Forward

Testimony given by poor people has generated concern and interest among the legislators. A new house resolution for the current session—identical to the first, reauthorizing “continued study”—passed shortly after nearly 400 social workers lobbied for it this spring. The legislative process has been instrumental as an organizing tool in the campaign. It is important to acknowledge that we are not looking for a legislative answer to end poverty. The resolution is used as an organizing tool which allows us to mobilize poor people and their allies around the state to continue building relationships. It also serves as a mechanism to aid in having people’s stories heard by the public—a public that is increasingly “only one illness away” from poverty. We encourage other states to replicate this activity and join our movement to end poverty and secure economic human rights.
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Reference

Immigration, from Page 1

The case of Latinos in the United States is a quintessential example of the struggle for economic, political, cultural, and social rights. Domestically, work with undocumented immigrants, as well as issues related to civil and labor rights, have been taken up by such movements as the farm workers’ and Justice for Janitors’ campaigns for unionization. In Latin America, human rights remain a critical issue—one that will surely become more complicated by expanding narco-militarization of the region.

Social work practice must recognize and contend with the pressures of a post-industrial and globalized world. Individuals, families, households, and communities are increasingly organized around a political economy that encourages mobility, yet undermines their natural support systems. The social work practitioner should recognize that this has implications for many models of service provision, in addition to immigrants and refugees.

Advocacy and policy efforts to assist immigrants and refugees will be more effective if the profession begins to design strategies and tactics that take into account the current political economy, which determines public policy. Social work must focus more attention on migration and immigration. An increased emphasis on international social work is a useful way to further these efforts. The profession must be equally active as a local, regional, national, global, and transnational agent.

Part of this enterprise must be social work’s participation in the formation of a multi-racial and multi-ethnic movement that focuses on the unified class interests, transcending sterile political expressions, such as diversity and multiculturalism. Two films provide a vision of what this would entail: *Matewan*, by John Sayles, and *Bread and Roses*, by Ken Loach.

*Matewan* tells the story of a coal miner’s strike in the early 1900s. In one scene, the workers—a combination of native-born whites, European immigrants, and African-Americans—are all playing music. The native-born bluegrass with country guitar and fiddle, the Italian folk music on a mandolin, and the African-American blues harmonica begin mixing and improvising to create an orchestral sound. This is a symbolic expression of what a multi-racial and multi-ethnic, class-based effort might become: Harmony from hybridity.

*Matewan* has its omissions; it depicts a male-dominated movement. The film *Bread and Roses* tells the story of a Justice for Janitors Service Employees International Union (SEIU) strike in LA. The strike transforms formerly alienated workers into a solidarity-based, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, non-
gendered labor movement composed of native-born Chicanos, African-Americans, Eastern European, and Latin American immigrants. Although Bread and Roses is perhaps the best portrayal yet of what a true solidarity movement might look like, it speaks too softly on issues such as ableism, ageism, gender, and sexual identity, and how these concerns might be integrated into the overarching effort for economic justice.

Each of the aforementioned issues has tremendous implications for politics and policy making. The old party politics, which managed European immigration and the forces of industrialization and urbanization in the last century, are gone. The long-time constituencies that culminated in the achievements of the Democratic Party’s New Deal Era and War on Poverty programming have disintegrated in the wake of suburbanization and increasing globalization.

Like the migrant workers and immigrants who are currently moving about the world-system at unprecedented levels and incorporating themselves into a rapidly changing society, social work must also find its place within the context of the simultaneous unraveling and integration of political, economic, and cultural systems. However, social work should act with caution and consider finely crafted strategies and tactics, or it runs the danger of accepting reform rather than fundamental social change. To paraphrase Eric Fromm: The spirit of the movement for economic justice must not succumb to the spirit of unfettered capitalism that it wants to replace and become a vehicle for workers to attain their place within its structure rather than transcending it. Instead of changing capitalism, the movement may eventually become absorbed by its spirit.

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