



Poor People's United Fund

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Boston's Spare Change Community

Spring 2016

I sometimes wish everyone could experience the alienation and discrimination, the isolation of disapprovalso everyone could know how it feels to be unloved, unwanted, unnecessary.

Kip Tiernan

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

An old Chinese Proverb curse says, "Better to be a dog in a peaceful time, than to be a human in a chaotic period." Well, given the state of our electoral process we can certainly see what they mean! Remember when we thought it was as bad as it could get?!

There is no question in my mind that the last 30 years of making it ok to demonize poor people, Muslims, Hispanics has led us to this moment in time when we are all too ready to put someone in office who can institutionalize this hatred in ways we have not seen since WWII.

We can see evidence of this in Georgia's article talking about how the Governor's budget proposes to 'save' \$29.5 million from cash assistance for very low income people. (8500 families) These families, already below the poverty level would lose between 35% to 50% of their cash income!

How will people pay rent? We will see a rise in hunger. PPUF is working with other coalitions and organizations to let people know just how harmful these cuts will be to the most vulnerable.

Vicky Steinitz's article gives us a picture of the plight of another unpopular group, Central American refugees who are fleeing from intolerable conditions in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

Yet in the face of all of this Kippy always liked to talk about Resurrections.

"We've learned to recognize ourselves truly as clowns who are realists and realists who must clown to stay alive. And like all circus clowns we will never, ever be in the big center ring but will almost always appear between the great acts as Henri Nowen tells us. We fumble and fall and pick ourselves up and start all over again, baggy pants and all. We may be clumsy and off balance and we may not always succeed, but Jesus Christ we try! And perhaps that's what crucifixions and resurrections are all about anyway, to do what we can, the best way we know how, with love and hope."

Kips' public memorial in Copley Square is progressing. More info soon!

In Struggle and Hope. Happy Spring Happy Easter!

Georgia, Margaret and Fran

P.S. Please read the obituary of the the loudest of the loud mouth women of Dorchester. Donna Finn was fiery advocate for all those who found themselves on the losing side of a rigged economic system. She was a dear friend and mentor. When I try to explain to people how loving she was all I can do is tell a story. "If I found myself lost and alone in a phone booth (remember those?) in Tuscaloosa Ala and I called Donna. I know she would say, "Don't leave that #%^&^# spot we are all coming to get you." She believed intensely in community. Thanks, Donna. We will continue your and Kippy's struggle for the dismissed.

Donna Finn, Lifelong Political Activist

Donna Finn died peacefully June 18th after a long life of struggle. She was formerly known as the “Queen of Dorchester” for her tireless and fiery leadership in the fight for racial and social justice.

In the early seventies, Donna awoke from believing “our country right or wrong” when her childhood friends returned home from being drafted to fight in Vietnam. She recognized that those who did not return in body bags were permanently scarred, both by the atrocities they had witnessed or participated in and the drugs they took to forget. She began to read history, learned from (and taught) anti-war political activists, and became politically engaged.



Donna became a powerful force in the campaign to remove the racist Judge Troy from the Dorchester Municipal Court. She participated in guarding the home of a neighborhood family who were threatened and attacked by racist violence. She helped found and for many years, co-directed Families and Friends of Prisoners, a Dorchester based self-help group which worked to keep families together while educating the larger community about the destructive impact of prisons and juvenile institutions, particularly on poor communities. She recognized that most prisoners, like combat veterans, would eventually come home but the wounds inflicted on them would also harm their families and neighborhoods.

Donna was active in the Dorchester Green Light Program, helping to identify safe homes for women escaping abuse and domestic violence. For many years, she was the pillar of the Dorchester Women’s Committee (DWC), a community group which sustained many individual women while organizing the best, largest, and loudest celebration of International Women’s Day in the Boston area for 25 years. (A copy of Donna’s Master’s thesis, on the history of the DWC’s International Women’s Day celebrations as unique working class events, is available for historians and activists at Harvard University’s Schlesinger Library.)

The DWC’s banner read: “Who’s that loud mouthed woman from Dorchester? She’s all of us!” Many who knew and loved Donna thought of her as THE loud mouthed woman from Dorchester.

This partial list of Donna’s work with many different political groups does not in any way reflect the impact and lasting influence of her life. She was a powerful personality, deeply attached both to her family and her extended family. She never forgot where she came from and had an extraordinary gift in her ability to talk to others who were not as politically aware or who felt powerless. She was respectfully and patiently able to help them change their opinions and find their strength. For Donna, if an injustice was happening in her world, it was her responsibility and that characteristic moved her to action when others might have stayed silent. Her friends remember with gratitude her confronting neighborhood teenagers who were outraged to see lesbian couples dancing together at one of her parties. Those boys woke up only because of Donna’s intervention.

She is survived by her daughter Kimberly, her grandson Kevin, her sisters Cheryl and Karen, her niece Kelly and nephew Damon, her extended family, and a community of political activists and sisters who will miss her for the rest of their lives. As Donna would have said, “Don’t mourn, organize!” A Donna Finn fund has been established at the Poor People’s United Fund in her honor.

Memorial Service: April 3 at 2-4 pm at the First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain.

Immigration Update----by Vicky Steinitz

The struggle to advance immigrant rights continues despite the daily diatribes of the Republican presidential candidates. The MA Trust Act bill, which limits the involvement of local police with federal immigration enforcement, received hearings in both the Judiciary and Public Safety and Homeland Security Committees. Unfortunately, the bill has been “sent to study” and thus will not be advancing to the floor.

Last fall, Pres. Obama issued an Executive Order granting temporary status to undocumented parents of US citizens who have lived in the US for five years. While not providing a road to citizenship, it would protect four to five million undocumented immigrants from detention and deportation. Twenty-six conservative states immediately appealed for an injunction.. A Texas court ruled in favor of the injunction, and it was upheld by a Texas Court of Appeals. The case is now before the Supreme Court where Justice Scalia's death made a risky situation even more unpredictable.

Paradoxically, while the President's Executive Action seemed to show the administration's willingness to recognize the heartrending damage to families of current policy, the continuing high rate of detentions and deportations signals the opposite. Christmas time raids on Central American mothers and children who crossed the border in the summer of 2014, make a mockery of claims that policy now focuses on “felons not families”. The raids have been roundly denounced by immigrant rights advocacy groups, both Democratic presidential candidates and thousands of citizens.

The Open Letter to Pres. Obama below has been signed by 336 MA residents. We, the undersigned -- members of faith communities, medical and legal professionals, concerned Massachusetts residents -- are profoundly troubled by this escalation of attacks against vulnerable refugee families who have committed no crimes but have simply fled for their lives. While the planned operation is said to target only adults and children who have already been ordered removed by an immigration judge, the court system that results in these removal orders is seriously broken.

The vast majority of these refugees have no access to a lawyer, nor information about what they are required to present. Unaware of court dates, without legal counsel and adequate interpretation, they are unable to prepare adequate asylum cases. “POLITICO” reported on 11/18/2015 that thousands of children less than 16 years old were ordered deported without access to legal counsel.... In defiance of a court order to stop detaining children, the Obama administration has increased the detention of families by 173% over the last several months.

The intention to track down these women and children and return them to the killing grounds they fled recalls very dark moments in human history. Since 2014, researchers have documented 83 deaths of Central American deportees returned to El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala (Guardian, 10/12/2015). Our government has a *moral responsibility to protect, not harm, these refugees.*

Our major religious traditions – Christian, Jewish and Moslem – all assert the moral imperative to protect those fleeing violence and abuse. As Rev. Adan Mairena of West Kensington Ministry, Philadelphia, PA, a church offering sanctuary, declared, *“Our elected officials cannot say ‘God bless America’ and at the same time deport, exclude, dehumanize, and criminalize those who come seeking refuge, in this case God's children from Central America. ...If we continue to go down this road of moral decay the consequences will be grave.”*

Our responsibility to refugees is further enshrined in international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention states that “No Contracting State shall expel or return a refugeeto the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

We respectfully urge President Obama to order the Department of Homeland Security to cancel plans for these raids immediately. We respectfully request Attorney General Lynch to ensure due legal process for Central Americans fleeing violence. And we respectfully ask Secretary of Homeland Security Johnson, to ensure that families are protected and children not further harmed after their perilous voyages to this country.

Alarms Sound for Poor Families in the Commonwealth

by Georgia Mattison

By making several alarming changes this March the Department of Transitional Assistance DTA will make Transitional Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) in Massachusetts even harder to access. Meanwhile, the TAFDC caseload is shrinking significantly every month.

First, DTA **plans to require** the 1,100 households that are exempt from the work requirement because they take care of a disabled parent or grandparent or sibling, to **put their family member in a nursing home** in order to comply with the work requirement. Deborah Harris from the Massachusetts Law Reform institute in a letter to legislators wrote: “The requirement that a caregiver should put her disabled relative in a nursing home is cruel and irresponsible.”

Furthermore, nursing homes cost the Commonwealth more in one month than the average TAFDC grant for a year. If a caregiver refuses to put her disabled relative in a nursing home, she loses the benefit for her and her children.

The second alarming change in March will be a stricter disability standard for exemption from the work requirement which will affect 2,200 households.



The third and worst major change will be the pre-application work search requirement which is predicted to keep an estimated 50-80% of applicants from accessing TAFDC. Currently the caseload is approximately 35,000 households according to the DTA website. The program is losing 3-4,000 households a month.

The Welfare coalition attributes this alarming decline to routine denial of appeals once a 24 month time limit has been reached, and the uptick in the application of sanctions. The Welfare Coalition cannot get statistics or information on these appeals and sanctions. We are going up the legal chain to try to get this public information released. And the continuing problems with the new DTA access system have put both TAFDC and SNAP (Food Stamps) under threat of serious caseload declines. This is all happening even before the new requirements are implemented! The Coalition has been meeting weekly to work against this tide of shameful effort to deny families the benefit they deserve.

The Welfare Coalition has expanded its membership to advocacy groups for the disabled and the elderly. We have been meeting with legislators since last August to file a bill to eliminate the new disabled standard and pre-application work requirement from the welfare reform law passed last year. A bill is due out of the Senate soon. The caretaker change which is a policy rather than a regulation or a law has been a subject of meetings with legislators and the DTA Commissioner. DTA has now delayed the caregiver exemption change until next October. (continued p.4)

DTA has also announced a delay until next December of the drastic change in the Disability Standard till next December. But a new DTA plan just announced is to deny the benefits severely disabled parents receiving Supplemental Social Security Income SSI the TAFDC benefits they are receive just for their children. This will terminate benefits to 6900 households by next July. The Coalition will be working with Legislators to block this current proposal.

As the caseload declines there is a simultaneous uptick in families living in deep poverty in the Commonwealth. Given the unreasonable and systematic denial of benefits, in a year or two, there may be virtually no families in the program. Families will get SNAP, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children's Program), and Medicaid, but no cash assistance. Currently according to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, there are 120,000 households in Massachusetts in deep poverty. Deep poverty is defined as 50% and below of the federal poverty line.

Massachusetts may soon mirror most of the United States with virtually no TAFDC benefit. In 1996 Congress passed the Welfare Reform Act changing the program from a federal entitlement program to a state block grant. Block grants essentially capped participation in the program. SNAP is a federal entitlement; therefore, all applicants who are eligible receive the benefit. For the most part states can do anything they want with this money and they have. The number of families in the United States and Massachusetts has slid to a quarter of the households that were receiving the benefit in 1996 when it was a federal entitlement program. The Speaker of the House Paul Ryan has proposed making SNAP a block grant.)

In the book, "\$2 Dollars a day: Living on almost nothing in America," authors Kathryn Edin and Luke Shaefer found most of the poor did not believe the TAFDC benefit still existed. The book described a vast pool of people who live in deep poverty, who struggle to survive, find work (often perilous work), and avoid homelessness. Only one in four U.S. jobs can support a family of four. Housing instability is a hallmark among those in deep poverty as housing subsidies are rare.

Georgia Mattison is the PPUF Project Director. She is a member of the Welfare Coalition, the SNAP Coalition and a Governor's appointee to the Boston DTA Advisory Board.

PPUF 35th Anniversary Party Photos



Photos By our phenomenal Ellen Shub





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