In Search of the Movement

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THE INDYPENDENT
ROCKAWAYS RECOVERY, P4 • NYPD ON TRIAL, P3 • INDY FICTION, P15

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

JUNE

THE READER'S VOICE

The boss, too.

What about horrible city hospitals?
It's personal, my mom was killed in one!
What about killer cops who often get only a slap on the wrist, if that?

What about the cuts and layoffs that are leaving many people unemployed, hungry and homeless? We the 99% have our faults, but the deck is stacked in the hands of the 1% (Big time!)

It's personal, my mom was killed in one!

Edgar Goldsmith

about New York City in the near future when more super storms habitually hit Manhattan. I was annoyed that the writer who wrote that tale chose to name his hero Muhammad, therein revealing his own political nature of God.

He was regarded as a prophet by many people, and his story is told in the Quran. Muhammad is considered by Muslims to be the final prophet of God, and his teachings are contained in the Quran.

In this perfectly believable tale, Muhammad dies when a Category 4 storm hits Manhattan, overwhelming the “Verrazano Narrows Bridge,” an unsuccessful attempt by man to ward off mega-storms that dwarf even Hurricane Sandy of 2012. This story takes place in 2037, the near future. Not only do I find this storm very believable, but I actually expect such things to happen.

It’s 75, an old coot who will probably not live to see that year, I nevertheless, recall some big wheel politicians having refused to even construct a sea wall. I forget who the jerk is.

Was it Bloomberg, or Cuomo? In Carmen Cock tells Noah to build an ark, that He is planning to flood the entire world. This reveals the sadistic nature of God. Noah does it. Present we have have pygmy politicians and “leaders” of such a low mentality that they refuse to even build such a restraining wall! Maybe that is because they don’t live in Zone A!

— EDWARD GODSMITH

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Tenants Face Another Hefty Rent Hike
WHILE LEADING MAYORAL CANDIDATES VIE FOR LANDLORD DOLLARS

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The city's Rent Guidelines Board is likely to hit tenants with a fat rent increase this month. The board will vote on June 20 to set the maximum increases allowed in the city's more than 900,000 rent-stabilized apartments, for leases that go into effect beginning in October. On April 30, it recommended guidelines of 3.25 to 6.25 percent for one-year lease renewals and 5 to 9.5 percent for two years. That means this year's increases will likely be substantially more than last year's, which were 2 percent for one year and 4 percent for two years.

As usual, the board's five “public members” backed the increases, while the two tenant representatives objected that it was too much and that the two landlord representatives complained it was not enough. RGB chair Jonathan Kimmel said the proposal was based on the board's Price Index of Operating Costs, which estimated that landlords' operating and maintenance costs increased by 5.9 percent last year. Tenant groups criticize the RGB for not considering landlords' actual profits and ignoring what tenants are able to pay and its mission of preventing rent-gouging.

“The index is one-sided, looking only at owners’ expenses while ignoring the income they receive and the profits they make,” Metropolitan Council on Housing chair Jonathan Benjamin wrote in the May issue of Tenant/Inquilino, the group's monthly newspaper. “The RGB produces a much more useful study, the Income and Expense Study, but the public members disregarded it.” That study, based on figures filed annually with the city's Department of Finance by property owners, found that landlords of rent-stabilized properties spent an average of 62 percent of rents they received on operations and maintenance, leaving 38 percent for debt service and profit.

“Does anyone seriously believe that landlords of rent-stabilized buildings are losing money?” Benjamin asked.

The RGB has frustrated tenants for years. The public members are supposed to be impartial, to balance tenants' need for rent relief with owners' need to make a profit, but Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who appoints the members to terms of two to four years, has consistently chosen them from finance and real estate. Only one of his choices has ever voted against raising rents — and Bloomberg refused to reappoint him the next spring.

Current public member David H. Wenk is executive director of capital markets at the real-estate firm Cushman & Wakefield. Courtneyney Moore is a “private wealth adviser” and executive at Merrill Lynch, serving “high-net-worth families.” Jonathan Kimmel is a lawyer specializing in pensions and the former legal director of the city Teachers' Retirement System. The two new public members are Tanya Levy-Odom, a vice-president and equity research analyst at the asset-management firm of Alliance Bernstein, and Carol Shine, a lawyer for the City Council's land-use division.

THE NEXT MAYOR

All six of the leading Democratic candidates for mayor have urged the RGB not to allow a rent increase. Otherwise, their main ideas for dealing with the city's housing crisis have been verbal support for stronger rent controls and tweaking schemes for financing “affordable” housing. Only the state government can strengthen the rent-regulation laws, and federal and state funds for public and subsidized housing have been cut dramatically since the 1980s.

Mayoral candidate and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, the frontrunner in both polls and fundraising, has been the most outspoken on rent-regulation issues, and longtime tenant activist Michael McKee said in March, but was “the worst” on issues of overdevelopment. Also, while Quinn has urged that the RGB be opened to more tenant-friendly public members, her enabling Bloomberg's third term gave him another four years to pack the board.

Quinn is the real-estate industry's financial favorite, but of the six main Democrats, only City Comptroller John Liu and longshot former Assemblmenber Al Sarbanes have not received substantial funding from landlords, according to campaign-finance records available online. Real-estate sources account for about 20 percent of the $7 million Quinn has taken in, and about 10 percent of the more than $3 million raised by Public Advocate Bill de Blasio and former Comptroller Bill Thompson.

The list of Quinn's contributors reads like a who's who of the city's biggest and most politically connected real-estate names: The Related Companies, which is developing her Chelsea-Clinton district with tax-subsidized luxury developments like MIMA and the under-construction Hudson Yards, has given at least $40,000.

Some of these donors have also contributed to de Blasio and Thompson. Both got the $4.95 million maximum from the Rent Stabilization Association, the landlord group that lobbies to destroy rent stabilization, and The Related Companies has given Thompson at least $21,000.

New entrant Anthony Weiner's $5 million bankroll is left over from his congressional campaigns. Its real-estate sources include William Macklowe, Stephen L. Green of SL Green and executives at Vornado and Newmark Knight Frank. Despite his reputation as a loudmouthed liberal, Weiner helped knock a major loophole in rent stabilization in 1994, when he voted for a City Council bill to deregulate vacant apartments that rented for more than $2,000 a month. He claimed that loophole, cemented by the state in 1997, would only affect rich Manhattanites who didn't need or deserve regulated rents — but it has fueled skyrocketing rents all over the city.

For this reason, tenant activists are now agitating for campaign-finance reform. Specifically, they want to close the “LLC loophole.” State law currently lets owners of multiple limited-liability corporations, a common business structure in real estate, give the maximum amount from each one they own. Leonard Litwin, the most notorious, has given $500,000 to Governor Andrew Cuomo; contributed to Quinn, de Blasio, and Thompson's current campaigns; and donated $40,000 to since-indicted state Senator Malcolm Smith in 2008 — when he was running unopposed.

JARON BENJAMIN: Head of the Metropolitan Council on Housing says the Rent Guidelines Board only listens to landlord concerns.

LEONARD LITWIN: This real estate baron has used a loophole in state law to make tens of thousands of dollars for pro-landlord politicians including Quinn and two of her leading challengers, Bill de Blasio and William Thompson. This practice is common in the real estate industry.

CHRISTINE QUINN: The frontrunner in the mayoral race has received 20 percent of her campaign donations from the real estate industry. Here, she (right) laughs it up with Real Estate Board of NY chairman, Mary Ann Tighe (left) and others at the organization's 2011 Executive Committee meeting.

For more information, go to www.housingny.com/html/about/meetings.html or contact the Met Council.
Homophobia is Everywhere

By Jesús D. Puerto

Homophobic attacks can happen anywhere at any time, and for me that is the scariest thing. You can be doing your grocery shopping or walking to work and encounter discrimination. You can be kissing your partner in public and have slurs shouted at you. Right on the New York City sidewalk, in broad daylight, you can be doing your grocery shopping or walking to work and encounter discrimination. You can be kissing your partner in public and have slurs shouted at you. Right on the New York City sidewalk, in broad daylight, you can be kissing your partner in public and have slurs shouted at you.

Our latest tragedy was the death of Mark Carson, a man who was shot because he was gay. It happened in the heart of the West Village, near the historic Stonewall Inn, in a neighborhood where the LGBT community is present and lively and where people feel safe and accepted. His death sparked the largest community response in years, which culminated in a May 20 rally attended by at least 1,500 people, including many of the city’s most prominent politicians.

Carson’s death is just one of the hundreds of homophobic and transphobic (marked by fear of transgender people) attacks that happen on a yearly basis in the United States. In New York, we’ve seen an increase in these sorts of attacks in the just the last few months; Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, at a press conference after Carson’s death, laid out the numbers: there have been 22 bias-motivated crimes in New York City this year, up “significantly” from 13 at this time last year.

Like many, I have also experienced anti-LGBT harassment. Perhaps the most distressing of these was an incident that occurred on the New York subway in 2011, when I was headed with a group of Hispanic LGBT youth from the Make the Road NY office in Queens — where I have been an activist and organizer for several years — to Lower Manhattan on the M train. We were on our way to a weekend camping retreat for young LGBT people, organized by an organization called Project Reach. Most of the participants had never experienced being with other LGBT youth for a weekend and the thought filled them with joy as they held their camping gear and excitedly discussed what they wanted to learn, who would help cook breakfast, and how wonderful it was to journey outside the city.

Those feelings of excitement turned into fear and discomfort when a middle-aged woman began screaming homophobic names at us. The words — “Dykes!” “Faggots!” “Lesbians!” “Devils!” — rang in our ears as the train moved, ever so slowly, to the next station. When we finally reached it we left the subway car, shaken and with our eyes tearing.

In that moment I was reminded that homophobia is everywhere and does not turn a blind eye toward anyone. And while much has been said about the increase in hate crimes against LGBT New Yorkers after Carson’s death, there are also LGBT community members who hesitate to call the NYPD for support if they are victims of a hate crime. I have seen numerous people of color, low-income New Yorkers and LGBT folks affected by police harassment, a trend that makes it even more difficult for vulnerable communities to feel safe. Victims of police harassment have organized to ensure police accountability through Communities United for Police Reform, a campaign to end discriminatory policing practices.

Understanding the demands of the LGBT community is not easy, especially because homophobia and transphobia come in many different forms. While we know that youth and transgender people are some of the most vulnerable members of our community, the bullying a young person may face in school or at home differs from the harassment a transgender person may experience on the...
EXPOSING WAR CRIMES

Marching for Bradley Manning
AS TRIAL BEGINS, AN OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT FOR ARMY WHISTLEBLOWER

By Ellen Davidson

Ninety-five degree temperatures did not deter hundreds of protesters from marching in the blazing sun at Ft. Meade, Md., on June 1 to support WikiLeaks whistleblower Bradley Manning. “Any day that we are out on the streets for justice is a good day,” said Ashley McCauley, one of the protesters.

The rally and march took place two days before the beginning of Manning’s trial on June 3. Participants included three busloads of people from New York City, members of organizations such as Veterans For Peace, Iraq Veterans Against The War, CODEPINK and Courage to Resist, and others that came from around the country in support of Manning.

The 25-year-old Manning faces 22 charges. He is accused of releasing nearly a million classified documents, including diplomatic cables, army reports on Iraq and Afghanistan and the notorious “Collateral Murder” video showing U.S. soldiers shooting unarmed civilians in Iraq in 2007. The trial is expected to take more than two months, with more than 100 witnesses scheduled; 24 of these are secret and will testify behind closed doors.

Manning does not deny leaking the documents and has already pled guilty to 10 of the lesser charges, but maintains that he released the information because he believed it was important for the public to know, saying in online chats that he hoped to start a debate on U.S. foreign policy.

The most serious charge he faces is that of aiding the enemy. In pretrial hearings on June 1, Veterans For Peace member Ward Reilly said to the crowd, “Bradley Manning’s duty was to report what we reported. If you tell the truth in this country, you go to prison… Bradley Manning should never have been in Iraq to begin with to see what he saw, and that is our collective failure, to not control the politicians and the war criminals. It is our job to see that those war criminals go to jail and take Bradley’s place.”

Heather Linebaugh, a former Air Force drone intelligence analyst, also spoke. “I did the same intelligence analysis as Bradley Manning. I saw the horrors of war and the needless killing every day that I served. I saw the lies that we tell people every day. I saw what really happens in war, the unjustified killings, because officers tell the enlisted: ‘That’s what you’re ordered to do, shut the hell up and do your job.’ If we tried to talk about it, if we tried to tell someone else about it, we were told, ‘It’s okay, collateral damage happens. You just have to accept it.’

We treat Bradley Manning as a criminal, when he really woke us up to something that happens every day.”

She asked for support for the whistleblowing community, saying, “There’s hundreds of other intelligence people in this country and abroad right now that would love to tell you what’s really happening, but we’re terrorized that we aren’t allowed to let anyone know the true horrors of what’s happening in the war. I ask all of you to just wake up to what’s really happening, because the drone program is not a joke. There are people behind those drones being forced to kill people for illegitimate reasons. It’s not a killing machine robot. It’s a war. There’s people dying.”

intended to “aid the enemy,” instead saying that the knowledge that releasing the documents would “aid the enemy” was sufficient to prove guilt.

Manning has gotten strong support from antiwar veterans. At the pre-march rally on June 1, Veterans For Peace member Ward Reilly said to the crowd, “Bradley Manning’s duty was to report what we reported. If you tell the truth in this country, you go to prison… Bradley Manning should never have been in Iraq to begin with to see what he saw, and that is our collective failure, to not control the politicians and the war criminals. It is our job to see that those war criminals go to jail and take Bradley’s place.”

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Seattle Test Boycott Victory
ONE STEP IN THE STRUGGLE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

Editor’s note: On January 10, teachers at Seattle’s Garfield High School unanimously refused to administer the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test to their ninth graders. The teachers said the test was unreliable and a waste of students’ time. With strong support from parents and students, the boycott soon spread to other Seattle schools and sparked anti-testing actions across the country. On May 13, Seattle teachers heard the news they had been waiting for.

By Jesse Hagopian

“High schools may opt out of MAP in 2013-14.”

This message was in an all-district communication blast, sent at 2:06pm on Monday, May 13 by Seattle Public School Superintendent Jose Banda, and led to spontaneous end-of-day celebrations by teachers and students around Garfield High School. Students fist-bumping each other. Ad hoc assemblies in the hallway to congratulat each other.

Until now, the “Measures of Academic Progress” (MAP) tests were required by the Seattle School District for all students in grades K through 12. A unified group of Garfield teachers announced in January that they would no longer administer the tests to students at Garfield. Other Seattle schools followed suit, and the bravery of these teachers led to a national movement.

Why were Garfield teachers celebrating the discontinuing of the MAP for our students next year?

We celebrated because we know hundreds of hours of student time will no longer be wasted on a test the district has now acknowledged is inappropriate for our students.

We celebrated because our English Language Learner students will no longer be humiliated by taking a test that is not culturally or linguistically appropriate and they will now have more hours to spend on the additional instructional time they need.

We celebrated because our special education students will not have to fidget in their chairs when they strike a computer key for the MAP test that never accounted for the student’s individualized education plans.

We celebrated because our students will no longer have to stare at the dull glow of a computer screen as they contemplate what possible answers they could give to questions on material that was never part of their state-mandated curriculum.

We celebrated because our evaluations would not be tied to test scores generated by bored students who have no motivation to perform well on possibly their fifth standardized test of the year. Annoyed students have been known to select “C” for each and every answer on that silly test.

We celebrated because we still have jobs we love, and because our superintendent had to back off of his original threat to suspend teachers for ten days without pay for refusing to administer an ill-conceived test (for which the district spends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year).

We celebrated because teachers, parents and students across the country (from New Zealand to England) have been inspired by our resistance and are waging their own battles for quality assessment. Perhaps most of all, we were celebrating because we are building a collaborative spirit of faculty and student solidarity at Garfield. Our students know we have their best interests at heart, and that the power of our commitment to truth can overcome the powerful.

Yet while teachers at five of Seattle’s high schools (Chief Sealth, Center School, Ballard, Ingraham and Garfield) who joined the MAP boycott are elated by the news of this victory, Superintendent Banda’s e-mail also warned that students in kindergarten through eighth grade will still be required to take the test next year.

Our victory, then, remains incomplete. Faculty at ORCA (K–5) and Thornton Creek Elementary have raised equally powerful arguments about the flawed use of the test at the primary grade levels. Moreover, the Department of Education released results from its 2012 study, showing the MAP to be ineffective at improving reading levels for students in the fourth and fifth grades. Similarly, the Chicago school district recently announced it was suspend- ing the MAP for grades K–5 — a clear indication the MAP isn’t serving the youngest pupils either.

For these reasons, Seattle’s high school teachers will continue to join with our K-8 colleagues to call on the Seattle School District to terminate its contract with the MAP test company at the end of this school year (when the agreement expires). The key to the victory over the high school MAP test was solidarity and widespread public support, and we intend to carry these lessons forward to change policy for K-8 schools as well.

As we both continue to build the movement to scrap the MAP and celebrate our huge victory, we shouldn’t forget the answer to this year’s end-of-semester exam: if we stand for what’s right for students, teachers can win.

Jesse Hagopian is a public high school teacher in Seattle and a founding member of Social Equality Educators (SEE). An earlier version of this article appeared on CommonDreams.org.
A Laboratory on Wheels

Photos by Ashley Marinaccio
Text by Independent Staff

Seen from the outside, the brightly-colored BioBus looks like it just rolled out of a Ken Kesey novel. Take a look inside and you will find the refurbished 1970s-era San Francisco transit bus is a high-tech laboratory on wheels, boasting an array of scientific equipment. For the people who work on the BioBus, it is the perfect vehicle for exposing the city’s students to science, including those at Bronx Little School who received a visit from the BioBus earlier this spring (See photos below). According to Danny Valdes, the project’s program coordinator, the BioBus will visit 96 schools this year and will spend part of the summer parked in front of New York City Hall of Science in Flushing Meadow–Corona Park in Queens.

“Every day we are changing at least one kid’s mind about science,” Valdes said. “Kids experience science in a textbook. Then they come on the BioBus and see their own cells. That totally changes the way they are learning.”

INQUIRING MINDS: Through science, first graders learn how to ask questions and think critically.

GATHER UP: BioBus program coordinator Danny Valdes spurs the enthusiasm of a first grade class at the Bronx Little School. BioBus volunteers help teach, develop curricula, apply for grants, maintain the group’s website, scrape mud out of creeks, collect the veggie oil that fuels the bus and much more.

TINY CRITTERS: A kindergartner looks through a microscope at a daphnia, a tiny, translucent water flea whose bodily functions can be easily observed. For many students, BioBus is the first experience they have with science. This visit was funded by a private foundation, because Bronx Little School’s science program was eliminated due to budget cuts.
Looking to Build a Larger Movement

By Steve Williams

My parents used to say that I was born in the wrong decade. As survivors of the segregated South who had graduated from Spelman and Morehouse Colleges in 1964, they had witnessed the rise of one of world’s great social movements. They now worried about their would-be revolutionary son growing up in the time of Reagan and reaction. Some nights, before going to sleep I wished that I had been alive in the 1960s.

I became an organizer in 1992 after I finished college. For the next 20 years, I organized with homeless and low-income people for economic, racial and gender justice in San Francisco — for five years with the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness and for the next fifteen with POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights), a community organization of working class African-American and Latino workers, tenants, students and transit riders that I co-founded in 1997. During my time at POWER, I had the opportunity to recruit new fighters in the movement and to meet other organizers and activists across the country through the different campaigns and alliances that we were a part of.

The time that I spent working at POWER included some of my proudest moments, but with the economic collapse of 2008, I sensed that the movement was missing historic opportunities to advance a liberatory agenda. I decided to leave my position at POWER to focus my energies on building a massive popular movement. This was August 2011 — three weeks before Occupy Wall Street began.

Inspired by the experiences of the great African revolutionary Amílcar Cabral who used his experience as an agronomist to strengthen the national liberation movement in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, I dreamed of interviewing organizers and activists from across the country about their insights and experiences on the frontlines of struggles for justice, sustainability and dignity. Now that I was unemployed, nothing was holding me back. After discussing the idea with another recently unemployed San Francisco organizer, NTanya Lee, the Ear to the Ground Project was born.

LISTENING CLOSELY

The two of us set out to interview at least 150 organizers and activists. From the beginning, we knew that we wouldn’t be able to talk to all of the amazing organizers and activists doing important work in the United States. In fact, we were scared that few people would be interested in a project such as this; we only hoped that the people we asked would be polite enough to grant us an interview.

Some of the people that we interviewed I knew from work we had done together in local organizing campaigns or national alliances. Some I considered comrades, and others didn’t know well but was interested in their assessments. But the interviews that were most powerful were those with people I was meeting for the first time. I was repeatedly surprised and humbled by the trust and generosity that people showed me — not only with their honest reflections but also by inviting me into their homes and sharing food with me.

This experience has changed me in many ways. I listen better now. The idea of the Ear to the Ground Project always drew from ways. I listen better now. The idea of the Ear to the Ground Project always drew from the trust and generosity that people showed me — not only with their honest reflections but also by inviting me into their homes and sharing food with me.

Continued on page 16

Overcoming Fragmentation

Interview by John Tarleton

In 2011, NTanya Lee quit her job as the executive director of a San Francisco-based community organization to launch the Ear to the Ground Project with fellow Bay Area organizer Steve Williams. A veteran of three decades of social justice activism dating back to her childhood roots in the black working class of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Lee spent the past year interviewing 158 fellow left activists and organizers across the United States about their work and the hopes they had for seeing a “movement of movements” emerge that could effectively challenge business as usual in this country. Lee and Williams recently released their first report (More Than We Imagined: Activists’ Assessments on the Moment & The Way Forward), which provides a candid snapshot of those who are fighting social justice every day perceive the challenges facing them.

John Tarleton: Many people on the left are discouraged at this moment, yet your report strikes a hopeful note. Why is that?

NTanya Lee: I came out of the interviews sobered by people’s assessments of the weaknesses of our movements and the challenges we need to overcome. Yet, in those same sobering conversations, people were so hungry, so ready to take the conditions we face on. It is a matter of how well or poorly we do the work. Even though people weren’t clear which way to go or on an overall strategy to strengthen our movements, that internal courage and readiness and hunger is essential to be able to move and people have that all over the country.

JT: What do you mean by “movement”? How is that different from having a collection of individual groups each pursuing their own campaigns?

NL: For us, a movement exists where there’s sustained, ongoing activism of many different forces working toward a common goal around shared values. From our perspective, there are actually many movements in the United States that are happening. The work in front of us is not to grow one big movement, but to build a movement of many movements.

JT: In the eyes of the activists and organizers you spoke with, what are some of the fundamental challenges that they face?

NL: One of the most common things people talked about was the level of fragmentation. In the United States, for a variety of historical and political reasons, social justice workers are really isolated from each other. They are all in these different silos fragmented by racial identity groups, etc. etc. This is a core weakness but it’s not the underlying weakness. The underlying weakness is a lack of coherent politiques. There’s not a coherent set of ideas that brings all our political work together, and that is what leads to fragmentation.

The other thing a lot of people talked about was how “movement culture makes hard work harder.” People and organizations who are doing really good work for justice are sort of infested by dominant values like competitiveness, ambitiousness and ego-drive work and people with insecurities end up manifesting interpersonal rivalries that are very destructive. We are calling for a renewal of culture that goes back to some feminist values that have been lost in a lot of social justice organizations, where there’s a real belief that how you do the work together matters.

JT: You raise the issue of race a lot in your report. Why must a racial analysis be central to left movements?

NL: Capitalism and white supremacy is racialized and white supremacy is embedded into the structure of it. The experience of working people differs depending on how they are racialized in this society. Our strategies have to take that into account. You can’t just organize workers, you have to organize people by Continued on page 16
What Is to Be Done?

39 Exciting Ideas for the Left

Compiled by NTanya Lee and Steve Williams

NTanya Lee and Steve Williams’ report on the state of the U.S. Left includes a catalog of suggestions (“75 Exciting Ideas for the Left”) that emerged from their interviews with grassroots organizers and activists. Here is a sampling of what they heard. For more, and for a full copy of More Than We Imagined, see www.eartothegroundproject.org.

1. RE-ORIENTING OUR WORK & BUILDING MOVEMENT COHERENCE

We need to push our demands and analysis.

2. We need to break out of defensive fights — picking our issues, setting the stage and following it all the way through.

3. We need to build power that is based on worldview and ideology, not just policies, and gets us out of silos and in a position to put out a broader set of proposals.

4. We need to put aside some assumptions about how social movements work. Don’t assume things are going to happen like they have in past movements.

5. We need to lift up conversations about race in everything we do because race is intertwined with every major social justice issue we face.

6. Develop a narrative about society and the economy that is compelling and resonates with people, and has a name that people can talk about and debate. People are fearful of losing their credibility but we can talk about and debate. People are fearful of losing their credibility but we can talk about and debate.

7. Create spaces for organizers to develop relationships of trust and solidarity across organizations, issues, campaigns, and so we can learn from each other’s experiences.

8. Learn to build united fronts that magnify our power.

9. We need some cross-pollination. People should travel through different parts of the country to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening in rural and urban areas as well as differences among the regions.

10. We need a new, nonsectarian Left that includes folks from all the trends in the past that don’t matter now. Learning from the 1970s — we have to be very careful about declaring people enemies.

11. We need to know what we should agree on:
   - Understanding of and opposition to the capitalist state
   - How race, gender and class have operated in the U.S.
   - Key elements of our vision, including our view of the state and the role of popular democracy
   - The critical importance of ecology and what it means for what we’re trying to build
   - International solidarity

12. MOVEMENT CULTURE & NEW POLITICAL FORMATIONS

We need to stop being so fucking cranky. It’s important to dream. That’s why artists and youth are so important.

13. We need to focus on internal transformation. Oppression, capitalism — we are in those systems, and they are in us. So the work is at the individual, and social/structural levels.

14. Pause. Slow down. The pace we have is unsustainable. We need to get clear and focused and you can’t do that if you’re just always tired and used up.

15. We need to push against our left purifying tendencies and against obsession with process.

16. Movements for economic and racial justice have neglected feminism in terms of their internal culture. Macho behavior hurts comradeship and solidarity. We need feminist social relations.

17. We need to shed our sentimentality and identification with what currently exists. Our movement isn’t organizations, we are a web of people. We will create vehicles as necessary but we should also destroy them as necessary. Institution-building can destroy creative and spirit that led to the creation of an organizational form.

18. We need to make a structured, strategic, organized break with the Democratic Party as the central gathering point of progressive politics in the U.S. There should be, roughly speaking, a truly mass third party, but not one specifically focused on elections, led by working class people of color.

19. We need a labor federation that includes community-based worker center organizations on an equal basis to traditional labor unions.

20. Push for a 30-hour work week — both as a mass demand for everyone, and for our sector, so people can have time to do movement work outside their paid jobs, and have time to build the kind of strong families and communities we need.

21. POLITICAL EDUCATION & BASE-BUILDING

The idea work needs to get done now, the sharp analysis, so our demands can be big enough to match the scale of the multiple crises we face. Otherwise the next uprising could be around small demands.

22. We need to remember it’s not enough to wage solid strategic organizing campaigns. People become leftists because their consciousness shifts. That has to happen at a much broader level, in different sectors. Building people’s political consciousness is a minimal requirement for ever winning.

23. In the Black community, we need a big push on international awareness, with exchanges to Palestine, etc. Historically, our international outlook has been at a much higher level. The broader movement will not be a righteous and powerful one without progressive Black organized forces with an international, anti-imperialist perspective.

24. Become better at talking about war and militarism, and deal with why the leadership of the anti-war movement is so out of touch with working class people of color communities.

25. Send organizers out into the field. Many organizers spend their time developing a political program or going to all these meetings, and have less time to be out in the field, hearing where folks are really at.

26. Let’s look at what’s innovative about online organizing and respond to people’s new ways of thinking and relating to each other. The community organizing model has not grappled with the structural shifts in people’s consciousness related to the dramatic shifts in technology, media, speed of visual culture.

27. We need to organize strategic sectors of the white working and middle classes. The Right is organizing them around a racist set of ideas, there are millions of working people who are struggling, who are increasingly precarious and insecure, who can be won over to the Left.

28. We need to expand the movement’s attention to organizing in places where there are demographic shifts such as the South and Southwest. Combined with our centers of progressive work on the coasts, plus the Upper Midwest, we will have the basis for a new bloc.

29. CAMPAIGNS & INFRASTRUCTURE

Climate justice is a unifying rallying call for people around the world. There’s an opportunity to link our local struggles and organizing with a global struggle to fight back and put forward a new vision.

30. The Keystone XL Tar Sands pipeline is a key fight, posing a way to build large cross-sector alliances willing to engage in direct action.

31. We need to fight the right level of power: corporate power, not government, and we need to play offense by making our way up the money and power tree to who’s really in charge. Take Wal-Mart for instance, the largest private employer in the U.S. Fighting them could unite us.

32. Our base-building groups need to expand our tactics beyond run-of-the-mill, show up at city council, do a petition kind of actions. Occupy was inspiring there.

33. We need a TON more people ready to do direct action and nonviolent civil disobedience. We need to be more politically confrontational with the state, which is connected to our need to be more politically independent.

34. We need to identify ways not just to get foundations to better resource our work, but we need to more fundamentally identify ways to have democratic control of capital to finance our movements.

35. We need to build new leadership to take over our institutions. We need to strengthen how we’re developing second-tier leadership.

36. We need to become more creative about resourcing our work outside of the foundation world. Tithing 1% of our personal and organizational resources to the Left should go to work that advances cross-sectoral movement-building and Left activities, especially work that takes strategic risks and would never be funded by foundations.

37. We need to figure out how to take advantage of new technologies that make messaging and reaching people cheaper and easier.

38. We need to dramatically scale up our new media and communications capacity. We need a pipeline of people of color especially getting trained in necessary technical skills.

39. Our movements need a national press, a national organizers’ magazine where we can communicate our ideas, reflections, analysis to each other.
WITHIN OUR REACH

EXAMPLES OF HOW TO CREATE A JUST AND HEALTHY SOCIETY ARE ALL AROUND US

NORTH DAKOTA
Founded in 1919 by agribusiness populists, the Bank of North Dakota is the only state-owned bank in the U.S. With $1.4 billion under its management, the bank is the depository for all state tax collections and fees. It returns its profits in the state by providing discounted loans to students, small businesses and farmers.

Texas

With an eye on u.s. wind-energy production increasing by 20 percent in 2012, Texas led the way, generating more than 12,000 megawatts of wind energy, more than twice that of California, the next closest state.

Quebec, Mexico

Aware of being perceived by drug traffickers while courting South American authorities, the province took the other way, more than 70 million and crime-

New York City

Considered the most successful anti-poverty program in u.s. history, the patchwork of initiatives provides modest benefits to 37 million americans, including the elderly, disabled workers and their families. The program has been dubbed a “death trap” in crime, which may be the result of the federal government’s efforts to keep other Mexican programs from competing.

Venezuela

In 2004, the paraguayan-american Hugo Chávez began to champion the idea of worker control as a way to suppress the factors that were closing or shuttering banks under the watch of the business class. Since then, more than 1,000 banks have been occupied and run by various forms of worker control.

Bolivia

The Bolivian government is one of several South American nations that has invested in recent years to open up the broadcast airwaves to independent public producers. Under a new communications law, state and indigenous groups will be eligible for the first time to own broadcast licenses.

Argentina

In 2000, Argentina launched its program of “social rights” to help alleviate poverty. The government has implemented a system of universal health care that’s still evolving.

Denmark

In response to a growing need to control health care costs, Denmark pioneered a low-cost, universal health care system that’s still evolving.

Spain

Based in the Basque country of Spain, the Mondragon Corporation is a federation of worker-owned cooperatives that employs 119,000 workers, who produce a broad range of industrial products, from automobiles to textiles. It’s also the first country in the industrial world to ban drug tariffs.

Kenya

High interest rates mean the c NFL has banned the use of luxury cars for the nation’s top athletes, and it’s also the first country in the industrial world to ban drug tariffs.

Ecuador

It legalized same-sex marriage and parenting a little under three years ago, becoming the first country in the continental U.S. to allow children to marry. The justices have also acknowledged that marijuana is fully decriminalized and people are permitted to marry whomever they please.

Switzerland

It’s not easy during times like these.

But, it’s worth remembering that the ingredients for the kind of society we want to see aren’t just ideas but exist in the world, scattered all around in waiting to be fought for, expanded and expanded upon.

NORTH DAKOTA

The U.S., in comparison, leads the way, generating almost $2 million a year that will be earmarked for school construction.

Texas

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Society of Addiction

By Nicholas Powers

I waited three months to eat a Krispy Kreme. I mean I waited. Every week or so, take the train to Penn Station, quickly ingesting through crowds. And every time I have to go through a mental monologue — Don’t stop at the Krispy Kreme. Don’t give yourself diabetes. Seriously, you might as well inject Elmer’s glue straight into your heart. But then I saw the doughnut, and that feeling hit me. The doughnut was delicious, and I needed it. And I got it. It was so good. If I hadn’t seen it, I would have walked right past it.

And then I begin the junkie’s debate — C’mon it’s been three months! Besides, one can’t hurt. And didn’t I help that homeless lady get her shit the shelter last night. That was an Opraah thing to do. And doesn’t Oprah have a donut? I was drooling before I even turned. Everyone on line had the same wild look. I feared for the servers. If they didn’t get us the donuts quickly we might have smashed the glass. When I got mine and bit into it, sugar and preservatives and trans-fat flooded my body and I lit up like a Christmas tree. It felt like Jesus descended from Heaven and kissed my brain.

Afterwards I felt dirty, guilty. At home, I googled Krispy Kreme and found a YouTube clip of comedian Chris Rock prowling the streets. “Krispy Kreme donuts are so good,” he said. “I was just drooling before I even turned.” Everyone on line had the same wild look. I would have to do something for the servers. If they didn’t get us the donuts quickly we might have smashed the glass.

C’mom man open up, give me one more donut, I’ll do anything. I’ll suck your dick.”

I knew something was up … got me knocking on the donut window at two in the morning. C’mon man open up, give me one more donut, I’ll do anything. I’ll suck your dick.

Rock chuckled maniacally as the audience roared. I paused the clip and let it sink in.

How much of what we eat is not really food but a drug designed to addict us with a rush of sugar, salt or fat? McDonald’s. Checkers and the other fried fast-food places line the streets in Bed-Stuy. Neighbors have that addict’s wild look. It roared. I paused the clip and let it sink in. I’ll do anything. I’ll suck your dick.”

Today, commodities come with the joy of a new purchase. Flush the tube of foundation and the dopamine system incites us to seek again, which rewards us making you curious about ideas.”

From an evolutionary standpoint this is critical. Dopamine makes you feel good. “It makes me feel good.” I thought, “Get your cheese!” And this is what Breaking the Sugar Habit: The Science of Addiction, Freedom, and How to Break the Sugar Addiction Cycle about is what it says.

After reading this I walked around Union Square and studied the consumers flowing in and out of the stores. “Go on you rats,” I shouted. “Get your cheese!” And this is what it says.

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smoke it?” But I closed my mouth and rolled my eyes instead.

The baby grabbed the Cheetos and I imagined the Yellow 6 dye that makes it day-glow food entering her blood. In laboratory tests, it caused kidney tumors and contained carcinogens. Good job, Dad! She licked her lips because the hydrogenated oil makes the Cheetos so tasty. If she grows up eating snacks like these, her heart will eventually become a wheezing accordion.

My stop came and I stepped off the bus, seeing as if for the first time the many fast-food places and bodegas lining Nostrand Avenue. They are the two major institutions in working-class urban neighborhoods. Over 200,000 fast food restaurants open their doors each morning in America. Sometimes it seems all of them are in Bed-Stuy.

Each institution has a goal and the fast food industry is designed not to nourish bodies but to make profits. What was a $6 billion industry in 1970 raked in $160 billion last year. It did this by playing on our evolutionary but无限 desire to make profits. What was a $6 billion industry is designed not to nourish bodies but creates a vast pyramid of power.

"To move product — into the bodies of children — is fast. It’s cheap. It’s addictive. And it’s deadly. Not long ago, I saw an ambulance outside the adjacent building; my neighbor said his friend had died. He shook his head and said, “She was 50, only 50, and caught a heart attack.”

The nag factor

Capitalism — the private ownership over the means of production. It is the world of labor behind every smartphone, every Cheeto, every commodity. It is the factory and the workers inside. It is the bosses, regional managers and owners rising above the masses of workers in a vast pyramid of power.

Defenders of the system say that it raises incomes and life-spans and serves the needs of consumers. But in a dialectical reversal, we can point at clear evidence that capitalism does not serve our needs but creates consumers to serve its need of making profit. It’s a global conveyor belt where raw material is transformed into commodities, shipped to markets to be sold. But consumer are not born but made.

While waiting for my laundry to dry, I heard a kid screaming at his mother for Lucky Charms. “Ma, get me the Charms,” he shouted, “The Charms. I mean this kid was hollering like an N.F.L. coach. His veins bulged at his neck. “Ma, get me the Charms,” he shouted, “The Charms! The Lucky Charms!” She looked haggard and took him outside and when they came back he was scooping the cereal into his mouth.

The nagging scene struck a memory. Once home, I looked up a documentary called The Corporation; in it, Lucy Hughes, Vice President of Initiative Media and co-creator of the report “The Nag Factor,” said, “We asked parents to keep a diary and to record every time a child nagged them for a product. Anywhere from 20 percent to 40 percent of purchases would not have occurred unless the child nagged their parents.”

She had the smug smile of someone paid well enough to not care. Later Professor Susan Linn of Baker’s Children Center said the study was done by corporations to get children to nag for their products. Linn was sad eyed. It was like she stared at the face of a juggernaut of money and power that she could analyze but not stop. She said, “Children are not little adults. Marketing is playing into their development vulnerabilities. The advertising that children are exposed to today is held by psychologists and enhanced by media technology.”

Later Hughes reappeared, “You can manipulate consumers into wanting and buying your products. It’s a game.” Again that smug smile, she concluded, “They are tomorrow’s adult consumer, so start talking with them now... and you got them as an adult. Someone asked me, ‘Lucy is that ethical? You’re essentially manipulating children.’ Is it ethical, I don’t know but our mission at Initiative is to move product.”

To move product — into the bodies of children even at risk to their health and by target
Addiction
Continued from previous page

ing their soft minds. How can one talk of freedom of choice when corporations target us before we have the ability to choose at all? The advertising bullseye hovers on us through our lives. As adults, it is our unconscious minds that are hit. Brand names are stitched on clothes, products are placed in movies. Images are slipped under our conscious and descend into our psychic depths were they grow into decisions that we mistake for our own free will.

Capitalism — this system of private ownership of the means of production rose from the collapse of feudalism, under which armored nobility in castles and cloaked monks in monasteries ruled over ragged peasants. It spread in the artisan towns and city states of the late Middle Ages, it spread with the enclosure of land as serfs, hungry and desperate, moved to factory work in the cities, it spread overseas in the New World conquest, the slave trade and colonization, it spread around the earth in violent racist colonialism. And now it dominates human civilization and has spread into our childhoods, our dreams and seeks to determine the destiny of our species.

THE BODY VERSUS CAPITALISM

One of the most famous scenes in recent film history was from The Matrix, when the protagonist Neo is offered a red pill by a terrorist named Morpheus. He takes it and after plunging down a surreal dream wakes up hooked to cables in a gooey pod. He looks around and sees billions of pods with people sleeping inside.

It resonated because we experience Capitalism as turning our bodies against us. It is a parasitical system that feeds on us. It takes our tongues and blinds us with taste. It floods our unconscious with logos. It takes our desire and puts a price tag on it. And dizzy with sensation and directed by commercials, we work ourselves numb to become landfills for commodities.

Is this the destiny of our species? Is this the highest we can imagine, the endless hunt of millions us to work making products and enslaving millions more to buy them? It seems the tragedy of our civilization is that by being walled in with commodities, we lose sight of beauty and preciousness we truly are.

Our ability to create, to be conscious, to imagine is a spark of beauty in the void. Humanity is the result of a series of near improbable accidents. It is a sheer accident that we exist at all, that billions of years ago, hot rock formed a planet at this distance from the sun, that ice-loaded meteors hit earth and gave it water, that in the sea microbes ignited into life and plants swept over land.

When visiting the Museum of Natural History, I imagine the T-Rex skeleton chomping up one or two visitors in a swift bite. It’s easy to feel how lucky we got with that comet impact 66 million years ago. And that’s what I mean. It’s an accident we’re here at all.

And yet here we are. The universe may team with life but most likely it is microbes on rocks or germs in seas. Sentient life that looks up and questions is infinitely rare. Our ability to look far into space and deep into time, to follow the trail of elements to the origin of reality and to know its end, is incredibly precious. We, so far as we know, are the only species that is the living memory of the universe.

The human body — lulled into commodification addiction, brainwashed by advertising is itself evidence of the grand-narrative of evolution that surpasses capitalism. Over millions of years, natural selection sculpted us to fit the environment until we began to adapt the environment to fit our needs. Now we are trapped in an economic system that does not serve us but enslaves us to serve it. But the history of revolution and workers crime show us a truth about ourselves. Our power to imagine is greater than our need to obey.

NEURO-JUSTICE

Freedom: 1. The absence of constraint on choice or action. 2. The liberation from slavery or from the power of another.

This is the land of the free and the home of the brave. Hey, buddy, it’s a free country, right? In cliché sayings, we’re reminded that freedom is our social ideal. In the iconic scenes of U.S. history we learn that our nation’s flag was planted on the moon by an astronaut, our armies can strike anywhere, anytime, and even a black man can become president of a country that once had slavery.

But the daily evidence of that freedom is on the stacked store shelves and in the advertisements that teach us about the capitalist Good Life. But what if on either side of the commodity existed millions of people who were not free at all?

What if we saw that behind the label is a world of misery? There, suicidal men and women grind their lives against a factory clock to make our latest clothing, and technology. They see no exit but death and leap from the roof to the only freedom left to claim. There, undocumented workers pick tomatoes and staff the blood-soaked killing floors of meat factories to get us our cheap fast food.

And in front of the label is us — people whose unconscious is shaped by subliminal advertising, our need for intimacy and recognition commoditized into market experiences of bought and sold emotional labor. Our bodies are given addictive products that make us crave self-destruction. We who live in a market-dominated world are not free, but are chemically enslaved by the very phantasmatic science of corporate America.

A step we can take in freeing ourselves is critiquing capitalism directly. To the older frame of political economy focused on production, distribution and consumption of commodities we must add a new frame. One possibility is thinking in terms of a physiological economy, in which the body is transformed into a consuming machine and directed to the market where it’s a commodity dumping ground, regardless of the health effects on it. Putting the body at the center creates a goal of respecting human potential.

And what might help is the idea of neuro-justice as a New Millenial update on natural rights. We have as human beings a right to develop ourselves. We are inheritors of a cosmic accident that created the earth in the seething, plasma-hot, shooting galaxy. We are inheritors of millions of years of evolution, and each of us belongs to a thing rare and precious in the universe, sentient life.

Behind our eyes, in our brains is a power greater than reality. It’s the power to imagine. A truly human civilization will move beyond capitalism, beyond addicting our consciousness and the commodity reality that we claim. There, undocumented workers pick tomatoes and staff the blood-soaked killing floors of meat factories, and we get our cheap fast food.

The Brecht Forum

The Untold Story
Dan Georgakas, Kostis Karpozilos, Eric Poulos
Sliding scale: $6/$10/$15

The Untold Story

Building a Movement That Moves
The Brecht Forum
451 West Street
(register online: brechtsforum.org 212-242-4201

Upcoming Events

FRI, JUNE 7 & SAT JUNE 8 • 8pm
ON WHEELS PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS:
HENRIK IBSEN’s A DOLL HOUSE
Directed by Ted Thompson
Sliding scale: $10/$15/$25

FRI, JUNE 14 • 5:30–7:30pm
Kant’s Critique of the Power of Judgment (1790)
Russell Dale
Sliding scale: $95–$125

THURS, JUNE 27 • 7:30pm
FILM SCREENING/DISCUSSION
The Untold Story
Dan Georgakas, Kostis Karpozilos, Eric Poulos
Sliding scale: $6/$10/$15
I

By Gerald Meyer

In 1819, in the very wake of triumphant counterrevolution, Percy Shelley, in the last line of his most radical poem, The Masque of Anarchy, reminded those defeated: “Ye Are Many; They Are Few.” Embedded in this epigram is a sense of the inevitable overturn of societies structured so the productive majority perennially loses to the acquisitive minority. William Blake had previously moved Shelley’s promise toward potential realization when, in 1804, he pledged that with unidentifiable comrades, we “will not cease from mental fight nor let the sword in our hands ... until we build ... Jerusalem in Britain’s green and pleasant Land.” The job of the Left is to bring this promise to fruition. Today, New York City is the site of the greatest income inequality in the United States. In 2012, the top one percent garnered almost 40 percent of the total income generated by the entire economy of the richest city in the world. Sadly, at the moment of its greatest relevance, the Left has failed in both the United States and Europe to advance a program or the means for its fulfillment. While the people are demanding a way out of this deadlocked misery, the Left offers vacuous slogans, elaborations on democratic procedures and clumsy political pageantry.

The essential weapons at the Left’s disposal are an understanding of history and a capability to build organizations. These are intrinsically connected pursuits. Karl Marx awakened millions by affirming, “The [written] history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle. ... [It has been] an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight to the death between classes.” Marx’s reading of history enabled him to see that the oppressed, even when they constituted nearly 90 percent of the population, were unable to resist in their societies until the advent of capitalism. Concurrent with the mines and the dark, satanic mills, capitalism created a new class: wage workers, men and women who crowded into cities with swelling populations to work in enterprises with larger and larger numbers of employees. These wage workers had the unprecedented opportunity to become aware of themselves as a class and the possibility of radically changing society. Based on necessity, they organized to fight for their collective rights, which had genuine potential for positive outcomes.

The period of history from the founding of The First International in 1864 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 represents an epoch of stupendous achievement for the working classes and oppressed peoples of the entire world. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education.

In 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 represents an epoch of stupendous achievement for the working classes and oppressed peoples of the entire world. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. The Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education.

The International Workers Order (IWO), a fraternal benefit society founded by the Party in 1930, organized into one “general” (that is, English-speaking) and fourteen “nationality” sections, offered low-cost term-life, burial and disability insurance policies while promoting cultural programs and first-language learning. The IWO’s membership peaked in 1947 at 185,000 men and women organized into over two thousand lodges. The IWO functioned to finance the Party’s foreign-language press, which reached a circulation of 400,000 in 1944. While drawing its members away from the Americanizing commercial culture, the IWO drew its members into the wider political Left under the slogan “Americans All.” In 1944, a Left coalition dominated by the CP gained the leadership of the American Labor Party (ALP), which on average garnered 15 percent of the city’s vote. The ALP ensured the election of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to his second and third terms and the re-elections of East Harlem’s Vito Marcantonio, the ALP’s sole member in the House of Representatives. There he functioned as an eloquent, tireless spokesperson for the American Left; in 1950, he cast the sole vote against U.S. intervention in the Korean Civil War.

The CP-led and -influenced organizations shared a common political outlook and culture: Their individual missions were viewed as fulfilling the longer-range goal of challenging capitalism itself. These organizations, while advocating for wider changes, provided some means for immediate relief. CP-style politics gave opportunities for activists, many of whom had limited education, to develop talents and skills that empowered them in their political work and their lives. Emblematic of all CP-led organizations was its inclusion of African-Americans and other minorities in their leadership and a socialization of whites to discourage attitudes of white chauvinism, that is, the pervasive sense of entitlement and superiority characteristic among many on the Left.

The influence of each organization was multiplied by the coordination of their efforts: IWO lodges served as meeting places for the CIOP organization drives; the IWO could reach deep into nationality communities where many, fearful of the consequences of membership, willingly contributed and participated in the Party’s campaigns. In turn, the Party adopted a cultural pluralistic modus operandi. An excellent example of the coordination of these organizations to achieve an overarching goal was their mobilization to ensure Marcantonio’s election. The CP-led New York City General Labor Council, the foreign-language press and the general resources of the ALP were concentrated on sending Marc back to Washington.

There is much to learn from this history, but history is not a cookbook from which we select favorite recipes. We must draw inspiration and lead which have the potential of producing tangible gains for the people, while struggling for wider, longer-lasting remedies. We must go to the people, not as missionaries but as junior partners with skills and comrade-ship. We must build trust among ourselves that is based on action. Let’s get started down a path that offers genuine hope of success. This a life’s work for a life worth living.

Gerald Meyer is a professor of history at Hostos Community College (CUNY). He is the author of Vito Marcantonio: Radical Political, 1902–1954.
Homophobia
Continued from page 4

street or in the workplace, and these kinds of discrimination must be battled with different strategies.

In Queens, Make the Road has been one of the few organizations fighting homophobia and transphobia. In Jackson Heights, a predominantly working class, immigrant community, where its office is based and where I live, the Make the Road model creates a link between young people of color, parents, immigrant workers, tenants and LGBT folks. Such community support creates real visible change, which can be seen when heterosexual allies explain to a group of non-LGBTQ people that the LGBT community deserves to be respected, or when politicians pay attention to people speaking about how unfair legislation affects diverse groups of people, including those who are LGBT. We are seeing that on both the personal and political level, people increasingly feel that LGBT rights are also immigrants’ rights, workers’ rights, tenants’ rights and human rights, and this is creating a much stronger and more connected movement.

Steve Williams
Continued from page 8
day-to-day campaign work, I recognized my tendency to connect people’s comments to my pre-existing ideas. Months of asking the same questions to some of the most thoughtful people in the movement with no pressure to emerge with an answer taught me the creative potential of spacious listening. I like to think that my assessments and recommendations are stronger now because I took in the richness of others’ thinking.

I had predicted that we would be inspired by the gritty and determined work that is happening across the country, and we were not disappointed. The imaginativeness driving so much important work is inspiring, but we were still left with the question of what it might take to bring the different strands of these efforts together into a larger whole. Given the difficulty that I’d witnessed in developing shared work in local, statewide and national spaces, I expected widely different assessments to emerge from the interviews, but I was surprised by the consensus that emerged.

The people we interviewed shared remarkably common assessments of the state of the world and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the movement.

A SHARED DESIRE
Coupled with this, an overwhelming number of people we interviewed talked about their desire to shift the way that their work is being done. They want connection to a larger movement. They want to feel engaged in a project to change the world for the better — even if that means abandoning some of the institutions and identities that have given us to this point. Repeatedly, people talked about wanting to feel like they are a part of a team — just like me.

We began this project because it filled a need that Ntanya and I felt, but over the course of almost a year and dozens of interviews, I see we weren’t alone. We would often receive emails and phone calls from people in Detroit, New York, Atlanta, Albuquerque and Los Angeles asking us about how the project was coming along. Frankly, we were surprised, but this was a need that many of us felt. This interest pushed us to be more rigorous in writing More than We Imagined, which summarizes our findings from the interviews.

NTanya and I traveled to more than 30 different communities across the United States to interview 158 organizers and activists, three-fourths of whom came of age after the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Clearly, there are a lot of people that we missed, and NTanya and I have started to joke about what it might mean to do a second round of interviews. We’re not rushing into that right now because we really want to hear people’s reactions and thoughts to this report of the first round.

In the end, I’m thankful for this last year because it’s shown me that if I were given a choice, this is the moment of history that I’d choose to be alive and active. I’d choose this time because I see that there are hundreds, if not tens of thousands of people out there, longing and dreaming and working for a world based on solidarity, liberation and sustainability. I see that I am not alone. After doing finishing this phase of the Ear to the Ground project, I know that there’s a community that I’m proud to be a part of and that there’s more of us than I ever imagined.

NTanya Lee
Continued from page 8

how they’re positioned in our society. Also, we want to have people in leadership of a transformative movement who have the most at stake in changing and overturning the current system.

JT: Many of the people you spoke with are active in base-building organizations. Can you describe what you mean by “base building” and why it is important?

NL: By base building, we mean doing membership recruitment, leadership development and campaign work to build organized bases of poor, usually working class people who can identify their own issues, their own campaigns and make demands that meet their own demands. There’s no social movement in the history of the world that hasn’t rested ultimately on local, organized bases of people as a core to moving things forward.

JT: Why do people stick with social justice work? It’s not an easy path to be on.

NL: People are not in it for the money, clearly. One thing I would pull out is that people need a community of people who share their values and who are going to consistently support the work you are doing. It’s not enough to be doing activist work and protesting and working on campaigns. We have to be really building relationships of trust with each other so that we can be with each other through hard and good times. Ultimately, we say, the movement should be “magnetic.” It’s not enough to be doing activist...
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**TAKING AIM AT GUN VIOLENCE**

Gun violence has been very much in the public mind lately, from the December shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School to Mark Carson’s recent death in New York City and the Mother’s Day parade shooting in New Orleans. If you want some evidence that the next generation takes the problem seriously and isn’t resigned to its own destruction, you should see *9mm America*. This arresting production, exploring how gun violence affects our lives, comes courtesy of Girl Be Heard, a theater collective that gives young women a venue to write and perform. It is based on conscious plays under professional guidance. The show debuted on June 1, but I had a chance to see the work-in-progress, while the delivery of the lines was still being honed and scenes were being mixed, matched and cut. Based on the play’s power, even at that stage, I would encourage readers to go to see the final product. This one’s going to hit hard.

Girl Be Heard productions draw material both from participants’ personal experience around an issue and research into other people’s experiences. Some of what emerges is straight narrative and some is more impressionistic. On the heels of *Ticked, about sex trafficking*, *9mm America* leans in the more impressionistic direction. It is a series of personal stories, a la Virginia Monologues, that morph with ease into defiant raps, mournful arias, bracing polyrhythmic stamp-and-clap dances, and other, freer verse forms. Diverse as the actors’ experiences are, the disparate strands add up to an inescapable message about systemic violence and the apathy and greed that perpetuate it.

The play has its share of iconic moments. Among them are a sarcastic primer on armed masochism “called “Gun 101” and a catchy song and dance that bookends the play with shout-outs to the global victims of violence: “From Liberia to the Congo, from Palestine down to Mexico.”

However, perhaps the most powerful of these moments is the one that veers most obviously into the world of childhood in the form of a double-Dutch game. The actors jump into the churning ropes and enter a state of palpable elation that she dudge and weave and the ropes (or violence) or heartbeat/pass more inches under their feet. This contrast highlights just how freighted the words and motions have been so far. The fleeting moment of play captures that precarious innocence that surprising numbers of children still manage to cling to, even when those in charge have failed to protect them from violence and want.

Company member Betsy Perez said in a post-rehearsal interview that she found herself seeking to present a balanced message in the show. The real-world ravages of gun violence are felt disproportionately in communities of color, and Perez didn’t want to shy away from that — but, she explained, at the same time, “We didn’t just want to make it tunnel vision … a racial thing. … It’s an epidemic [in] America as a whole. … Even if you’re not directly affected, you’re affected regardless.” (In fact, one rap from the play warns us that “some of the best kills come from rich villains.”)

Perez’s colleague, Melanie Martins, elaborated with her view about the mass media, citing the formulaic, factoid-heavy presentation of news as a major culprit and saying that viewers act as though, “just because the news went off, the issue went away too.”

While Perez and Martins draw inspiration for the production from their own truly horrific experiences with gun violence, the production has been an eye-opening experience for Monica Furman, who relates that she felt into that same out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality by living in a relatively safe neighborhood. “I felt like I was in a bubble and it just got burst by the creation of this show.”

Ashley Marinaccio, GBH’s founder and artistic director, steers with a sure hand and a heart that knows when to be heavy or light. She prodded the actors to think critically about potential solutions to these problems, beyond the confines of the play, so that the lines would read authentically: Do we change the law? Do we protest in the street? Do we reduce the military budget? There is no easy, single answer, but that doesn’t faze the participants. Though the play doesn’t bring all good news by a long shot, it’s clear that some bright young minds, with plenty of life ahead of them, are gearing up to meet the challenges.

— **DAVID MEADOW**

9mm America runs through June 19 at the Robert Moss Theater, at 440 Lafayette Street. For tickets, showtimes and more, see www.GirlBeHeard.org/9mmamerica.
Youth Revolt

Something in the Air (Après Mai)
Directed by Olivier Assayas
MK2, France 3 Cinema and Vortex Sutra, 2014

“Between us and heaven, hell or nothingness, there is only life, the most fragile thing in the world.” A philosophy teacher reads out this quote by the French thinker Blaise Pascal to a classroom of inerte teenagers draped over their chairs. A few seconds later, you see the same youngsters running for their lives, pursued by riot police with clubs in the cobble-stoned streets of 1970s Paris. Something In the Air (Après Mai) is director Olivier Assayas’ ode to that period, and to his own coming of age in the immediate aftermath of the May 1968 uprisings, as the French title suggests.

Against the backdrop of the “70s, the director paints a flowing portrait of youth in all its incredible frailty and perseverance. Gilles, the lanky hero of the film, bears some resemblance to Assayas himself: raised in an affluent household in a Paris suburb with a father in the film industry and an ephemerall flirtation with violent left-wing groups.

This may explain why the movie errs on the side of being a whimsical retrospective rather than a feature film with a semi-coherent plot and a set of characters: Assayas is brilliant at recreating the atmosphere of the time, but he leaves his scantly-clad and loosely-sketchy characters whimsically drifting around with a very meager sense of narrative.

As a great conjurer of context, Assayas has packed the film tight with cultural and historical references, ranging from the wonderful “Ballad of William Worthy” and tracks by The Soft Machine to the posters Gilles and his friends plaster the school with overnight — for a ridiculous blockbuster about Nazis and dinosaurs and soaks up experimental cinema at night, the last book we see him reading is on the Situationist Internationale, the radical artist collective whose founder, Guy Debord, championed nihilistic individualism. Not entirely surprising: Assayas based this film on an earlier letter he had written to Alice Debord, the founder’s wife.

Gilles’ struggle to balance political engagement with art is reflected in his flirtations: while the sophisticated Laure leaves him, he is not sure about his feelings for the beautiful Christine, a relentless fighter for the working class. Laure ends up dead, Christine in the kitchen while her revolutionarily filmmaker boyfriend discusses work on the patio and confuses feminists with lesbians. There are no easy answers.

It is difficult then not to laugh at the gravity with which Gilles, Christine, Laure and their friends take their search for political and creative outlets: spirit dancing, drip painting, petty disputes between militant factions and casting rune dice for where to go next. To his credit, Assayas manages to follow their amblings with tenderness and respect, occasionally bringing the scenes to the point of simmering irony but never with too much of a bite.

This period and its dreamy generation has been rehearsed a number of times in French cinema — occasionally steeped in nostalgia like Bernardo Bertolucci’s The Dreamers, or pepped up with humor like Cédric Klapisch’s Le Péril Jeune. But rarely has the unrest and engagement of the time been taken up with such dedicated seriousness as by Assayas.

Despite its earnestness, the film suffers from poor character development, which is a serious shortcoming for a feature primarily centered on the development of its characters. Gilles and his friends remain remarkably understated and listless whenever they are not running from the police, their voices deadpan even when discussing their passions. They may be meandering, but they never believe themselves to be lost — this is where the film’s ode to youth reveals its limits: growing up involves growth pains, but there is no real discomfort and therefore no real tension in the film. The youngsters remain poised, even when jumping into the void.

One of the young radicals’ illicit posters shows a mummy with a safety pin through its mouth. It reads: “Youth that worries too often about the future.” This rings truer than ever today. With the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring at the back of their minds, today’s audience is left with the sense that any collective struggle is also first and foremost an individual one, and the same concerns return time and again, in varying forms, as time goes by.

— Holland Cotter, art critic, New York Times

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9.5 THESSES ON ART AND CLASS

Ben Davis

“Just when it seemed that contemporary art writing and the subject of real-life politics had permanently parted ways, along comes the young New York critic Ben Davis with a book that brings them together: No cheering here, no swoony prosody, no easy kisses-off; just smart, ardent, illusion-puncturing observation and analysis on the intersection of art, commerce, and—the elephant in the art fair VIP lounge—class. None of this would matter much if he didn’t tell us why we should care, but he does. Under all his excorciations lies a faith in art as an agent of transformation toward a post-neoliberal, post-greed society that could be, should be.”

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