Building Coalitions for Economic Justice

the Budget for All Experience

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Need for Multi-Issue Organizing

- Classical grassroots organizing postulates advocacy campaigns around individual, winnable issues
- But current U.S. economic crisis is making it more and more difficult to win with that approach
- Peace movement does not have the political power to win its issues on its own
- Yet Washington-centric top-down progressive coalitions have lacked the strategy and staying power required to sink deep roots
Federal Budget Crisis

- Washington budget impasse is fundamental and will be with us for decades
- As world economic conflicts deepen, there will be no going back to the days when Uncle Sam doled out generous programs to buy social peace
- Progressive coalition must also go deeper
- Single issue groups will continue to fail and austerity will continue
- New revenues can only come from taxing the 1% or from curtailing U.S. militarism
Congressional Progressive Caucus Budget

- Preserve critical services and benefits
- Invest in jobs
- Tax upper incomes, corporations, and carbon
- Cut bloated military spending
The Federal Budget

- Social Security, Unemployment & Labor: 32%
- Medicare & Health: 23%
- Military: 20%
- Interest on Debt: 6%
- Veterans’ Benefits: 3%
- Energy & Environment: 2%
- Education: 2%
- Transportation: 3%
- Housing & Community: 3%
- Food & Agriculture: 3%
- International Affairs: 1%
- Government: 1%
- Science: 1%

Source: OMB
Budget for All Coalition

- Labor unions
- Low-income and people of color community organizing groups
- Housing groups
- Democratic and Green party groups
- Faith groups
- Environmental and climate groups
- Peace groups
1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East
ACT UP Boston (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power)
Action for Peace Working Group/Occupy Boston
AFGE/Local 3258/AFL-CIO
Alliance for Peace and Justice
Alliance to Develop Power
American Friends Service Committee
Amherst League of Women Voters
ARISE for Social Justice
Arlington Fund Our Communities/Reduce Military Spending 25%
Arlington United for Justice with Peace
Boston Coalition to Fund Our Communities/Cut Military Spending 25%
Boston Workers Alliance
Brookline PAX
Cambridge United for Justice with Peace
Can't be Neutral
Chelmsford Collaborative
Chelsea Uniting Against the War
Chinese Progressive Association
Civil Liberties and Public Policy Program
Climate Action NOW!
Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries
Democratic Socialists of America – Boston chapter
Doctors for Global Health
Dorchester People for Peace
Eastern Massachusetts Coalition to Fund our Communities/Reduce Military Spending 25% (aka: 25% Campaign)
Essex Towers Tenants Association
Fenway Community Development Corporation
First Churches Peace & Justice Committee (UCC, ABC)
First Parish Church in Bridgewater, Social Justice Committee
Fund Our Communities Not War/Massachusetts
Grace Church Peace Fellowship
Green-Rainbow Party of Massachusetts
Leverett Peace Commission
Lexington Justice and Peace
Madison Park Development Corporation
Majority Agenda Project
Mary Ellen McCormack Tenant Task Force
Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance
Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants
Massachusetts Communities Action Network
Massachusetts Global Action
Massachusetts Jobs With Justice
Massachusetts Nurses Association
Massachusetts Peace Action
Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants
MassOccupy/Brookline
Merrimack Valley People for Peace
Metrowest Peace Action
Milton for Peace
MoveOn Boston Council
MoveOn of Western Mass
MoveOn South Shore Council
National Priorities Project
Neighbors United for a Better East Boston (NUBE)
New England United for Justice (NEU4J)
Newton Dialogues on Peace & War
North Shore Coalition for Peace & Justice
Northampton Committee to Stop Wars
Northampton Democratic City Committee
Occupy Amherst Schools in Solidarity
Occupy Arlington
Occupy Fall River
Occupy Newton
Occupy Winchester
Pioneer Valley Buddhist Peace Fellowship
Pioneer Valley Green Rainbow Party
Population & Development Program, Hampshire College
Progressive Democrats of America (PDA)
Quechechan Alliance
Right to the City VOTE!
SEIU Local 615
Survivors Inc.
UNITED HERE New England Joint Board
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)
United for Justice with Peace
United National Antiwar Coalition
Veterans for Peace – Smedley Butler Brigade
Walpole Peace & Justice Group
Ward 15 Democratic Committee, Boston
Watertown Citizens for Peace Justice and the Environment
Western MA Fund Our Communities Not War
Western Mass American Friends Service Committee
Western Mass Jobs With Justice
Women’s International League for Peace & Freedom – Boston Branch
Worcester Unemployed Action Group
Shall the state Representative (or Senator) from this district be instructed to vote in favor of a resolution calling upon the Congress and the President to:

1. Prevent cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and Veterans benefits, or to housing, food and unemployment assistance;

2. Create and protect jobs by investing in manufacturing, schools, housing, renewable energy, transportation and other public services;

3. Provide new revenues for these purposes and to reduce the long-term federal deficit by closing corporate tax loopholes, ending offshore tax havens, and raising taxes on incomes over $250,000; and

4. Redirect military spending to these domestic needs by reducing the military budget, ending the war in Afghanistan and bringing U.S. troops home safely now.
A FREEDOM BUDGET FOR ALL AMERICANS

Recapturing the Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in the Struggle for Economic Justice Today

PAUL LE BLANC and MICHAEL D. YATES
Non-binding questions in Massachusetts are put on the ballot district by district
We gathered 25,000 signatures in spring 2012
Got on the ballot in 8 state Senate and 24 state Representative districts
All or part of 91 cities and towns or about 1/3 of the state
Combining Groups with Different Social Bases!

- Low-income Boston community groups have organizing and door-knocking capacity
  - Mass. Alliance of HUD Tenants
  - Boston Workers Alliance
  - Chinatown Progressive Association
  - New England United for Justice
  - Neighbors United for a Better East Boston

- Peace movement has suburban reach into many pockets across the state
Working class cities

- Qualified for ballot in the entire city of Boston and neighboring cities
- Also in the depressed cities of Lawrence, Fall River, Holyoke, and Chelsea
  - Substantial Black & Latino populations
- The great majority supports our agenda
- Canvassers registered new voters and used the B4A to motivate turnout in elections
- Passed by 75–80% in these places
Locally based and suburban peace groups

- Liberal, majority white areas
- E.g. Newton, Arlington, Northampton, Berkshires, etc
- Most people, not all, are sympathetic to our agenda, except for:
  - people who think they might make $250k some day
  - People who have a generalized distrust of government
- Passed by 75–90%
Far suburban areas: a challenge

- Less peace and progressive activism
- More influence from right wing, anti-tax ideas
- More support for the military – call to cut the military budget raises eyebrows
- Passed in these areas too, but narrower margins: 65–80%
- Including in towns that voted for Mitt Romney and Scott Brown
NOV 6 Vote Yes on Budget for All

Protect Social Security • Make Taxes Fair
Reduce Military Spending • Invest in Jobs

www.budget4allmass.org
Vote result

- Passed in each and every of the 91 cities and towns where it was on the ballot
- Statewide average 75%
- Lowest margin 57% (Dover)
- Bipartisan popular majority
  - Confirmed by public opinion polls
Budget for All, Post-Nov 2012

- State Legislature resolution
- Rallies and Forums
- Press Coverage
- Political Support
- Coalition Building
State Legislature Resolution

- Filed Budget for All as resolutions in state House & Senate in January 2013
- Terrific hearing in July 2013 with 35 speakers and 9+ legislators supporting
- Session ends July 2014 – now or never!
Keeping the Pressure Up: Rallies and Forums

- 10 rallies in Boston area during 2013
  - 5 of these echoed in Northampton, Fall River, and/or Worcester
- Lots of DC Action
  - Sequestration
  - Shutdown
  - Elections
  - Unemployment & Food Stamp Cuts
  - Budget Debates

- Substantial opportunities for press coverage
Political Support

- Reps. John Tierney, Stephen Lynch inconsistent
- Progressives in State Legislature
- 2 gubernatorial candidates
- Democratic State Committee resolution
Coalition Building

- Keeping the 85 groups involved and activated is a huge challenge
- Budget is an abstract issue, hard to explain, hard to motivate grassroots activism
- Payoff of united effort is long-term and uncertain
- Coalition has few central resources to sustain outreach efforts
- *But*... New, substantial new groups are continuing to join and show up for major events!
Coalition Building: Next Steps?

- Military Bond Bill
- Defense Industry Jobs
- Convergence
- An Economy for All
- Raise Up
Military Bond Bill

- DoD wants to close 1/3 of military bases, but Congress won’t hear of it
- 6 Mass. bases are mostly marginal in importance but support 45,000 jobs
- Mass. Governor Deval Patrick had Legislature authorize $177 million of state funds to spruce up the bases and hopefully forestall their closure
- Mass. Peace Action opposed, but hasn’t got much traction
- Rapid progress of this spending in State Legislature in stark contrast with stalling on Budget for All resolution
Defense Industry Jobs

Figure 1: Jobs per $1 million in spending in Massachusetts

- Education: 18.6 jobs
- Healthcare: 13.36 jobs
- Non-defense federal spending in MA: 9.69 jobs
- Construction: 10.74 jobs
- Clean energy: 11.12 jobs
- Defense spending in MA: 8.43 jobs
- Defense sequestration personnel: 7.94 jobs
- Defense and non-defense sequestration: 9.06 jobs

Note: Direct, indirect, and induced employment impacts. See appendix for sources and methods.
Convergence

- How can peace, economic justice, racial justice, and climate movements converge?
- Their problems are substantively linked
- They have a common adversary in corporate rule
- We organized a 1-day “Autumn Convergence” in November 2013 to talk about common approaches
- It was just a start
- We came away believing that the movements need specific common projects and more experience working together before they can unite
An Economy for All?

- How can we link defense industry conversion with conversion of fossil fuel plants to green energy?
- We are exploring a common economic development agenda for the State with partners in climate, labor and community groups and with legislators.
Raised by:

- Budget for All vote was non-binding
- This year, labor and community groups have taken it to the next level
  - Binding ballot questions to raise the minimum wage and require jobs to provide sick leave
- Issues are narrower, more specific, but affect 1 million workers in Massachusetts and are winnable
- Progressive movement working together
Peace Action’s Perspective

- Peace Action is excited about building a new kind of movement that is both a peace AND justice movement which is growing from the awareness of the human and economic consequences of wars.

- Our national goal is to support the organizing of strong labor-community efforts, both on a national and local level, to change national spending priorities and spark a 21st century economic conversion drive -- or what is being called defense transition.

- Our hope is that we can help build a movement which can protect working people and the communities in which they live from bearing the social costs of cutting the Pentagon budget and work towards an economy where everyone has a decent job.
Last year, the passage of state legislation to create the Connecticut Futures Commission was a huge step towards planning for how communities can move from depending on defense contracts for good paying union manufacturing jobs to local sustainable economies.

CT has one of the highest concentrations of aerospace production.

The legislation was passed through the efforts of the Machinists, the AFL-CIO and local electeds and their communities & peace groups.

Gave Peace Action, National Priorities Project and other groups the handle to launch a national effort to do the same in other states.
Basis of a Move the Money movement

- Our tax dollars should be spent on what will make the economy stronger and help our country contribute to solving pressing global problems no one country can solve on its own, such as the climate crisis.
- We believe we can, if we build a strong grassroots movement, move the money from wars and weapons to fund public services and protect manufacturing jobs and create new ones.
Defense Layoffs in Oshkosh

- In 2012 when the layoffs were announced in Oshkosh, Peace Action began to reach out to labor to begin work on defense industry transition and find ways to support workers, their families and the communities who are being affected by layoffs now and in the future.
- The layoffs now in Oshkosh, York, PA and Lima, OH are the tip of the iceberg. We have to dig in now and find ways to build a movement led by community groups, local electeds and labor that can respond and demand action on every level of government.
- The current round of layoffs are NOT yet due to cuts in the Pentagon budget, rather that contracts are coming to end. But soon budget cuts will be made.
Jobs Issue Looms in Struggles over Defense cuts

- The urgency to build a national consensus on the need for defense industry transition is great.
- For example, within the Pentagon there has been a debate on the number of Littoral combat ships to build in the shipyards in WI & Miss.
- In the recent congressional vote on the NDAA one ship was cut…it will go to the Senate then into conference at the end of this year for the final decision.
- We have to get ahead of the curve and bring all the stakeholders together from labor, community and local electeds to make a plan.
Organizing for a new economy

- We have to get ahead of the curve and bring all the stakeholders together from labor, community and local electeds to make a plan.
- We must organize to get federal funding that exists for example in the Office of Economic Adjustment to create commissions on a state or regional level that provide for public engagement and education and making a plan to protect and create new jobs.
- Our goal is to build a consensus for a new economy
  - Sustainable manufacturing jobs and a service industry with a living wage & respect
  - A resourced public sector through equitable taxation
Conclusions

- Struggle for unity across peace, environment, labor, community, people of color groups is crucial but not simple
- Multi-issue organizing has never been more important