



The Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ) is a working coalition of labor, faith, and community leaders committed to protecting the basic working rights of all people. Since its beginning in 1986, CEJ has spoken out on moral issues, which we believe to be the foundation of economic justice. Our goals are (1) to organize community support for workers treated unjustly or illegally in the workplace and (2) to address the root cause of poverty while working for economic policies that benefit the whole community. In our over 30 years of organizing for justice, CEJ has won real victories for working people.

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear CEJ Member,

This newsletter will cover the campaigns we have been engaged in and some of the wins we were a part of in 2019. For instance, the Wendt workers joined Iron Workers Local 574 and are on the path to receiving a contract, having won their rightful seat at a table with management in negotiations. Buffalo Transit Riders United (BTRU) has been fighting for voting seats on the NFTA board for years and this year a bill was passed in the New York State Senate that requires two voting seats on the transit authority board. Buffalo now has unionized coffee shop workers with SPoT Coffee, thanks to the tireless efforts of the workers, organizers, and Workers United. There is certainly more work to do, but while there's more to do, it's important to celebrate the victories.

We must also acknowledge the New Era campaign. New Era closed earlier this year after a strong fight to keep the more than 200 jobs that were lost. In instances like this, we must do what we can to stand with the workers and let them know that there are people that see what is happening to them, recognize it as unjust, and demonstrate that we weren't willing to simply let it happen without a fight. Our goal is always to win. Even when a win is out of our reach, it is crucial to show up so no one has to stand alone. We must assess what we are doing really well and where we need to make improvements, so next time the win is within our grasp.

For me, 2019 will be remembered as a year of transitions. I was not expecting this year to end with me as the Executive Director, in a new office space, and actively searching for a new Transit Rider Organizer. Someone told me recently that growth comes from the uncomfortable moments. Transition isn't always easy, but it's just as uncomfortable as is needed to move into the next phase. This has been a truth for me at CEJ and in my personal life. I know I will learn many more lessons in this process, but I wanted to share some of what I've learned or had reinforced so far:

- 1) To always be honest about your capacity, especially to yourself. There is a lot of urgency in our work, for good reason. People's lives and livelihoods are on the line. But to mistake urgency for capacity will leave you falling short at critical moments and all of the good intentions let you, and your community, down.
- 2) To trust in your community. As organizers, our relationship with our community is reciprocal. I have had many ups and down this year, as most do, and it's taken me a long time to learn the benefits of sharing with, receiving strength as well as praise from others, and the kindness of allowing others to help you when they can.
- 3) Communication is important in all relationships. It is often talked about as a cornerstone of romantic relationship but it's just as important within friendships, among professional peers, and with our allies and our base for building and maintaining trust.

This Newsletter is one exercise in these lessons. It's the use of some capacity to tell you and the rest of the community what CEJ looked like in 2019, so that with some understanding of where we are coming from, we can move forward together. My plan is to ensure CEJ does the work needed to deepen our connection and communication with all of you in 2020 and beyond. This is one of my many hopes for the coming year. In doing so, I look forward to celebrating many more victories and learning many important lessons alongside all of you.

In Solidarity, Holly Nowak



Buffalo Transit Riders United (BTRU) is a collective of transit riders working for a more efficient, equitable, and responsive public transit system in the greater Buffalo area. BTRU has been bringing riders and community leaders together to fight for transit justice since 2016.

It is the belief of BTRU members that in order to effectively address current problems faced by riders and create the thriving public transportation Buffalo deserves, the riders need to have a seat at the table and voice in the room when decisions are being made for their transit system.



A major win for BTRU in early 2019 was the passing of NY State Senate Bill S3656, which requires the appointment of a transit dependent and para-transit dependent representative, with a vote, on the transportation authority board. But our work isn't done there. Before it can become law, bill A6168 must pass the State Assembly. Our petition received 193 signatures and so many of you came out to our rally for A6168 in May. We'll need your energy again during this upcoming session!

In 2019, BTRU also held our first Transit Based Scavenger Hunt. We attempted our first parade float for the Pride Parade. Sure the float fell apart on our way to the parade, but we learned what to do differently in the future and, honestly, had a great time. We collected pictures and stories of snowed in bus stops and sidewalks to support the launch of a future campaign, collaborated with other groups in the area to further explore the intersectionality of transit justice with issues such as environmental and housing justice, and hosted a Fruitvale Station movie event and discussion. In 2020, we are looking forward to further engaging with riders and continuing to fight for the transit system we all deserve!





Poor People's Campaign

A NATIONAL CALL for MORAL REVIVAL

A National Call for Moral Revival (PPC) is a resurrection of the anti-poverty campaign Martin Luther King Jr was organizing when he was assassinated. Under the current iteration, led by Rev William Barber and Rev Liz Theoharis, works to unite people living in poverty to share their stories, center their needs, and effect policy changes. Across the country, this can be seen in campaigns to fighting for things like living wage laws, criminal justice reforms, single payer health care laws, and much more.

In New York, two van tours were taken to help familiarize folks from different parts of the state with the issues faced by poor people from Buffalo to Long Island, any many, many stops in between. The first tour was kicked off in Buffalo January 16th and ended in Syracuse. In September, the second van tour took place, taking folks such as Ms Barr through eastern of New York, to listen and learn. One of the many takeaway was the persistent nature of Healthcare and Housing issues across the state. Therefore, Healthcare and Housing will be the center of actions in the near future, including a mobilization of people in Albany January 14th, 2020.



For Buffalonians engaged in the PPC, 2019 was a year of gathering. Locally we hosted events where we gathered over food and sang movement songs. We also represented the WNY area at the Moral Action Congress in DC and at the Statewide Assembly in Painted Post where we congregated where we prepared for what the NY PPC will look like in 2020.

Ms Dennice Barr, PPC leader and Vice Chair of CEJ's Board of Directors, had these reflections about the PPC in 2019:

"This year has been a base building time in growing alliances and partnerships with people from around the state who are dealing with 3 to 5 highlighted issues at the time, and in realizing that it's systemic and not personal. I have had proud moments with PPC in seeing the continued work being done on multiple issues country wide. The continued mission is to bring others to the big table and negotiate for what we all need to have quality of life and demand that our representatives hear and respond to their constituents country wide. We have consistently shown that when we stand together we win."



LABOR SOLIDARITY

The WNY AFL-CIO has been an important partner for CEJ since our founding over 30 years ago. Below are some reflections about work done with labor in 2019 from Richard Lipsitz, President of the WNY AFL-CIO.

"Spot Coffee: CEJ lent a hand in the successful boycott of Spot Coffee, inc. The Workers United had initiated an organizing campaign at the company after three of it's lead worker/organizers were terminated. The entire WNYALF united with groups like CEJ to spread the boycott, and to support the organizing campaign. The effort was a crowned success when the bargaining unit was successful in at representation election by a vote of 43-6. In November, the boycott was ended when the company and the union agreed to a neutrality agreement which will expand the bargaining unit and when two of the three workers were rehired. The union and the company are hopeful about reaching an agreement early in 2020.



"New Era: In the beginning of the year the New Era corporation located in Derby, NY announced its intention to close operations during the first half of 2019. CWA #11417 stood to lose about 200 members and the resultant impact on the community would be quite negative. The union undertook bargaining over the effects of the closure and CEJ and the ALF began a community campaign aimed at saving the jobs. Unfortunately, and despite great effort and help from our allies (including the Major League Baseball Players association) the plant did in fact close. There is nor question that this closure was a deliberate attempt to bust the union and in doing so maximize profits for the New Era corporation.

We look forward to expanding our joint work in 2020, especially around the expansion of public transportation in the region through adding to the feeder buses that connect the east side and the west side to Main Street and a more robust light rail system."



CEJ ANNUAL BANQUET

On May 16th, CEJ held our annual awards banquet. This year, we had the great privilege of having Lorna Hill, of the Ujima Theater, emceeding the event and Rev Brenda Maynor, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, give the invocation.

We had three awardees this year:

Geovaira Hernandez (PUSH Buffalo) received the Future of Justice Award for her work organizing with NYRenews, which fought hard to get the Climate Community Protect Act (CCPA) passed this year, and for the force she has proven herself to be on the local organizing scene as an advocate against environmental racism. We can't wait to see all she will accomplish in the coming years.



Debora Hayes (CWA District One), a longtime friend and support of CEJ, received the Joan Malone Award as recognition for her years of advocacy and organizing work in support of labor rights, particularly with and for nurses. It would take much more space than allowed here to give all of her accomplishments their appropriate due. Please just know we appreciate all that you do!

We've appreciated the work of this year's Organization of the Year Awardees, the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization (BPTO) so much that this year was their second time receiving the award from us in three years. If anyone deserves it, they do. Their many accomplishments since they were established in 2013 include fights: against threats of privatization of Buffalo Public Schools, for the removal of a school board member who exhibited racist and hateful behavior, for a districtwide Gender Identity Policy for transgender students, and expanded usage of bus passes for students.

We would like to extend our congratulations, once again, to our award winners, and a thank you to all of our banquet sponsors and attendees this year. We hope all of oyu join us again to celebrate in 2020!

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COALITION FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE



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CEJ Buffalo unites our member labor, faith, and community organizations and activist with allies and resources to win campaigns that promote economic justice for all through building strong, diverse, sustainable communities.

BECOME A MEMBER!

Yes, I want to be a CEJ member and receive newsletters and emails. In return I pledge to take action 5 times a year for my struggle as well as someone else's.

Please become either a **Solidarity Sustainer** with a monthly pledge or make a **One Time** membership contribution today!

Yes, I would like to become a **Solidarity Sustainer** at the following level (circle one):

\$50/month \$25/month \$10/month Other (at least \$5) \$ _____

Yes, I would like to make a **One Time** membership contribution:

- \$ _____ Agitator @ \$35
- \$ _____ Change Maker @\$50 - \$99
- \$ _____ Justice Fighter @\$100 - \$499
- \$ _____ Change Maker @\$500+
- \$ _____ Other

**In solidarity, and with
deep gratitude!**

Pledge online at **www.cejbuffalo.org**

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