



WEST WAYS

Gender Justice: Making the Connection

Last year when the National Governors Association met in Boise, activists from The Welfare Engine staged a mock wedding ceremony protesting “marriage promotion” policies. While Utah is the only state in the region currently diverting funds from public assistance to the “promotion of marriage,” the street theater action put governors on notice that these policies would meet vigorous local opposition despite the federal push behind them.

“Marriage promotion” is just one of the gender-related threats that present fertile organizing ground in the Western States region. Recently the Center talked with over 50 community-based organizations working on gender issues to get a handle on the full range of threats and organizing opportunities in the region. By understanding these in the broad context of gender justice, the Center can strengthen relationships among organizations and promote a shared analysis and response.

Threats to Gender Justice

While terms like *sexism* and *homophobia* are now commonly understood among progressive organizers, the broader concept of *gender oppression* is new to many. What does this mean in the Western States region?

With legislatures still in session, over 40 separate bills have already been introduced to limit or proscribe reproductive rights, reproductive health, and sexuality education in our region. “Fetal rights” legislation in Alaska, Idaho, and Montana would have reduced pregnant women to dehumanized vessels. Although these bills were defeated, Montana voters may face an initiative in November, 2004 to amend their constitution to define life as beginning at conception. The perennial efforts of the Oregon Citizens Alliance include a ballot measure that “Prohibits: Abortion, Physician-Aided Dying, Certain Pain/Birth-Control Methods, Mortal Harm To Innocent Persons.” The Washington



Photo credit: Moira Bowman

“President Bush” (right) looks on with satisfaction as pregnant brides are wed to random guys in order to maintain the benefits they need for their families to survive.

legislature, on the other hand, has not been able to pass a bill stating that sexuality education should be medically accurate.

On the economic front, most states are making it harder, not easier, for women to access education while on welfare. Montana, Nevada, Idaho, and Alaska refuse access to cash assistance, Medicaid, Social Security or food stamps to immigrant families who are lawful US residents but not citizens. Seven out of eight of our states either eliminate or restrict access to welfare for women convicted of a drug felony (Oregon is the exception). Women of color are the fastest growing prison population in the country: the economic pressure and stigmatization and criminalization of poverty created by the disappearing safety net will likely worsen this trend.

While the June 2003 Supreme Court decision is a huge civil rights victory for gay, lesbian and bisexual people (see sidebar, page 6), state policies addressing sexual and gender orientation continue to promote discrimination. Aside from an Oregon court ruling that provides limited protection, Nevada is the only state in the region that outlaws discrimination based on sexual orientation. The Washington legislature was the only body that advanced



cont. on page 6



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WEST WAYS

*is a semi-annual look at the latest ways
Western States Center is working to build
the progressive movement in the West.*

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Editor: Holly Pruett
Editorial Support: RuthAlice Anderson
Graphic Designer: Greer Graphics Inc.
Resident Artist: Laure Heinz
Contributions by Center staff

PHONE US: (503) 228-8866

FAX US: (503) 228-1965

VISIT US: www.westernstatescenter.org

MAIL US: P.O. Box 40305
Portland, Oregon 97240

WESTERN STATES CENTER's mission is to build a progressive movement for social, economic, racial and environmental justice in the eight Western states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and Alaska. Our vision is of a just and equitable society governed by a strong, grassroots democracy. We work on three levels: strengthening grassroots organizing and community-based leadership; building long-term strategic alliances among community, environmental, labor, social justice and other public interest organizations; and developing the capacity of informed communities to participate in the public policy process and in elections. *Here's how we do it:*

- The **COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM** expands the capacity and impact of grassroots and statewide organizations and their leaders by convening both emerging and established leaders for leadership development, training, and strategic organizational assistance. This program includes targeted technical assistance to organizations across the region; the **Community Strategic Training Initiative**, an annual four-day training for over 400 community leaders; and the **Western Institute for Organizing and Leadership Development** (formerly ALMP), an intensive year-long organizing and leadership development training program.
- The **WESTERN PROGRESSIVE LEADERSHIP NETWORK** helps build relationships and develop common strategies among community, environmental, labor, social justice and other public interest organizations to address vital public policy issues. The program supports the development of permanent, multi-issue statewide coalitions, and provides training and strategic support to build the capacity of informed communities to participate in the public policy process and in elections.
- The Center's **RESEARCH AND ACTION FOR CHANGE AND EQUITY (RACE) PROGRAM** supports research, education and action on race-related issues at the community level. It includes a dismantling racism training program; a partnership project that combines issue education and strategic convening of allied organizations working towards racial justice; and focused organizational development within communities of color.
- The **MONEY IN WESTERN POLITICS PROJECT** works to analyze the flow of campaign contributions and political funds from wealthy private and corporate interests into politics in the West; expose the influence of these funds in our states; and mobilize public support for fundamental campaign finance reform.
- The **HUB OF THE WHEEL** is the development and administrative team which creates internal strategies that support external organizing, including leveraging national resources and expanding the regional progressive donor base; opening doors and providing fiscal sponsorship for new groups; and maintaining an active communications network linking 2,000 progressive organizations and almost 5,000 individuals.

Gearing Up for 2004:

Training Curriculum Ready for Critical Electoral Cycle

If you want to make a difference in the 2004 elections, there are two simple words to live by: **start early**.

After a year of field-testing, *Building Grassroots Power: An Introduction To Electoral Politics*, will be ready this fall to help community-based organizations advance their mission through strategic participation in the coming electoral season.

Building Grassroots Power: An Introduction To Electoral Politics is designed to help non-profit base-building organizations make more strategic choices about how and when to engage in the electoral arena. The flexible curriculum is made up of a series of interactive exercises and discussion formats that can be tailored to the interests and experience level of any group, including those with a 501(c)(3) tax-exemption.

As the political environment becomes increasingly constrained, Western States Center seeks to work with organizations interested in expanding, or starting up, an electoral component. In preparation for the 2004 elections, the Center will be offering strategic training and resources to a limited number of non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations focused on engaging under-represented constituencies in the region.

If you would like more information on the Building Grassroots Power curriculum or the Center's 2004 electoral strategies, contact Field Director Kelley Weigel at: kellew@wscpdx.org or (503)228-8866 x112



Building Grassroots Power: An Introduction To Electoral Politics

For the past thirty years, conservatives have methodically built their movement by mounting issue-oriented campaigns and running their own candidates for office. Political campaigns have enabled the right wing to expand its base of known supporters, to shape public debate on key issues, and to increase its clout within mainstream political organizations.

The progressive movement can use political campaigns to out-organize the right wing. By joining the techniques of electoral campaigns with the values base and goals of ongoing community organizing, we can build power to advance social and economic justice.

All across the country, community-based groups are building grassroots power for disempowered constituencies and progressive issues through the political system. In the West, organizers are engaging first-time Native and Latino voters in school board and legislative races, and economic justice and civil rights ballot issues. A dozen years of organizing against anti-gay attacks has helped the gay rights movement in Oregon build a broad resource bank of skills, supportive voters and allies, donors and volunteers. Organized labor and community-based allies won a ballot measure indexing the minimum wage to cost of living in Washington, and multi-lingual worker safety training in Nevada.

These examples are only the beginning. This curriculum is meant to inspire and equip your organization and community to use electoral organizing as a tool. With training, people power, and effective planning, you can build your capacity to move your agenda and advance your mission through participating in—and thereby helping to change—the political process.



There Goes the Neighborhood

After 7 years in Portland's Board of Trade Building, Western States Center is pleased to find itself surrounded by progressive neighbors. Planning allied actions on the elevators are:

- Basic Rights Oregon www.basicrights.org
- Oregon NARAL www.oregonnaral.org
- Coalition for a Livable Future www.cfuture.org
- League of Women Voters www.open.org/~lwvor

In addition, we're in arm's reach of several consultants who keep the tech side of the progressive movement going:

- Fred Heutte, Sunlight Data Systems, database specialist focusing on voter list management. www.voterlist.com
- Tanya Zumach, technology and design services for progressive organizations and campaigns. www.zumach.com

When you're in the neighborhood, stop by 310 SW 4th Avenue to pay all of us a visit.

The Dismantling Racism Project:

Now five years old, Western States Center's Dismantling Racism Project made its name doing trainings and offering a full package of anti-racist organizational development tools to groups around the region. With the creation of the larger RACE Program at the Center (Research and Action for Change and Equity), the DR Project is now strategically focused on working with organizers who are committed to moving racial justice organizing forward.

A Shared Analysis of Race and Racism

The Dismantling Racism Project developed in response to the right wing's increasing success at pushing a racist agenda on a legislative and electoral level in our region. Too many white organizations who considered themselves progressive were not effectively stepping up as allies to people of color. The DR Project was originally designed to work with primarily white organizations to help them develop a shared analysis of race and racism, and build a base to engage successfully in anti-racism work.

In the DR Project's early years, the Center used an assessment process to help organizations identify how race dynamics and racism were affecting their organization, then develop a plan for change.

Issues commonly prioritized by groups included:

- Strengthening their ability to recruit and retain staff, board, and leaders of color
- Examining their organizational structure to find ways to increase the power and influence of people of color
- Strengthening their ability to name and intervene in racism and other oppression when it happens

While similar to standard organizational development work, the approach was infused with anti-oppression and race-based analysis and supported by focused political education.

Developing a Racial Justice Agenda

Within the broader context of the RACE program, the DR Project has now moved from supporting groups focused on anti-racist organizational development, to strengthening the capacity of partner organizations to engage in and support racial justice organizing.

This shift in strategic direction includes:

- Prioritizing working with groups who are moving organizing campaigns (or are about to) and are open to a racial justice focus
- Helping organizations distinguish racial justice campaigns from traditional organizing
- Developing political education tools that allow organizations to broaden and deepen their race analysis within the organization, working with members and leaders—not just staff and board
- Moving away from using standard two-day Dismantling Racism workshops to developing a more customized approach to training, tailored to the particular campaign stage of an organization

To make this transition, the DR Project has collected and developed new political education and organizing tools to help equip organizations to move a racial justice agenda. Following are excerpts from some of these tools.



Photo credit: Oregon Action

Oregon Action members addressing prescription drug coverage as a racial justice issue.

Are you ready to do a racial justice organizing campaign?

Not every organization is ready to take on racial justice work, even if they are eager to do so. The assessments developed by the Dismantling Racism Project are designed to identify potential barriers and the preparatory work that may be needed to engage in effective, sustainable racial justice work. The assessments can be used by organizations of color, white organizations and multi-racial organizations.

Sample Assessment Questions:

- What is motivating people within the organization to take on racial justice work?
- Do you expect some resistance to taking on more explicit racial justice work?
- How is your organization prepared to deal with racist attacks?
- Does your organization have a strategic approach to weighing the costs and benefits of entering coalitions, particularly with white organizations?

Moving a Racial Justice Agenda

Picking an issue

Many organizations committed to racial justice find themselves trying to add a racial justice twist to an issue or campaign they are already working on. While that approach can work, it can also represent a far stretch at times. Developing a set of racial justice criteria for picking an issue can prepare an organization for more successful racial justice organizing.

Sample Racial Justice Criteria:

- People of color are disproportionately affected.
- Issue is widely and deeply felt by communities and organizations of color.
- Affects more than one community of color or offers opportunities to build relationships between communities of color.
- Exposes a clearly discriminatory or oppressive practice or policy.

Applying an oppression analysis to organizing

It is one thing to have an analysis of racism and other oppressions. It's another matter to integrate this analysis into campaign planning and decision-making. It is critical to identify when oppression is creating tension, conflict, or barriers to organizing. The DR Project has developed political education tools that allow organizers and leaders to reflect on complex organizing problems and develop an action plan to resolve them. These political education discussions use realistic organizing scenarios or case studies drawn from an organization's own campaigns.

Sample organizing problems include:

- Building alliances across race
- Conflicting dynamics: short term wins vs. movement building
- When leaders of color are your targets

Visit www.westernstatescenter.org for downloadable versions of the *Dismantling Racism* tools excerpted here.

Naming and framing race

To name and frame racism is to be explicit and public with language and an analysis that describe an issue as a matter of racial justice. This framing has to be done intentionally and consistently, internally and externally, even if racial justice is not the only frame put on the issue.

There are many reasons why it is important to name and frame race including:

- In the mid-1960s, sweeping federal legislation like the Voting Rights Act was passed that largely instituted racial equality “under the law.” Since then, denial of the existence of racism has steadily increased, as if the problem had been fixed. To advance racial justice, it is increasingly necessary to argue and actually prove the current existence of racism.
- By naming and framing racism you can take the “mask” off of coded language and denial. In organizing we’re often taught to find broadly popular, “common denominator” issues and to avoid divisive ones. But when the issue is about racism, people generally respond to “coded” messages and ideas about race, even if that’s not how you frame your messages or demands. For example: if you name and frame “English Only” legislation as racist attacks on immigrants, people can no longer be in denial and base their actions on the myth that they are “helping” people to succeed in America.
- What happens if your campaign loses when you decided, for short-term gain, to avoid naming and framing racism? Now you’ve failed to win your demands and you’ve also failed to educate anyone about the problem of institutionalized racism that you were fighting.



Photo credit: Oregon Action

Oregon Action members hold a press conference explaining how a statewide prescription drug purchasing pool could save up to \$100 million annually. The Dismantling Racism Project worked with Oregon Action to develop a racial justice analysis of their issue and campaign.



cont. from page 1

Gender Justice...

protections this year, banning harassment based on sexual orientation in schools. In all of these cases, gender identity is not protected.

Dominant gender roles and stereotypes, far from being a relic of the 1950s, continue to be written into public policy. As with any form of oppression, gender-specific threats represent an extreme and complicated reality when combined with racism and economic oppression. Thus women and queers of color—and those in poverty and on low incomes—are hardest hit by the current wave of budget crises. The elimination of health coverage and childhood health and education programs is especially hard to bear when resources are instead funneled to “fetal protection,” “truth in sentencing,” and “promotion of marriage” policies.

Advancing Gender Justice

Western States Center’s organizational survey was the first step in working with others in the region to better understand the role of gender oppression in social control and social change.

Groups surveyed address a broad range of gender-related issues:

- Reproductive and environmental health, including HIV/AIDS, and infant mortality among Native Americans
- Sexual and domestic violence, including violence within lesbian, gay, bi and trans relationships and directed against women of color
- Homophobia and transphobia (see definitions below, right)
- Economic safety net issues
- Pay equity and workers’ rights
- Educational opportunities
- Leadership development, including youth leadership and internalized racism among women of color

Regardless of their primary issues, most groups surveyed defined their work as reactive to the attacks on reproductive rights, civil rights and safety net programs rather than as strategically moving a gender justice agenda. Over a third of the organizations have one or no full time staff.

Many reported a harder time raising money in the last year and a need to either cut back on programs and staffing or an inability to expand to address key areas of work.

Developing Regional Strategies

While reporting their struggles, the organizations surveyed also expressed interest in working across geography to explicitly address gender oppression. Early indication of what groups in the region would find helpful includes:

- Regional analysis and approaches to addressing issues rooted in gender oppression
- Training and technical support for understaffed, under-resourced organizations
- Support and training in expanding staff-board dialogue into member-public dialogue that is proactive rather than reactive
- Peer training and exchange across geography, identity and organizing style

While the Center seeks resources to further develop its own capacity to respond to these needs, we are already offering initial support in three arenas: training on gender oppression, peer organizational assistance, and convening networks of gender justice organizers and activists.

Training & Analysis

Western States Center works with a broad definition and analysis of gender justice that identifies sexism, homophobia and transphobia as inextricable, root causes of gender oppression. Racism and economic injustice are intimately tied to both understanding gender oppression and meaningful gender justice organizing. Gender justice and equity, like racial and economic justice, are core values of the progressive social change movement that we are committed to building.

Within this framework, the Center’s new training curriculum is developing a shared analysis of the intersection of homophobia, transphobia and sexism.

TRANSPHOBIA: The belief in two or binary genders tied to biological bodies and the power to enforce that belief.

HOMOPHOBIA: The belief that same gender sex is wrong and the power to enforce that belief.

SEXISM: The belief in male supremacy and the power to enforce that belief.

Gender Justice or ‘The Culture War’?

The Supreme Court on June 26, 2003 issued a landmark gender justice decision when it ruled,

“The state cannot demean [homosexuals] existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime.”

Justice Antonin Scalia, in a dissent tinged with hysteria, declared: “The court has taken sides in the culture war... [it] has largely signed on to the so-called homosexual agenda.”

Since it was first previewed with the Western States board, the gender justice training has been in demand with groups like the Oregon Student of Color Coalition Conference and a Youth Leadership Retreat sponsored by the Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity.

Placing single issues within a gender oppression framework positions groups to work more collaboratively.

The Utah Progressive Network, for example, targeted the wage gap by pressing for a study to show the difference in earnings between women and men workers in state employment. UPNet chose this strategy not only because it fit the bill as a “good issue,” but also because it opened the door to member discussions about transphobia, reproductive rights and sexuality education. UPNet won their wage gap bill. As their energized activists look for their next organizing handle, UPNet will continue to look for linkages among other issues related to gender oppression.

Peer Organizational Support



The Center is seeking to expand its use of resources to support gender justice groups that are at a critical juncture. In 2002, Equal Rights Nevada was fighting an anti-LGBT ballot measure, the Defense of Marriage Act. The Center worked with Basic Rights Oregon (BRO), which has a long track record of defeating homophobic ballot measures, to bring peer support to Nevada. Roey Thorpe, BRO's Executive

Director and a new Western States Center board member, traveled to Las Vegas to provide fundraising and strategic support.

At this year's Community Strategic Training Initiative (CSTI), the results of the gender justice regional survey will be released. As participating

organizations learn more about each other's work, we anticipate increased opportunities for peer support and regional networking.

Convening Networks

Sometimes breaking isolation means being able to sit in a room together, build relationships and strategize without the pressure of defending against a particular attack. This year at CSTI, the Center is offering two such opportunities.

For the last several years there has been a Women of Color Caucus at CSTI. This year the caucus has been expanded to a pre-CSTI gathering. Selena Mason, Administrative Director for the Center and coordinator of the gathering, says: “This was not a brainchild of the Center, but a direct request from women of color constituents. Although this gathering is sure to provide a space for much needed dialogue and rejuvenation, much of what it will provide is not tangible, but rather that which is needed to keep the soul and the spirit alive.”

And while queer organizers have long participated in CSTI, this year for the first time the Center has scheduled an LGBT caucus. The session will provide a chance for organizers to share their experiences as gender justice leaders within the context of the broader progressive movement.

The Bottom Line

Western States Center is poised to work with organizations throughout the region to increase our gender justice work. A more integrated approach is needed to move away from reactive, single-issue politics. Drawing connections between sexism, transphobia, homophobia, racism, and economic justice facilitates stronger alliances to create change.

The opposition is clear about the connections between gay rights, reproductive health, women's rights, welfare, and criminal justice. We as progressive organizers must seek to connect these constituencies. This cross-issue support is particularly important in our region, where tiny margins and small, organized constituencies can make or break ballot measures and legislative decisions. This is how we will build political power.

Resources available at www.westernstatescenter.org

Contributors:
Maira Bowman,
Trainer/Organizer
Kelley Weigel,
Field Director
Holly Pruett,
Editor



West Ways Organizers Index

West Ways introduces the two newest members of Western State Center's board of directors.



Roey Thorpe

Years as executive director of Basic Rights Oregon: **2**

Miles relocated to work at BRO: **2,279**

Days between moving to Oregon and testifying on behalf of LGBT Oregonians: **1**

Years as a city councilwoman in Ithaca, NY: **4**

Number of years it felt like: **100**

Years since coming out as a lesbian: **22**

Years as a social justice activist: **22**

Years as a registered Girl Scout: **20**

States (including District of Columbia) banning employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation: **15**

States in the Western States region in that number: **1***

States (including District of Columbia) banning employment discrimination on the basis of gender identity: **4**

States in the Western States region in that number: **0**

Civil rights bills including sexual orientation and gender identity introduced by BRO this session: **2**

Number of trans-inclusive laws passed in NY prior to Roey's passage of local trans-inclusive hate crimes legislation: **0**

* Nevada



Kate Kahan

Years as executive director of Working for Equality and Economic Liberation (WEEL): **4**

Age of son, Elliot: **10**

Years as a social justice activist: **10**

Years Kate and Elliot survived welfare and welfare reform: **5**

Percent of Montana children in poverty: **21**

Typical ranking of Montana on national wage scale: **49**

Number of low-income members of WEEL: **1,200**

Organizations in Western Regional Welfare Activists' Network coordinated by Kate: **20**

National campaigns relying on WEEL's leadership: **6**

Times testified before US Congress: **7**

Years holding Senator Max Bacchus accountable to gain current influence with Senate Finance Committee: **4**

Presidential candidates incorporating WEEL policy into platform: **2**

Maximum number of continuous weeks at home in last 4 years: **6**

Annual miles run uphill (literally): **1,560**



**WESTERN STATES
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Portland, Oregon 97240

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