

FIGHT for Economic JUSTICE



Metro Justice

Why is the American Standard of Living Declining?

Politicians and their CEO campaign contributors are actively choosing to erode it.

We are living in difficult times. Cuts to education, health care, and many other social services are being passed. We're told we can't afford the basic social safety net that helped to keep many of us from falling into abject poverty.

The youth of today are likely to be the first generation of children to do worse economically than their parents. Cuts to education are making it difficult to get into college, and nearly impossible to pay for it. Even those that graduate have a difficult time finding work at wages that will keep them out of poverty.

The elderly are similarly facing attacks. We are told that we can no longer afford Medicare and Social Security and that we may have to give up the promise to security in retirement we once had.

What we need to understand is that we can absolutely afford the social programs

that have been instrumental to building the middle class and keeping the poor in our country from falling into total destitution. **The money is there, it's just in the wrong pockets!**

Economies are not natural occurrences; they are a collection of choices that our country makes. For decades, there have been those that believe the safety net that protects so many of us is a barrier to profits. They believe that with government programs out of the way, wealth should be concentrated in the hands of the richest people, and insist that it will trickle down to the rest of us. Today's problems are proof their ideology is wrong.

One person that has been very influential in government since the 1980's is Grover Norquist, who is known for saying "I simply want to reduce [government] to the size where I can drag it into

the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub."

Since the Reagan administration, people like Norquist have had a great deal of control in our government. Since that time, wealth has moved further to the wealthy as the middle class and working families have been squeezed.

In 2001, the Bush administration began bankrupting the United States government by cutting taxes and increasing spending. His tax cuts to the wealthy increased our deficit by \$1.7 trillion between 2001 and 2008. Meanwhile his two wars cost another \$1.2 trillion. At its lowest estimated cost, the bank bailouts cost \$700 billion. After this massive redistribution of wealth we're now told we can no longer afford the programs that benefit everyday people.

These same lies are being peddled all throughout the world. The richest people in our world and the politi-

cians that they have bought, want to convince us that they shouldn't have to fix the problems that they've created.

But we shouldn't become hopeless. The very existence of programs like Social Security are the result of everyday people organizing to fight back against the greed of the wealthy and powerful. What we've discovered repeatedly throughout history is that when we get organized, we are much more powerful than those that would deny us a dignified livelihood.

That is why Metro Justice has developed this campaign. We intend to organize the real power of everyday people to take our economy back. But, we can't do it alone. We need people throughout the Rochester area to participate in numbers that we haven't seen in a long time. We need to show the elite, living in luxury on our hard work and tax dollars, that we will fight back!



Quality Jobs Available for All

Every person has the right to find productive work that can ensure them and their family a secure livelihood and basic necessities of life. There seems to be no real plan to create the jobs necessary to bring us back to pre-recession employment, let alone bring us to any shared prosperity. But it isn't simply about creating jobs. We need to ensure an economy that creates quality, living wage jobs.

There are those that stand in the way of this vision. With an unquestioning faith in the idea that wealth naturally trickles down from an incredibly well-off elite to the rest of us, presidents like Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush sold out the American promise of shared prosperity in exchange for hard work.

Since the 1970's, real wages for average Americans have been nearly stagnant, seeing very little growth. Meanwhile, CEO compensation has soared from an average of \$700,000 per year in 1970 to \$2.2 million per year in 2000. It's no coincidence that the number of workers in unions has decreased during that time. Unions are the strongest defense that working families have from big business greed. In 1950, 35% of Americans belonged to unions. Today, as business and politicians have worked together to make it exceedingly difficult for workers to join unions, only 12% belong to unions and only 7.4% of private workers. This decline isn't because people don't want to join unions. Of private sector workers, nearly 60% say they would vote to join a union, 8 times the amount actually in unions. This shows the obstacles that are put in the way of workers joining unions.

To create a country with quality jobs for all, **Metro Justice organizes in solidarity with our union brothers and sisters to improve workers' right to organize into unions.**

There is no reason to believe that government can't actively work to create jobs, because they already do. As is the case with so many things, government currently spends money to create jobs in ways that benefit big business interests before anyone else's. New York State alone spends more than \$8 billion dollars on job creation per year. Our government hands it out to corporations with little accountability with the hope that jobs will be created, but without any standards for the quality of those jobs. In fact, very few jobs are ever created, and those jobs are generally poverty-wage jobs. On top of that, massive amounts of public money is simply given to private businesses. **Metro Justice is organizing to ensure that we get our money's worth when investing in job creation.**



Dignified Retirement for All

Any decent society should ensure a quality retirement to its workers after a lifetime of work. Social Security is one of the most important progressive victories that we have won in our country. Not only does a quality retirement ensure that those no longer working can have a decent livelihood, it also serves to open up jobs for younger workers. This is vital in today's economy where the unemployment rate of people under 30 years old is consistently higher than average.

In terms of racial justice, over 80% of the black community has Social Security as their main source of income after retirement, while the same is true for less than 50% of whites. An attack on Social Security would have a detrimental impact on all, but it would have a particularly devastating impact on Black America and other communities of color.

As with many programs, we are told that we cannot afford Social Security. This is simply untrue. Social Security currently has a \$2.6 trillion surplus! At this very moment Social Security has sufficient funding until at least 2036, but Social Security could be strengthened even further. Currently there is a cap on paying into Social Security, payment is made only on the first \$106,800 made. If this cap were raised, Social Security would be funded for indefinite generations to come. **Metro Justice continues to organize in defense of Social Security and specifically to raise the payment cap.**

Why is Social Security so important? Because it is a "guaranteed-benefit" plan: you know how much you put in and you know how much you will get out. This makes them very different from 401k's, which are "defined-contribution" plans, where you know how much you put in, but are gambling on how much you will get out. Under a defined-contribution plan, nothing is certain. There was a time when private businesses had guaranteed-benefit plans as part of their benefit packages. As big business got greedier and the attack on unions grew stronger, these packages slowly disappeared. **Metro Justice pushes to expand guaranteed-benefit plans.**



Health Care is a Human Right

The United States spends double of what many other industrialized nations spend on health care per person. Yet, 50.7 million people are left without health insur-

ance in our country and still millions more have inadequate coverage. This is largely because for-profit, private insurance bureaucracies consume huge amounts of that money. A national single-payer system would save an estimated \$400 billion per year, while providing health insurance for everyone in the country.

Many poorer nations throughout the world provide free health care to their entire populations. It is absolutely inhumane to continue allowing our country to refuse health care to those that cannot afford the coverage. The results are people frequently dying of diseases, that if found earlier, could have been cured. Often those that do get necessary operations without insurance find themselves in debt for the rest of their lives from massive medical bills. This is obscene.

It's not unreasonable to expect the United States to provide single payer health care - it already does. Medicare is a program of universal, single-payer, non-profit health care for people over 65. **Metro Justice is organizing to defend Medicare from cuts while demanding that it be expanded to cover all people in the United States.**



Quality Public Education for All

Public education represents an opportunity for all people in our country to learn those things that can help them to succeed economically while becoming contributing citizens capable of participating in running our society. Unfortunately, public education often falls below those standards for many people.

In wealthy towns and suburbs, many people enjoy a superior public education that helps them to maintain their wealth. However, in urban and poor rural schools, education often serves as an inferior substitute. This is only made worse by underfunding. In New York State, public education has seen almost \$3 billion in cuts in the last two years. These cuts have impacted urban schools more harshly than others, as state funding is meant to act as an equalizer to close the gap in spending that many urban schools experience. Black and Latino students in urban schools have their futures sabotaged by the destruction of urban public schools.

Cuts in funding also shift more of the cost of college onto the students. As even state colleges and universities become unaffordable for so many, we find that the promise of public education being betrayed. Quality higher education is becoming increasingly less accessible for working families.

Metro Justice continues to organize for the necessary funding to provide high quality education for all and against budget cuts.

Metro Justice's "Fight For Economic Justice"

It is not only through increased funding that education will be successful though. Our educational institutions need to see a dramatic shift in organization and decision making. They need to be made into more democratic institutions. **Metro Justice stands firmly on the belief of increased parent and student participation and power in educational institutions.**



Housing is a Human Right

When the financial crisis hit, the banks that had broken our financial system were rewarded with hundreds of billions of dollars to help them survive. The ones that were punished were those that hadn't created the crisis; they were the ones trying to stay afloat in a worsening economy. It was home-owners and tenants that found themselves being thrown out on the street, without a bailout.

Despite the \$700 billion bank bailout, banks continue to foreclose on family's homes and evict the people living in them. As one of the richest countries in the world, it is absurd that we still have a homeless population. We could find the money necessary to pay for the bank bailout, to pay for two wars, and to hand \$8 billion away in private development money, but we can't solve

homelessness? Today, public housing provides homes for over 2 million people; but, the federal government has drastically reduced its spending on public and affordable housing in recent years. Between 1975 and 2005, federal funding for affordable housing has been cut in half.

Without access to reasonable quality housing, it becomes nearly impossible to maintain a livelihood. Keeping or getting a job is nearly impossible without a stable address or phone number. Doing well in school is out of the question if you don't have somewhere to study or sleep. To ensure people have access to opportunity of any kind, they need to have access to quality housing!

We can absolutely solve homelessness. **Metro Justice will work to ensure that adequate housing be a human right through supporting the development of public housing and defending against unjust foreclosures and evictions.**



Investment that Fosters Community

Billions of dollars in public money are spent every year on development and so much of it is just given to private companies, without much concern for various community needs. However, there are so many infrastructure and community projects that could create decent jobs and develop essential community functions.

Public spaces, like parks and community centers, are fundamental parts of any good neighborhood. These sorts of public gathering spaces help to develop connections within and between communities. We need to begin to reclaim the commons - the places that belong to us all and so drastically improve our quality of life.

Reliable and widespread public transportation can unite a city and provide people access to jobs outside of their im-



Dignified Unemployment for All

Our current economic system requires a certain level of unemployment. There were times in the 1990's when Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, argued that unemployment was *too low*. It's difficult for businesses to keep wages low when too many people feel secure. But, if our economic system is designed to ensure a certain level of unemployment, why is it that the unemployed must live at such a low standard of living? And, if the economy requires unemployment, why are the unemployed blamed for their situation? We make broad economic decisions every year to ensure a certain level of unemployment.

If we are stuck with a certain level of unemployment, it should be more justly distributed. Among young black men, the unemployment rate has been far higher

than recession level unemployment for years. Among all groups of people facing unemployment recently, that time unemployed has lasted considerably longer than before. It seems that the "acceptable" level of unemployment is leveling off around nine percent.

Many economists are now beginning to describe this current recession as "L-shaped". What they mean is that jobs will be lost in

the crash and likely won't return without a massive change in the way we run our economy. This is different from previous "V-shaped" recessions where jobs eventually bounced back from the losses experienced at the worst points of recession.

If those with the most power over our economy are going to continue to insist that some level of unemployment is a required component of our economy, then we need to insist that this unemployment doesn't leave people in the desperate situations that ultimately impact all of us. We need to ensure that all people are able to maintain a reasonable standard of living.

To help maintain a decent standard of living for all people in our country, **Metro Justice will organize in defense of unemployment benefit extensions and in defense of the social services necessary to ensure that the long-term unemployed have a dignified livelihood.**



mediate neighborhoods. Public transit can also be a huge money saver for families and communities by helping people get around without a car.

Public investment in the arts helps give communities a stronger voice and provide access to the kind of culture that is often available only to wealthier communities. So often, we forget about the quality of life impacts that investment in the arts can help to bring us. The wealth is there for us to live in communities that we can love.

To see this sort of public investment, we will need greater community control of the financial institutions that control so much in our economy. The growth of local credit unions with community control and a focus on local development will help to strengthen our communities.

Metro Justice will organize to encourage funding that fosters community, like public transit, arts, and parks.

Metro Justice's "Fight For Economic Justice"

Our Country Isn't Broke, We're Handing All Our Money to the Rich

At the same time as average Americans are losing their jobs, losing their homes, and watching vital social programs such as education and health care get cut, we are seeing record corporate profits. It's the same old line – the rich getting richer while the poor get poorer.

Let's avoid falling for the defeatist belief that this is the natural way of things. It isn't. There are real political decisions being made to ensure that the wealthiest in our country get more while the programs that protect us from falling into total poverty get weaker. There are politicians, mostly Republican, but with more Democratic allies than they should have, that have been passing policies that redistribute wealth to the top.

As much as the right-wing keeps crying about "class war", if we look at the past decade, CEO campaign contributors and the politicians that they've bought have been waging a vicious, one-sided class war. They are

attacking all of the programs that benefit the middle class and working families while taking every tax break and handout they can get.

The bank bailout of 2008 is such an obvious moment of redistributing wealth to give more to the rich. George W. Bush pushed through a handout of \$700 billion to big banks. When the banks have a moment of trouble, we could manage to find \$700 billion quickly. Urban schools have been in crisis for years, where is their bailout? Bush basically committed mass theft in favor of big banks.

Bush did more than just the bank bailout though. When he first came into office, he brought about massive tax cuts that heavily favored the rich. These tax cuts increased the deficit by \$1.7 trillion. Most of the benefits of these cuts went to people that earn over \$600,000 per year! Bush's tax cuts for his wealthy allies didn't stop there. Cuts to the inheritance and capital gains taxes were

clearly meant to benefit the wealthy, but they also took millions of dollars out of the budget, increasing our deficit further.

While Bush was busy handing away billions of dollars in tax breaks and handouts, he started wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These wars allowed for further massive spending – another \$1.2 trillion towards bankrupting the federal government. Huge portions of these war costs were contracts with major arms corporations and even some private mercenary companies.

As if all of these tax cuts and handouts weren't enough, most large corporations are taking advantage of huge tax loopholes. A 2008 study found that two-thirds of corporations in the United States pay zero federal income taxes. Since 2009 ExxonMobil, GE, Bank of America, and Citigroup all paid a grand total of – you guessed it – \$0 in federal income taxes. Bank of America got a refund of \$2.3 billion. GE got a re-

fund of \$3.2 billion. All of this has happened while corporate profits reach record highs.

Creating the progressive economy that works for all people that Metro Justice is fighting for isn't impossible. It simply means that our government needs to begin taxing the rich and big corporations at reasonable rates and shifting massive war spending to domestic needs. In short, our government should stop redistributing wealth to the top. They aren't going to do it without a push though. We need to build a unified movement demanding that our country re-align its priorities to represent the vast majority of us that don't earn over \$600,000/year. In New York State we demand an extension of the Millionaires Tax! Federally, we should look to the People's Budget as an example of the kind of change we need. Come get involved in the movement to take our economy back! Contact Metro Justice today.

What can you do to get involved?

There are a huge variety of things that people can do to help support the Fight for Economic Justice, and we will need the support and effort of anyone that agrees with this economic vision if we hope to succeed.

The best way to get involved is simply to contact us at Metro Justice and tell us that you'd like to participate in this campaign. We can work with you to find where your help would be useful.

Here is a brief list of some of the possible things you can do to support the Fight for Economic Justice now:

Become a member of Metro Justice. This work requires resources. The box on this page can help you to become a member.

Help spread the word. You can help to put up posters with the campaign demands, distribute this newspaper, help us call people throughout the area to explain the campaign, as well as a variety of other ways that you can help publicize our efforts.

Join a committee. We are developing committees for each of the seven platform pieces listed in this paper. If you have ideas for how to build our movement, and have the time and energy to put into those efforts, let us know you'd like to participate in a committee.

Join the rapid response team. We also need people who can help to mobilize our membership at a moments notice. We're building a phone tree of rapid response members so that we can have a strong Metro Justice presence whenever needed.

Talk to your friends and neighbors about this work. The best way to help build our movement is for other progressive people throughout the Rochester area to talk with their friends and neighbors to ask them to get involved. When you see an upcoming event around the Fight for Economic Justice, don't just come along, bring some people with you!

Building the kind of

movement necessary to begin taking our country back from big business interests is going to take some activity from every one of us. Movements happen when people make them happen. Contact Metro

Justice and find out how you can get involved! Call us at (585)325-2560 or email at metroj@frontiernet.net. We look forward to hearing from you.

Membership

Yes! I want to join Metro Justice and support the important work that it does.

Levels of support:

\$30 \$50 \$70 \$100 \$500 \$1000 Other \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

If you would like your contribution to support our campaign and lobbying work, make checks payable to "Metro Justice." If you would like your contribution to be tax-deductible please make check payable to "Metro Justice Education Fund", then send to:

Metro Justice Membership
167 Flanders Street
Rochester, NY 14619

Thank You