EPIDEMIC OF FEAR
THE PLAGUE THAT’S WORSE THAN EBOLA
NICHOLAS POWERS, P4
THROUGH NOV 16 Various times • Free EXHIBITION: "SELF-DETERMINATION INSIDE/OUT" Recasting the history of the prison-industrial complex, this exhibition features cultural materials produced by incarcerated people and their allies. Subjects include the Attica Rebellion, political imprisonment, AIDS education, prisoners-as-laborers, the struggles of incarcerated women and queer people, prison hunger strikes and more. Interference Archive 131 8th St, #4, Brooklyn interferencearchive.org

MON OCT 27 7pm • Free DISCUSSION: THE COMING SWARM Author Molly Sauter and other panelists will lead a discussion about online activism. Sauter is the author of The Comming Swarm: 2005’s Actions, Hacktivism and Civil Disobedience on the Internet. Bluestockings Bookstore & Café 172 Allen St 212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

WED OCT 29 7pm • Free DISCUSSION: CAN THE LEFT TAKE OVER THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY? A discussion of progressives’ strategy to push the Democratic Party to the left. The discussion will include the roles of activists and political actors such as Bill de Blasio, Elizabeth Warren and the Working Families Party. Queens Pride House 76-11 37th Ave, 2nd Fl Jackson Heights, Queens nycsocialist.org

SAT NOV 1 12 6pm • Free PARTY: 2ND ANNUAL NYUORICAN BLOCK PARTY. Celebrate the 41st anniversary of the Nyuorican Poets Café at this community block party. Enjoy an afternoon of poetry readings, musical performances, food and carnival games while honoring this long-standing hub of cultural creativity. East 3rd St btw Aves B & C 212-780-9386 • nyuorican.org

SAT NOV 8 1-3:30pm • $5 WORKSHOP: FOOD WASTE REDUCTION AND COMPOSTING IN THE CITY. A workshop on composting options in the city along with education relating to the processes of transferring leftover food into usable soil. Registration is required at lesecologycenter.org. Dana Discovery Center, Central Park 110th St Between 5th Ave & Lenox 212-477-4022 • lesecologycenter.org

SUN NOV 9 10:30am-3:30pm • Suggested donation $20/40/80 WALKING TOUR: THE MANHATTANIZATION OF BROOKLYN. The upscaling of Brooklyn has been on planners’ drawing boards for decades, and over the last decade, their dreams have been coming true. Led by journalist Doug Henwood, the tour will explore the strategy behind the transformation. All donations go to the Marxists Education Project. Meetup at the Hungry Ghost Café 647 Fulton St, Brooklyn thecommonsbrooklyn.org

MON NOV 10 7pm • $15/$10 student PANEL: TOWARD A POST-CARBON NYC. Hurricane Sandy dramatically exposed New York’s vulnerability to the ravages of climate change. Panelists will explore city-level efforts to reduce carbon emissions and fossil fuel consumption, adapt to climate change and ensure infrastructure resiliency. International Center of Photography 1133 Ave of the Americas 212-897-9000 • icp.org

FRI NOV 14 6:30-9pm • Free COMMUNITY VOICES: BRONX STORIES. Storytellers, poets and musicians will raise their voices to challenge the stereotypes of the Bronx. The event will end with an open mic in which the audience is encouraged to contribute stories, poems and songs. Bronx Museum, 2nd Fl 1040 Grand Concourse, Bronx 718-681-6000 • bronxmuseum.org

SAT NOV 15 6pm • $150 GALA, PATHMAKERS TO PEACE. Brooklyn for Peace will honor celebrated public intellectual Noam Chomsky and commemorate its 30th anniversary with a reception and gala dinner. Chomsky will give the keynote address and dinner and drinks will be provided. Plymouth Church 57 Orange St, Brooklyn 718-544-5521 • brooklynpeace.org

SUN NOV 16 2:30pm • Various FILM PREMIERE: THE HAND THAT FEEDS. A group of undocumented low-wage workers at an Upper East Side deli risk deportation by forming an independent union and fighting for a contract. Will they win? Premiers as part of the DOC NYC festival, running Nov. 13-20. IFC Center 323 6th Ave thehandthatfeedsfilm.com • docnyc.net

COMING SOON! A FREE PRESS ISN’T FREE. THE INDYPENDENT BEGINS ITS ANNUAL FUND DRIVE ON DEC. 1, BUT YOU CAN SHOW YOUR SUPPORT AND HELP US GET OFF TO A GREAT HEAD START BY GIVING TODAY! WHETHER YOU CAN GIVE $25, $50, $100, $200, $500, $1000 OR MORE, IT ALL MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A ONE-TIME OR RECURRING MONTHLY DONATION, VISIT INDYPENDENT.ORG/DONATE OR SEND A CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO THE INDYPENDENT • 388 ATLANTIC AVENUE, 2ND FLOOR • BROOKLYN, NY 11217.

SAT NOV 22 6pm • $18 MUSIC: PEOPLES’ VOICE CAFE 35TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION. After opening its doors in 1979, Peoples’ Voice is still going strong. Come have a ball with the special program of performers, including Sally Campbell, Mike Glick, Judy Gorman, Barry Kornhauser, The Ray Korona Band, Susan Lippman, Bruce Markow, Peter Pasco, Anne Price, Professor Louise, Rachel Stone and Steve Suffet. Peoples’ Voice Café 40 E 35th St 212-787-3903 • peoplesvoicecafe.org

CONGRATULATIONS TO INDEPENDENT STALLWARTS ANNA GOLD AND SAM ALCOFF ON THE BIRTH OF THEIR SECOND CHILD. NINA SIMONE HARRETT ALCOFF. BORN SEPTEMBER 5, 2014.
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Ello is a new social networking site that vows it will not sell user info to advertisers. So what do its venture capital investors want?
Dear reader,

This image contains a page from a document discussing the Ebola virus and its impact. The text is written in English and covers topics such as the origins of the outbreak, the political factors, and the fear factor associated with Ebola.

The page begins with a discussion of how the virus spread and the impact on public health systems. It mentions the high mortality rate and the difficulty in catching the disease. The text also touches on the political aspects of the outbreak, such as the response of the World Health Organization and other governments.

The page concludes with a section on the fear factor, discussing the paranoia and panic that can accompany such outbreaks.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
EBOLA AND THE POLITICS OF PARANOIA

FEAR FACTOR

Island, during an NBC interview. Ebola has already hit New York. "I shake my hand," said Jonathan King, a Liberian in Staten Island, "I shake my hand." None of this had to happen.

corruption make it nearly impossible for health agencies to spread news to people quickly and effectively. And even when they can, they must often do it painstakingly via radio, murals or word of mouth, since the literacy rates in the three hardest-hit countries are so low. In Guinea it is 41 percent, Liberia 60 percent and Sierra Leone 35 percent.

of the dead are found in the streets. And none of this, none of this, would have had a vaccine if we had not gone through our 10-year slide in research support, we probably would have had a vaccine in time for this.

Finally, in the Global North the neoliberal push for privatizing social services and the market focus on profit-oriented medicines has stalled the search for an Ebola vaccine. In a vicious cycle, government agencies are defunded and then with their budgets cut, staff are expected to operate fully. When they can't, the blame is put on them, not the budget cuts.

Dr. Frances Collins, head of the National Institutes of Health, recently said, "Frankly if we had not gone through our 10-year slide in research support, we probably would have had a vaccine in time for this.

THE TWO FACES OF PARANOIA

"They don't come close to me anymore. They don't want to shake my hand," said Jonathan King, a Liberian in Staten Island, during an NBC interview. Ebola has already hit New York. Not only one case of the virus, but the fear of it.

Nearly every single day the New York Post and Daily News are screaming about Ebola. It's not a front page headline exclaiming "Ebola Here!" in reference to infected New York doctor Craig Spencer, it's about low-paying screeners at the airport. The paper joins the rising chorus of right-wing hysteria about the disease propagated by Fox News, the National Review, Rush Limbaugh and so many others.

Racial paranoia, sometimes disguised, sometimes overt, runs through their commentary. The common theme is that the first Black president is exposing America to the diseased Global South in revenge for white supremacy.

"Obama doesn't want America to believe that we're exceptional. He wants us to be just like everybody else," said Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative icon who campaigned against the Equal Rights Amendment, in an interview with the right-wing World Net Daily. "If Africa is suffering from Ebola, we ought to join the group and be suffering from it too. That's his attitude."

The fantasy of Black revenge pulses from the far right to the center-right. Laura Ingraham, a Fox News pundit, on ABC's This Week with George Stephanopoulos that Obama hasn't banned flights from West Africa due to his "familial connection with Africa." The Ebola crisis is the site where fears of a rising tide of people of color, engulfing the City on a Hill, is rendered legible and concealed at the same time. The implicit conflict is between the wretched of the Earth and the pristine whites whose skin is the illuminating race of civilization.

At the most obscure end, racial paranoia becomes genocidal. "I rather admire the efficiency of Ebola. From a Mal- thusian and marketing perspective it's beyond reproach," said British television personality and weekly Son columnist Katie Hopkins. Her racial cleansing rhetoric was echoed by Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of France's far-right party Front National, who advocated Ebola as way to deal with the "population explosion" and France's "immigration problem." Mischievously, he said, "Monsieur Ebola could sort that out in three months."

Plague paranoia runs both ways, going from the privileged to the oppressed and back again. In a bottom-up fantasy of omnipotent evil, one that mirrors the racial paranoia of the right wing, Minister Louis Farrakhan, head of the Nation of Islam, wrote in the Final Call that Ebola was designed to kill Black people.

"What is the method that they [the U.S. government] are going to use to depopulate [the world]?" he asked. Among the tactics he suggests are under consideration is "disease infection through bio-weapons such as Ebola and AIDS, which are race targeting weapons." He went on to say that it would exterminate Black people but leave whites untouched. Following him, singer and domestic abuse expert, Chris Brown tweeted, "I don’t know … But I think this Ebola epidemic would be a species threat. And yet the waves of terror sweeping across the world have already moved us rightward, reinforcing a conservative vision across the divide between the Third and First Worlds.

One answer is that we are living in an era of austerity whose drama of scarcity is translated in art through zombie apocalypse narratives. The transformation of the living to the rotting, smelly and hungry undead is a representation of the social trauma of people losing their class status and plummeting into poverty. Until the taboo of openly questioning capitalism is finally and fully purged, these cinematic fantasies will bandage that trauma with supernatural imagery.

The zombie apocalypse narrative is currently the dominant fantasy narrative, so when Ebola broke out, it was as if that imaginary world broke into our real one. In a suspension of disbelief, the pandemic we long imagined appeared in news headlines. It’s as if we were suddenly thrown into the series The Walking Dead or Contagion. The emotional engine of the zombie End Times plot is that we must kill those we love because they’ve changed into the undead. The lesson is that to survive in the new dystopia, we must be cold and cruel enough to kill. After the lights of the film or computer screen fade and we walk outside, the narrative of survival scarcity may become our political response to a world filled with the poor and desperate, until we get infected too.

THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL HEALTH

"Life is rough, and then you die," Dr. Soka Moses said at the JFK Ebola Treatment Center in Liberia during a CNN interview. "I don’t know … But I think this Ebola epidemic is a form of population control. S–t is getting crazy bruh."

In a YouGov poll, 59 percent of African-Americans think the US government would be more likely to test Black patients than White patients arriving at their doorsteps every day. In the slums, more and more of the dead are found in the streets. And none of this, none of this, had to happen.

AMERICAN CINEMA AND THE PLAGUE

"First Ebola Zombie Captured," shouted the Big American News headline. On the web page, a half-rotted Black man with tangled dreads stared out in hopeless, head-dead agony. It was official. The zombie apocalypse was here.

Of course it was a hoax. The image was doctored. It was not a mash-up between a zombie from the film World War Z and a zombie mask sculpture. But not long after an October 2 ABC report showed a man, thought dead on the streets of Monrovia, be wrapped up by a full-suited burial crew and then begin, limply, to move back to life.

Why is fear so contagious? Ebola will ultimately be contained or tragically burn itself out among the poor. It is not a species threat. And yet the waves of terror sweeping across the world have already moved us rightward, reinforcing a conservative vision across the divide between the Third and First Worlds.

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THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE NARRATIVE IS CURRENTLY THE DOMINANT FANTASY NARRATIVE, SO WHEN EBOLA BROKE OUT, IT WAS AS IF THAT IMAGINARY WORLD BROKE INTO OUR REAL ONE.
Sitting in the messy living room of a Park Slope brownstone 11 days before he was scheduled to take the stage with Andrew Cuomo in the only televised debate of this year’s New York governor’s race, UPS truck loader Howie Hawkins pondered how he would best convey his energy policy in 60 seconds or less.

Hawkins, running again this year as the Green Party candidate for governor, dove into the topic by describing his plan to convert the state to 100 percent renewable energy sources in 15 years. This plan, he insisted, would address climate change, generate millions of new jobs and cut electric rates in half.

“It’s a no-brainer,” he said, chopping the air with his left hand. “Except that too many of our politicians have been bought off by the oil and gas industry and are pandering to the people who pay for their campaigns.”

Hawkins, a soft-spoken man with a silver beard and a thoughtful demeanor, was told he finished his answer six seconds late. However, his advisors were more concerned about the hand chops distracting television viewers and making the candidate look “strident.”

So what was a better approach?

“You don’t want to be robotic,” said one advisor. “He wants to be conversational,” said Green Party State Co-Chair Gloria Mattera. “He wants to be charming,” added Mark Dunlea, a longtime friend of Hawkins.

“And seductive,” Mattera chimed in again. Hawkins grinned sheepishly. “Every time I think ‘be charming,’” he confessed, “it makes me smile. I think ‘Oh, right.’”

“Well, think it about 20 more times,” Dunlea said.

**SURPRISE STORY**

Actually, Hawkins and his supporters have quite a lot to be smiling about, as he has emerged as the surprise story of this fall’s otherwise desultory race for the most important political office in the state.

The Greens have existed on the farthest margins of New York politics for most of the past two decades, rarely cracking one percent in statewide races. They also remain stigmatized in liberal liberal circles for Ralph Nader’s role in helping to tip Florida and the 2000 presidential race to George W. Bush. Yet, by mid-October, Hawkins, who is on unpaid leave this fall from his job at a UPS shipping hub in Syracuse, had climbed to 9 percent in statewide polls. He also began to pick up an unprecedented string of endorsements from several liberal Democratic Party clubs in New York City and a half-dozen teacher union locals across the state, including the Buffalo Teachers Federation, as well as a handful of minor Democratic Party officeholders, all of whom share a deep disenchantment with the incumbent governor.

“ASTORINO HAS HIT A CEILING. Cuomo is doing well. And, we’re going up,” Hawkins crowed while introducing himself to voters outside the Park Slope Farmers’ Market.

Hawkins’ debate prep session was squeezed into the middle of a hectic Sunday three weeks out from Election Day. In addition to debate prep and a trip to the farmers’ market, the candidate would meet with members of a liberal Democratic club later in the week. It was his first-ever endorsement of a non-Democrat and attend three house parties thrown by supporters, all while being followed around by this reporter.

The candidate’s platform — a ban on fracking, a $15 minimum wage, a(created multiracial neighborhood in San Mateo, Calif., just south of San Francisco. He still speaks with a twang he acquired from the neighborhood kids he grew up with, whose families had moved from the South during the war to work in the Bay Area shipyards. Captivated by the civil rights protests of the early 1960s, Hawkins caught the third-party bug in 1964 at the age of 12.

At that year’s presidential nominating convention, the Democrats had refused on national television to seat the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which was led by poor and working-class blacks in opposition to that state’s official Democratic Party. The Republicans, meanwhile, were already going into backlash mode against the early gains of the civil rights movement. The young Hawkins was dismayed.

“I asked ‘Where’s my party?’” he recalls.

He spent the next 20 years looking for it. His political odyssey included stints working on behalf of the Peace and Freedom Party, which ran Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver for president in 1968, the Citizens Party, which ran the ecologist Barry Commoner in the 1980 presidential election; and the Liberty Union Party in Vermont, where Senator Bernie Sanders got his start in electoral politics. In 1984, Hawkins co-founded the Green Party of the United States and settled into what has become his permanent political home.

“I see the Green Party as the political expression of the left third-party politics hasn’t wavered over five decades. ‘The richest 1 percent already own the two biggest capitalists on Wall Street and the real estate industry and other corporate influences. Hawkins' estimation, has de

**WHERE’S MY PARTY?**

Hawkins, 61, was raised in a single-parent household in a multiracial neighborhood in San Mateo, Calif., just south of San Francisco. He still speaks with a twang he acquired from the neighborhood kids he grew up with, whose families had moved from the South during the war to work in the Bay Area shipyards. Captivated by the civil rights protests of the early 1960s, Hawkins caught the third-party bug in 1964 at the age of 12.

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Street-backed charter school operator Eva Moskowitz earlier this year, during Moskowitz’s confrontation with Mayor Bill de Blasio over his refusal to grant three of her privately run schools access to public school buildings that were already fully utilized. The fight ended with Cuomo strong-arming a measure through the State Legislature that requires public schools to house charter schools free of charge or for the Department of Education to cover the rent for charters that have to find their own buildings, depriving cash-starved public schools of much-needed funding.

“After that, there was no going back,” Friend said. “If I had any thought of voting for him, that ended it.”

“He [Cuomo] doesn’t publish his own schedule. He doesn’t interact with his constituents. He’s not available to us,” added Susan Weltman, a retired social worker who voted for Cuomo in 2010 but is supporting Hawkins this year.

At both house parties, Hawkins urged attendees to donate to his surging campaign, noting that the average Hawkins donor gives $70 vs. $7,000 for the average Cuomo donor.

In his first appearance, he briefly referenced his 1964 political epiphany before drifting further back in time to discuss 1944 and Franklin Roosevelt’s proposed Economic Bill of Rights and how his ambitious plans to convert New York to renewable energy would fulfill the promise of FDR’s vision with a green twist to address climate change.

As Hawkins continued, the eyes of his supporters in the room started to glaze over, but they stuck with him and heard him out. Chided afterward by Mattera for giving a “history lesson,” Hawkins was clear and direct at his second appearance, sharing more of his personal story about how his political convictions took shape under the influence of the civil rights movement and relating that to the present moment and the rationale for his third-party candidacy.

“The whole political spectrum has moved
**FIGHT THE FRACKERS**

By Kim Fraczek

When we marched on September 21, we made it clear that it was time to put a stop to new fossil fuel projects and begin making a rapid transition to renewable energy sources. However, that was only one day. We have to continue organizing against these projects in a sustained way if we are going to change our energy system.

Here in the New York City area, the first thing we need to do is get informed about plans to build a massive liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility called Port Ambrose several miles offshore from Long Beach, N.Y., and just up the coast from the Rockaways. Liberty Natural Gas — a secretive corporation of nameless backers based in the Cayman Islands — claims Port Ambrose would be used to import gas, but it’s clear that the intent is to export gas to Europe and Asia at enormous profit. Exporting would allow companies to obtain lower prices for gas, which would lead to more fracking in the Northeast.

Liquified natural gas is a highly volatile substance, making Port Ambrose an obvious terrorist target. To build such a facility near New York City is reckless. Plus, an offshore wind farm has been proposed for the same area — we know we need to move to renewable energy, and Long Island residents themselves want wind power, but the two projects cannot co-exist. So what do we do?

Step one is to call Governor Cuomo at 518-474-8390 and tell him to veto Port Ambrose. Additionally, come to our monthly NYC Grassroots Alliance meetings that focus on fracking issues at the New York Society for Ethical Culture. We have a real shot at defeating this port if we work together.

The environmental impact statement on the project is due out around the winter holidays, and we need all hands on deck to send a clear message that we do not want LNG — and then we can work together for offshore wind that’s built right. Sign up for the Sane Energy Project newsletter on our website to remain in the loop.

Second, get involved with our Food Not Fracking Alliance. There is compelling evidence that fracking poisons our land and groundwater, harming our ability to grow healthy produce, dairy, wine grapes and other agricultural products. By opposing fracking, we’re standing up for New York State’s proud tradition of farms and vineyards.

New York’s future should be as the land of organic food and wine, not an industrial wasteland for Wall Street prof-

*And still, the overarching questions we need to stay focused on remain with us. How will state repression and police violence escalate amid worsening climate change? How does the militarization of local police foreshadow the excessive use of force during future resource scarcities? Is it possible for a broad-based social movement to stave off climate chaos using only nonviolent direct action and the building of sustainable alternatives?*

*The voices of indigenous peoples and other heavily affected communities were at the forefront of the People’s Climate March. However, it’s going to take much more than 400,000 people hitting the streets on a single day in one city to change the broken economic and political systems that have created the climate crisis.*

*Indigenous communities around the world have been devastated by corrupt fossil fuel corporations for many decades and very few non-indigenous people seemed to notice or care. The genocides, the stereotyping and the lack of respect by the mainstream made these important and powerful voices essentially mute — until now.*

*By Pennie Opal Plant*
A
ll around the world, students are telling their universities the same thing: investing in fossil fuels is a bet against our future. Coal, oil and gas companies are wrecking the planet's climate and associating with them is no longer acceptable. Divest our endowment from these destructive companies.

New York University promotes itself as a “sustainability leader.” That’s why student activists like myself have been pressuring the powers-that-be at NYU to live up to that claim. We want NYU to recognize the contradiction between its sustainability efforts and its environmentally damaging investments.

October 16 was a landmark moment in our campaign. For the first time, we got to present the case for divestment to people with the institutional power to make it a reality. NYU would be by far the largest school to divest from fossil fuels, we are more hopeful than ever.

Momentum is building. The People’s Climate March inspired many new climate activists to get involved across the country, and we’ve seen the effects on campus. Our core membership has doubled in the past few weeks.

Fossil fuel divestment offers climate activists a tangible goal. It’s a local approach to a global problem that goes beyond small lifestyle changes. We intend to change the public conversation. It’s past time for people to see climate change as a moral and a political issue. That’s why we draw inspiration from the anti-apartheid divestment movement of the 1980s. The tactic has proven effective before.

College students are at the forefront of the divestment movement. This is unsurprising. Students have always been on the front lines of social change, but divestment is far more inclusive than that. Anyone who is part of a religious group or a labor union or lives in a city or state with a pension fund (i.e. just about everyone) can push for divestment in their community. To date, 181 institutions, including 13 U.S. universities, as well as more than 600 individuals have divested over $50 billion in fossil fuel assets. Your organization could be next. To learn more about how you can get involved, see gofossilfree.org.

With so many concerned student, faculty and alumni names displayed so boldly, it was impossible for Sexton to ignore us any longer.

The action earned us a private meeting with both Sexton and NYU’s chief financial officer Marty Dorph. Sexton agreed to our demands of 1) putting fossil fuel divestment on the University Senate agenda, 2) creating a subcommittee on divestment within the Financial Committee of the University Senate and 3) ensuring that we are able to present our proposal to the Board of Trustees in spring of 2015. These concessions are unprecedented for a student group at NYU.

NYU’s 66-member Board of Trustees is filled with 1 percenters from finance, real estate, corporate media and prestigious law firms. If we can get this elite group to publicly disavow the fossil fuel industry it will be big news for the movement. NYU would be by far the largest school to divest yet. It may seem unlikely, but with groups like the Rockefeller Brothers Fund announcing that they will divest from fossil fuels, we are more hopeful than ever.

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CLIMATE MARCH INSIDER LOOKS BACK

By John Tarleton

The People’s Climate March was a sprawling enterprise with more than 1,000 endorsing organizations, dozens of working groups, three de facto steering committees and hundreds of staff and volunteers. At the center of this activity was PCM’s Logistics Coordinator Leslie Cagan, a familiar face on the Left who has orchestrated many of this country’s largest political demonstrations over the past three decades.

I caught up with Cagan a month after the march and asked the veteran organizer to reflect on what had happened, as well as to address lingering questions such as why this historic event had no official speakers and what it means to cringe too. This was an example of the way I couldn’t believe it when I saw it. It caused me to cringe.

Leslie Cagan: We’re not going to know for another six months to a year whether this in fact marks a new moment in the climate justice movement. That said, there are moments in the course of any movement when being able to publicly show that you represent massive numbers of people is an important step forward. We did that. It’s not a beginning or an end but a part of a process.

John Tarleton: An enormous number of people turned out for the People’s Climate March. But besides creating impressive images of crowds of people in the streets, what did this protest achieve?

Leslie Cagan: We didn’t want to go to the U.N. There’s not much happening on that part of First Avenue on a Sunday afternoon. There was also some sentiment that we shouldn’t lead people to believe that the U.N. was going to solve the problem.

The question is what do you want your relationship to be to unions who support projects they see as good for jobs even if they’re bad for the environment? Do you want to close the door? Or, do you want to open the door and hopefully, sooner rather than later, win them over to a position that actually is more in line with somebody who’s speaking against fracking.”

I couldn’t believe it when I saw it. It caused me to cringe. This was an example of the way that our organizing was set up. Groups could do their own thing. So one particular organization, in this case it was Avaaz.org, raised a lot of money online and bought the subway ads. They decided what the content would be. They did not say to the larger coalition, “We’re going to go and make a contribution to this overall effort by purchasing subway ads and what do you all think they should say?” Instead, they basically said, “We’re going to buy some subway ads and you’ll see them when you ride the subway.”

John Tarleton: It was an enormous number of people who turned out for the People’s Climate March. More than 400,000 people turned out for the People’s Climate March?

Leslie Cagan (center) has been a lead organizer for many of this country’s largest protests over the past three decades.

One of the biggest factors was that this was a broad coalition with a wide range of perspectives, some at odds with one another. For instance, some unions do not oppose fracking or building the Keystone XL pipeline. They believe it’s an important job opportunity. A decision was made to try and congregate all our forces into the march and to not aggravate our differences. One way to do that was to not have a rally. If there had been a rally, I could have imagined that someone would have said, “We need to have someone speaking against fracking.” It’s a struggle going on in many parts of the country. Here in New York, there’s a very big fight. And certainly some of the trade unions would have said, “No, we’re not going to be on the same stage with somebody who’s speaking against fracking.”

There were tremendous numbers of young people — not just college age but high school kids too and younger even. That’s always a good sign for any movement. Also, there was much more racial and ethnic diversity than one usually sees related to the climate crisis or environmental issues. That wasn’t an accident. There was a conscious effort to recalibrate the character of this movement. The real question is how do we maintain that in a way that’s not just a numbers game but ensures that people of color and working people are in the leadership of this movement and setting the direction from here on out.

What was the initial reaction when you reached out to labor and community leaders who would not usually be seen at a climate change protest?

At an organizational level some groups signed a campaign to put pressure on the mayor’s office to put pressure on the police department to give us Times Square.

Several unions and other organizations with close ties to de Blasio made calls to people in City Hall very close to the mayor. We knew that these mayoral aides in turn made calls to One Police Plaza. That did not lead to a decision to give us Times Square. But I do think that’s part of what made the rest of the negotiations a lot easier in terms of arranging the gazillion details that are a part of staging an event of this size. The police insisted on 11th Avenue so people could get to their buses to leave town more easily and also because they wanted us out of the center of Manhattan. We conceded that point, because the most important thing for us all along was marching in the heart of the city. And for most of the day, most of the people did that.

On a Sunday afternoon. Others said, “Well we need to talk about it. This is a new issue for us.”

Many groups had never done anything on environmental justice or the climate crisis, but the memory of Hurricane Sandy was still fresh in many people’s memories as an example of the impact climate change can have. A lot of people became invested in this and pushed and struggled within their organizations and won the day in terms of getting at least an endorsement for the march.

Why did the march end up on 11th Avenue on the far west side of Manhattan instead of at the United Nations?

We didn’t want to go to the U.N. There’s not much happening on that part of First Avenue on a Sunday afternoon. There was also some sentiment that we shouldn’t lead people to believe that the U.N. was going to solve the problem.

We originally wanted to march from Columbus Circle through Times Square to Union Square. Times Square remained a contentious issue for weeks. Before a final decision was made by the NYPD, we organized a targeted protest.

The people organizing the People’s Climate March had not decided what to say to the larger coalition by purchasing subway ads. They decided what the content would be. They did not say to the larger coalition, “We’re going to go and make a contribution to this overall effort by purchasing subway ads and what do you all think they should say?” Instead, they basically said, “We’re going to buy some subway ads and you’ll see them when you ride the subway.”

A lot of us, myself included, were not only surprised but put off by those ads. If bankers and hipsters is what people think we want the range of diversity to be in this movement … well, that doesn’t capture it for me.

What made the People’s Climate March both unique and similar to other mass protests that you have played a leading role in organizing?

What makes each mass protest unique has to do with their moment in history. Things like this come together when there is already some organizing going on and resources — people power mostly — are put to work in a very good way. But also it’s the right time and the right place and the right articulation of the issue that resonates with people. This was the right time because more people are becoming aware of the climate crisis and the urgent need for action. We can’t put it off for another 15, 20, 30 years. We also can’t assume that the powers-that-be are going to act on their own without being pushed by people.

One thing that runs through all of these big demonstrations is the realization on the day after that no matter the size of a march, it doesn’t by itself make policy changes. It has to be part of a movement that is constantly building and deepening and strengthening itself both in terms of its numbers, its diversity, the types of communities that are involved and in terms of its creativity and the tactics it uses. You know you have a movement when you can’t keep track of everything that’s going on.

I think we’ll be able to look back and say the People’s Climate March inspired new people to join the movement and re-energized people already in it. And if all it did was to take this movement to another level of organizing and building its own power, then it was more than worthwhile to do.

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The Metropolitan Transportation Authority will place New York City subway riders under increasing surveillance in the coming decade.

Police Commissioner Bill Bratton has championed the idea of installing cameras inside subway cars for months, saying he would like the New York Police Department to someday be able to monitor all 6,325 subway cars in real time. On Oct. 1, Public Advocate Letitia James released a letter from the MTA in which it committed to installing cameras on 904 R211-class subway cars that it expects to order as part of its 2015-2019 capital plan. The agency had previously ordered 300 other trains that will be capable of having cameras installed inside of them.

The cameras are likely to cost millions of dollars to install and will not be able to provide police real-time images, at least for the foreseeable future. Surveillance supporters hope the cameras will reduce crime in the subway system, including sex crimes against women, which, according to a statement from the Public Advocate’s office, occurs mostly on trains. However, critics worry that expanded surveillance inside subway cars will be used to target minor “quality of life” offenders such as the homeless and subway performers.

The MTA has previously sought to install closed-circuit television cameras to monitor its stations, tunnels and platforms. In 2005, the MTA signed a $205 million contract with Lockheed Martin, under which the contractor would operate throughout the system. However, the contract was terminated in 2009 and the MTA and Lockheed Martin “are no longer working together,” the MTA said in a statement.

The cameras might be helpful in “catching someone later,” Vitale said. “But there’s no real evidence of cameras having a deterrent effect, like most would like you to believe.”

According to the MTA’s 2011-2015 capital plan, the project will cost $1.1 billion, compared to New York City’s 1.708 billion.

Busting the Buskers

Subway performers have also been targeted by “broken window” policing.

“Broken windows” goes underground

The MTA’s new surveillance system, the largest public transportation agency in the nation, would follow in the footsteps of the Chicago Transit Authority. In 2011, the CTA embarked on an ambitious plan of installing more than 4,000 cameras in five months, spokesman Christian said.

Many performers were targeted by the CTA’s new surveillance system, which has been criticized by the advocacy group BuskNY.

Subway performers have also been targeted by “broken window” policing.

“The [homeless] population is figuratively and literally going underground,” said Dave Subren, a member of the advocacy group Picture the Homeless (PITH). He said this has alarmed the city’s increasingly gentrified population.

LIMITED VALUE

Alex Vitale, a Brooklyn College professor of sociology and author of City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics, disputes this, saying, “Real-time observation of thousands of subway cars is never going to be feasible.”

There are already 4,000 cameras placed throughout the system, Jim Gannon, director of communications for Transit Workers Union Local 100, told The Independent. Most of them go unmonitored. “They’re only used if something happens,” he said.

Gannon said the expense seemed unnecessary “if there isn’t one step at a time,” he said. “We are focused on getting a system in place for the R211s.”

The MTA, the largest public transportation agency in the nation, would follow in the footsteps of the Chicago Transit Authority. In 2011, the CTA embarked on an ambitious plan of installing more than 4,000 cameras in five months, spokesman Christian said.

Christian said there has been a rise in the ticketing and arresting of artists despite the fact that performing in the subway has been legal since 1983. The violinist was surprised when, instead of noticing a decline in unlawful arrests with the new administration, “as soon as January rolled around we started hearing of more people being confronted by police.”

More officers are being sent into the subway to combat “low-level violations” while being unfamiliar with MTA rules and regulations, Christian said. “The costs of implementing these rules, the expenditure that’s necessary to arrest someone dancing on the train, to hold him for two nights and to process all the court work, is a huge amount of [taxpayers’] money for quite a meaningless goal.”

As far as cameras go, Christian told The Independent that while the NYPD’s stated policy objective is not to arrest more musicians, the performing community remains skeptical of police intentions. The irony of the crackdown is not lost on him.

“Subway performance is one of the most appreciated elements of the transit experience,” Christian said. “In fighting quality-of-life offenses [they] have succeeded in decreasing the quality of life.”

By Rebecca Ibarra

The New York City subway system’s rate of serious felonies has decreased by 14 percent from 1990 to 2013, according to a Daily News op-ed penned this summer by NYPD Transit Chief Joseph Fox. Nonetheless, there has been an increased crackdown on low-level subway offenses this year. “Each illegal panhandler, peddler, or fare evader that is left unchecked can have a negative impact on the sense of safety and security of subway riders,” Fox wrote. “That doesn’t sit well with us.”

Increased surveillance could result in increased targeting of minor offenses. Like Ray Kelly before him, Bratton is “exploring and increasing the use of technology,” Vitale said. “He is also doubling down on ‘quality-of-life’ and ‘broken windows’ policing. That’s very troubling.”

According to Vitale, Bratton has managed to convince people that the NYPD’s “broken windows” policy of targeting minor offenses helps prevent more serious crimes from taking place. “It defies logic,” Vitale said, “to believe that getting rid of all the panhandlers could bring down crime.”

Nearly 2,000 homeless people inhabit the subway system. They are more likely, Vitale added, to encounter a police officer than a social worker and bear the brunt of “quality-of-life” policing.

“An increased surveillance is only there to appease the public,” Subren concluded.

By Rebecca Ibarra

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority will place New York City subway riders under increasing surveillance in the coming decade.

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Busting the Buskers

Subway performers have also been targeted by “broken windows” policing.

Michael Christian moved to New York from Vermont in 2011 and was excited to play his violin underground, only to be arrested by an undercover police officer his second time performing at the Spring Street station on the C line.

Christian, a member of the arts advocacy group BuskNY, said there has been a rise in the ticketing and arresting of artists despite the fact that performing in the subway has been legal since 1983. The violinist was surprised when, instead of noticing a decline in unlawful arrests with the new administration, “as soon as January rolled around we started hearing of more people being confronted by police.”

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STILL SEEKING JUSTICE
THOUSANDS TURN OUT FOR FERGUSON OCTOBER

Photos by Ellen Davidson
Text by Alina Mogilyanskaya

“A round up, don’t shoot!”
“Black lives matter!”

These have become the clarion calls of the struggle for justice for Michael Brown. After the unarmed black teenager was shot by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9 and his body was left on the street for more than four hours, protests erupted. Those initial expressions of grief and rage have since grown into an organized national movement.

Daily protests have taken place in Ferguson since Brown’s death, punctuated by violent police crackdowns and the subsequent police killings in the Greater St. Louis Area of two other young black men, Vonderrit Myers, 18, and Kajiembe Powell, 25.

During the weekend of October 10-13, thousands of St. Louis residents and out-of-towners took part in acts of resistance dubbed “Ferguson October.” Demonstrators demanded the indictment of Brown’s killer, Darren Wilson, and responded to systemic issues underlying the struggle for racial justice in the wake of Michael Brown’s murder — racial bias and lack of accountability in law enforcement, normalized violence against communities of color, the militarization of the nation’s police departments and more — with rallies, direct actions and civil disobedience. Dozens were arrested.

Tensions remain high in Ferguson. The grand jury deadline for a decision about Wilson’s indictment is January 7, and as residents await the legitimacy of the process and the outcome, the community’s people return day after day to protest at the local police station. In the recent words of one Ferguson resident, “No one is going to rest until we get justice.”

Thousants participate in a “Justice for All” march in St. Louis on October 11. The march wound through downtown St. Louis and culminated with a rally at Kierer Plaza. The crowd numbered in the thousands and included local and out-of-state activists, peace groups, faith and labor union members and more.

Protesters draw an outline of a body in white and yellow chalk in the Ferguson police station parking lot to memorialize Michael Brown.

Members of the clergy took a stand in front of police in riot gear at the Ferguson police station, praying and asking the police to repent in the pouring rain. Some participants got through the line of police and more than 40 were arrested.

October 13 was dubbed by Ferguson activists organizers of a “Moral Monday” of civil disobedience, alluding to ongoing “Moral Monday” actions that began in North Carolina last year and have since spread to other states. Clergy leaders and others, including philosopher Cornel West, led a march to the Ferguson police station on the morning of October 13.

A young woman decries being seen as a target because of her brown skin.

Protesters march from the store where 18-year-old Vonderrit Myers Jr. was killed by an off-duty police officer on October 8. Here, Vonderrit Myers Sr. holds a photograph of his son and his own mother. After the rally, protesters marched through the streets and ended the night with at least 200 arrests at St. Louis University. Seventeen others were arrested the night after doing sit-ins at another convenience store.

Protesters draw an outline of a body in white and yellow chalk in the Ferguson police station parking lot to memorialize Michael Brown.

Messages at the march aired a multitude of grievances.

Thousands of young and working-class black people emerged as leaders on the ground in Ferguson. Canfield Green Apartments, where he was shot, to the Ferguson police station. On Saturday, October 11, activists marched from the Michael Brown memorial by St. Louis Area Church of the Brethren, the Quakers and 13 other groups to the Ferguson police station. The march raised up both arms.

On Thursday, October 17, activists marched from the Michael Brown memorial by Central Green Apartments, where he was shot, to the Ferguson police station. Young and working-class black people emerged as leaders in the ground in Ferguson after Brown’s death, standing at the heart of much of the local response and challenging entrenched old-line figures and institutions in the process.

In what has become a defining gesture of the Ferguson protests, the march raised up both arms.

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Protesters march from the store where 18-year-old Vonderrit Myers Jr. was killed by an off-duty police officer on October 8. Here, Vonderrit Myers Sr. holds a photograph of his son and his own mother. After the rally, protesters marched through the streets and ended the night with at least 200 arrests at St. Louis University. Seventeen others were arrested the night after doing sit-ins at another convenience store.

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MEXICO MURDER MYSTERY
43 STUDENTS DISAPPEARED AFTER RUN-IN WITH CORRUPT POLICE FORCE

By Héctor Agredano Rivera

Tens of thousands of people marched throughout Mexico in early October to demand justice for 43 missing students from the Normal Rural School at Ayotzinapa. The student teachers were last seen being herded onto buses after police killed six of them in two shooting incidents.

The marches came amid the discovery of several shallow mass graves near the location where the student teachers were last seen. The graves contain dozens of burned and maimed bodies — Mexican authorities say months of DNA testing may be necessary to determine their identities.

But the discovery has led to shock and horror across all of Mexico, fixing the nation’s attention on the plight of the missing students now feared murdered in the most brazen act of political violence in more than a generation.

In Mexico City, parents and students from the teachers’ college in Ayotzinapa led an October 9 mass demonstration, protesters carrying signs and banners with the names of the missing students and crosses with the names of those killed in the police shooting, which also left 25 injured. Many are using the slogan “Hasta encontramos” (“Until we find them”) in their organizing efforts and as an expression of hope that some of the students may still be alive.

Parents of the victims and other students suspect that police turned the 43 missing students over to the local criminal organization Guerreros Unidos. Recent investigations indicate that Guerreros Unidos has ties to local politicians, including the mayor of Iguala, who has been in hiding since the shootings took place.

An international outcry has forced the federal government to send in the army and federal police to look for the missing students. More than 20 police, as well as some Guerreros Unidos members, have already been taken into custody, but have yet to face criminal charges over the murders and kidnappings.

While authorities work to identify the bodies and locate the Iguala mayor, protests, mobilizations and blockades continue across the country. The left-wing of the national teachers’ union and the rural teachers’ colleges have called for an indefinite strike until the missing students are found.

The Raúl Isidro Burgos Normal Rural School at Ayotzinapa is near Chilpancingo, the capital of the state of Guerrero. The school is a teachers’ college established in 1926 as part of a national program to train teachers and extend public education to rural communities throughout Mexico. During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s, a socialist curriculum was adopted throughout the school system.

Although the curriculum was slowly phased out at other schools, Ayotzinapa is one of the few schools that preserved it. The school is well known for this left-wing legacy, and some of Mexico’s best-known radical leaders and guerrilla fighters, including Lucio Cabañas Barrientos and Genaro Vázquez Rojas, studied there. Thus, the government often refers to the school as a “breeding ground for guerrillas.”

The school has a strong tradition of resistance and a militant student union. The Federation of Socialist Rural Students of Mexico (FECSM) organizes the curriculum and runs the school together with teachers. Chronic underfunding, however, has threatened the Rural Normal School of Ayotzinapa. For years, the FECSM has fought for more funding and opposition efforts to reform the school and its curriculum, often blockading highways and clashing with police.

Graduates from Ayotzinapa have also been the backbone of the National Coordinator of Education Workers (UNTE) — the left-wing section of the national teachers union — in Guerrero state, where opposition to the neoliberal education reform agenda of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has been strongest.

Students from the Normal School at Ayotzinapa are no strangers to harassment by police, given their history of resistance, but the attack they suffered on Friday, September 26, is unprecedented. Police violence on this scale hasn’t been seen in Mexico since the massacre of Tlatelolco, when army forces killed and disappeared university students on the eve of the 1968 Olympics. It is difficult to establish exactly what took place on the night of the 26th. Testimonies from survivors have only recently begun to surface via social media, radio interviews, YouTube channels and online news websites. However, the general picture that has emerged is deeply disturbing.

During the day, student teachers converged on the city of Iguala to raise funds to attend an upcoming student congress. They canvassed the city, stood on street corners and went from house to house, collecting donations in cans. The activists also made their way to Iguala’s central plaza, where the mayor’s wife was holding a political event, but local police barred the students from entering, so the students retreated to the bus station.

Once at the bus station, the student teachers seized three buses from a local bus company and convinced the drivers to cooperate with them. As the students left the bus station, several police vehicles followed them, and once they reached the outskirts of the city, the police blocked the road and surrounded them. Then a small group from the bus at the front of the caravan got off to negotiate with police to let them through.

Chaos ensued. Without warning, police opened fire on the caravan of buses, shooting at the students who had gotten off to negotiate and directly at the bus windows. The student teachers scattered to seek cover from the gunfire.

When the shooting stopped, the activists began exiting the buses with their hands in the air, telling police that they were students, and that some of their classmates had been injured and were bleeding badly. Police opened fire again.

Again, students sought cover — on the ground, between and under the buses. Once the shooting stopped for a second time, 17 students had been injured, three critically. Police then corralled 43 of the students into police trucks and took them from the scene. The students left behind called an ambulance for the injured, and one police truck even escorted the ambulance to the hospital.

As soon as the police left, people from the neighborhood began helping the students, treating wounds and offering support. Local teachers began calling newspapers, and the student teachers reached out to their classmates to join them for a press conference.

Meanwhile, in another part of Iguala, police confined a bus belonging to a local third-division soccer team, the Avispones de Chilpancingo, with the buses of the student teachers and attacked it, killing three people — one soccer player, the bus driver and a woman who was passing by.

It was midnight by the time the press conference began. Several media outlets were present, and there was a strong turnout from teachers and townspeople. A large group of students from Ayotzinapa had also made their way to Iguala — two hours away — to join their classmates.

But the worst was yet to come. While the press conference was underway, an unmarked pickup truck and a police vehicle showed up and immediately opened fire on the crowd gathered at the scene. Two students died instantly, and as the crowd scattered, the gunmen directed their fire straight at the students attempting to escape.

After this second shooting, the survivors recounted a harrowing scene. In his testimony, Omar García, a survivor of the second shooting, said he and his classmates ran toward the city as soon as the unmarked vehicle opened fire. Soldiers from a military convoy stopped them a few blocks away, and when the students asked for help, the soldiers told them: “Shut up, shut up. You were looking for trouble. You wanted to confront them. Well, face them. Face them and handle it.”

Marcos explained how he and a few classmates carried a student named Edgar, who was badly injured from a bullet that entered his cheek and shattered his teeth, into the city. Taxi drivers refused to give them a ride, and when they finally found a hospital, health care workers were afraid to help them because they feared for their own lives.

After helping to ease the bleeding and stabilizing Edgar, the nurses left the hospital. Marcos and his classmates remained there until 2am, when a group of soldiers burst in with their guns drawn. These soldiers also refused to help them and left. At about 3am, they forced a taxi driver to take Edgar to another hospital. Marco and the rest of his group then sought refuge in a vacant lot, waiting for dawn while rain soaked them.

When morning broke, the students began to regroup at the local police precinct to demand the release of the 43 classmates taken in the police trucks the night before. Police, however, told them that nobody was being held in custody and no arrests had been made the night before. Looking for answers, students returned to the scene of the shooting. There, they found the body of Julio César Mondragón, one of the students taken by police the night before. His face had been flayed, and his eyes had been removed from his eye sockets.

The shootings in Iguala and the case of the disappeared students from Ayotzinapa have shaken all of Mexico. Pressure from domestic and international civil society groups has forced the government to provide greater transparency in its investigation of the event.
from parents and classmates of the missing students have led to a political crisis in the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

Historically, the PRD was an opposition party to the PRI, now back in power under President Enrique Peña Nieto. But the PRD has degenerated considerably over the last two decades. For example, Guerrero governor Ángel Aguirre Ribero belongs to the PRD, and his administration has been tainted by a series of political scandals linked to corruption and organized crime.

Iguala Mayor José Luis Abarca Velázquez also belongs to the PRD and has been in hiding since the shootings took place. The left wing of the PRD in Guerrero had pressed charges against him in 2013 for his associations with the Beltrán Leyva drug cartel, but the general prosecutor’s office never followed up on the accusations. New investigations now link him to the criminal organization Guerreros Unidos.

Despite recent events in Iguala, the national director of the PRD has yet to call on Aguirre Ribero to step down from his post. Instead, Aguirre Ribero has vehemently denied any responsibility for the events in Iguala and has called for a statewide referendum on whether he should step down.

Meanwhile, President Enrique Peña Nieto’s response to the crisis in Iguala has been less than inspiring. On October 9, while thousands of people marched in the streets of Mexico City to demand justice for Ayotzinapa students, Peña Nieto was in Monterrey inaugurating a sports complex and taking selfies with the crowd.

The PRI undoubtedly hopes to take advantage of the political crisis shaking the PRD in the wake of the Iguala shootings. But the 43 missing student teachers and the nine mass graves discovered so far also reflect poorly on the president and his party, since they have tried to push the issue of violence and security to the margins while courting foreign investment with new neoliberal reforms.
THE SOCIALISTS EMBRACE DEMANDS FOR DEEP BUDGET CUTS. WILL THE FRENCH REVOLT ONCE MORE?

From France’s ultra-rich, but it wasn’t enough to beef up the budget on its own. And while unemployment in France is on the rise and an increasing number of people are living below the national poverty line, pressure from Berlin and Brussels to meet EU debt and deficit reduction standards has been relentless.

In the 1990s, Germany came on board with the eurozone project — which was championed by François Mitterrand, the only other Socialist president in French history — on the condition that members’ national debt be capped at 60 percent of GDP. France has been one of the EU’s white elephants ever since, with its debt climbing over the EU norm since 2000 and reaching over 90 percent of GDP today. With Germany and the rest of Europe at their heels, the Socialists now find themselves in a mess of their own making.

“IT’S MODERNITY”

Just as President Barack Obama has tried to strike a so-called “Grand Bargain” on budgetary issues with Republicans — the debt held by the United States, for its part, is more than 100 percent of GDP — Hollande has made similar concessions to the financial right.

“It’s not austerity,” Hollande recently said at a meeting at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), “it’s modernity.” France’s 2015 budget, unveiled in September, paints a different picture. It slashes public spending by $27 billion, cutting down family and employment benefits. The government plans to save $63 billion over the next three years, and most of it will come out of the state’s welfare program. Though the European Commission may find that it’s not enough, for many in France, it goes too far.

One of the five major unions in France called for a general protest against the budget in mid-October. Tens of thousands marched in the streets, but their numbers did not come anywhere near those of previous mass movements. The four other unions ignored the march.

“There is a certain degree of embarrassment on the left, and they have never been this splintered,” says Noëlline Castagnez, a historian of the Socialist Party. The left-wing political landscape looks about as grim as a winter day in Normandy: Some of the unions have been reactionary; the conservative anti-gay movement, Manif Pour Toi, or “Protest for All,” came into bloom in opposition to the same-sex marriage bill in 2012. Despite the five major unions in France called for a general protest against the budget, the Socialists now find themselves in a mess of their own making.

SURRENDER: French President François Hollande has been under heavy pressure from German Chancellor Angela Merkel to introduce austerity measures.

FRANCE VS. HAUTE FINANCE

by Anna Polonyi

During his presidential campaign, French President François Hollande declared: “My enemy is finance.” He received a standing ovation from a population that felt that traders on Wall Street were to blame for the country’s stagnant economy.

Three years later, Hollande’s government has come a long way. In August, hoping to woo a gathering of CEOs, his prime minister, Manuel Valls, professed: “I love business!” The declaration came days after he had re-shuffled his cabinet for the second time in less than six months, firing Economy Minister Arnaud Montebourg, an outspoken critic of austerity measures. Montebourg was replaced by a conservative banker, Emmanuel Macron.

Unlike other European countries such as Greece and Spain, France at first steered clear of slashing public spending to reduce debt. One of Hollande’s flagship reforms was to raise taxes on the wealthy — a measure he hoped would patch up some of the holes in France’s budget when he introduced it in 2012.

The move earned him undying ill-will from France’s ultra-rich, but it wasn’t enough to beef up the budget on its own. And while unemployment in France is on the rise and an increasing number of people are living below the national poverty line, pressure from Berlin and Brussels to meet EU debt and deficit reduction standards has been relentless.

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POLITICS OF RESENTMENT: Hundreds of thousands of people protested without success against France’s same-sex marriage bill in 2013. Their disenchantment has fed the strength of the far-right National Front.

Participants’ best efforts, the bill was passed. Faith in the power of mass popular protest may now be passé, and the failure of Manif, according to sociologist Anne Salmon, is key to understanding why. “The real issue here isn’t whether people are out protesting or not. Because many people are very ready to go down to the street. The real question is how their actions would translate into a real political alternative,” Salmon says.

THE FAR RIGHT

Marching in the streets by the hundred thousand or so is no longer a surprise, as the 1968 student movement — France was long seen by the world as the spiritual home for street protests. Though you can still stumble across a protest on any given day in Paris, they are a pale shadow of what used to be.

In 1995, the government attempted to roll back retirement benefits, sparking a strike that paralyzed the country. The government dropped the plan. In 2006, it tried to pass a labor bill that made anyone under 26 easier to hire — and fire. France’s students and high schoolers flooded the streets. The government dropped the plan.

Since then there has been a smorgasbord of protests in France, but none have been successful in achieving serious political results. During Hollande’s tenure, the largest protests have been reactionary: the conservative anti-gay movement, Manif Pour Toi, or “Protest for All,” came into bloom in opposition to the same-sex marriage bill in 2012. Despite the five major unions in France called for a general protest against the budget, the Socialists now find themselves in a mess of their own making.

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THE RADICAL RIGHT

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The radical right is at the gates of power,” Prime Minister Manuel Valls said recently in reaction to September polls that indicated Marine Le Pen might be a popular candidate for presidential elections in 2017. According to Salmon, the National Front’s success has a lot to do with France’s feelings of impotence.

“When you go out onto the streets and shout and nothing happens, that’s humiliating. So when you see the National Front winning, it’s impressive. At some point, the feeling of success is important,” says Salmon.
Fanning resentment toward Brussels and Berlin, the National Front taps into French feelings of dashed “national dignity.” It is particularly popular with young French people: according to poll data, a third of voters under 35 cast their ballots for the National Front this spring.

MORE DEMANDS

For decades, France has faced mounting pressure to get on board with the neoliberal program. The French have thus far managed to sustain a generous welfare state, but the writing on the wall in the rest of Europe suggests it may not last long. A recent OECD report, released in October and publicly hailed by Hollande as he sat with the leaders of the world’s financial institutions, says France’s prospects are good — as long as it jettisons more of its labor regulations and social spending.

Hollande is the most unpopular president on record, with only 13 percent of French people claiming to have a favorable view of the Socialist leader in late September. This is because he can afford to be. The French, looking at the rest of Europe, are met with similar and discouraging prospects abroad:

Spain’s unemployment, Greece’s mounting extremist right, Portugal’s buoyant debt.

“You know how to boil a frog?” This is how a veteran French journalist responded when asked whether any mobilization against austerity in France could be expected. “You put the frog in cold water. It won’t try to jump out, because as the water gets warmer slowly, it won’t notice. Until the water boils that is, and then it’s too late.” Across the political spectrum, most would agree that the water temperature has been inching from lukewarm to hot. The French frog has always been highly self-conscious. It’s possible it might notice after all and jump.
to the right, and the reason is because we don’t have a political party that speaks for us," Hawkins said as his audience nodded in agreement. “I think we’re on the verge of something big. The question is whether there’s enough time.”

GREENS VS. WFP
Anti-Cuomo sentiment has been running strong on the Left all year. The labor-backed Working Families Party (WFP) briefly considered running an anti-Cuomo candidate on its ballot line in the spring. In the end it bowed to pressure from its Democratic Party allies to once again put Cuomo on its ballot line, which minor parties are allowed to do under New York election law. “It’s a way for liberals to feel good about voting for conservative Democrats,” Hawkins says.

WFP’s cautious decision rankled many of the party’s rank and file. Party leaders insisted, however, that cutting a deal with the governor was the smart move that would give WFP more influence in a Cuomo second term.

As Hawkins fills the void on the Left, WFP now faces the prospect of being routed by a party it has long regarded as irrelevent. Cuomo’s decision to bankroll the newly formed Women’s Equality Party (which gave him its ballot line as well) complicates matters further. In a worst-case scenario for WFP, its vote total in the governor’s race could drop below the magic threshold of 50,000 votes needed to maintain ballot status for the next four years. “Losing to the Greens and falling down the ballot line would be a huge blow to the WFP,” a former WFP staffer told The Independent. “It’s going to be harder to strut around as the left alternative to the Democrats if they get fewer votes than the Greens.”

The former WFP staffer questioned whether the Greens have the will and the organizational capacity to take advantage of a strong showing this election to build a party that can bring about real change in a state that has endured decades of misuse and corruption on the part of both Democrats and Republicans.

Hawkins will almost certainly be headed back to his overnight job at UPS. Going forward, he sees the Greens taking root as the second party to the Democrats in parts of the state and continuing to build from there. Other top state party leaders also insist that party-building work will continue after the voting is done. “It’s an incremental process,” said state co-chair Michael O’Neil. “There are no overnight successes in true movement building.”

Meanwhile, Hawkins hopes his days of being seen as a fringe candidate are over. “I’m not a protest vote,” he said. “People are voting for what they want. And if enough people vote for me, I will be the next governor of New York.”

Activists need to build broad coalitions to push policies that will facilitate the rapid transition to a carbon-free and nuclear-free future. The United States must follow the lead of Germany, which has committed itself to both the conversion to renewables and the phase-out of all dirty energy, including nuclear power. They’re succeeding in a much less sunny and windy location. Surely the renewable-rich United States can as well, but this isn’t going to happen by itself.

The climate movement needs to press for both incentives and mandates to increase investment in clean energy. The public generally supports green, renewable energy, and, when put to a vote, renewable energy standards (RES) usually score landslide wins. There is, however, growing pushback coming from the industry and Koch-funded groups including the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). They are pushing the repeal of RES laws via the so-called “Electricity Freedom Act.”

Aside from seeking more green energy through stronger RES laws, and opposing ALEC, activists can:

- Support net metering and feed-in-tariffs incentivizing more distributed renewable generations.
- Support utility-scale renewable energy projects, including offshore wind and the wheeling of power generated in wind-rich regions, like the High Plains, via efficient high-voltage DC lines.
- Rally behind sustainable living education and projects to implement this in all aspects of life, from local food production to cycling, mass transit, eco-villages, etc.

The movement must work on public education, public policy, divestment campaigns and more to challenge the power of the fossil fuel industry, as well as to beat back false “solutions,” like nuclear power, that retard our ability to effectively address the climate crisis and present their own set of serious problems.

Mark Maim serves as director of Mid-Missouri Peaceworks in Columbia, Missouri, a grassroots nonprofit that does education and advocacy at the interface of peace, justice and sustainability.

Mexico
Continued from page 15
their grievances at the increasingly privatized public institution. Striking students at the IPN have begun to fuse with other protest movements, including those seeking justice at Ayotzinapa.

The Insurgent People’s Revolutionary Army (ERPI) guerrilla group has also thrown its support behind the student teachers from Ayotzinapa and has created a special brigade to “settle accounts” with the Guerreros Unidos criminal organization.

Thus, the political panorama of Mexico has become increasingly complex. An array of social movements and struggles are developing organic connections while corrupt and ineffective politicians offer nothing more than empty rhetoric — or worse.

For now, though, all eyes are on Guerrero, where the cry of grief and rage rings louder than ever.

An earlier version of this article appeared at socialistworker.org.
I am redesigning the Indy.
I am an artist.
I can design for you.

HOW LABOR CAN SAVE ITSELF
The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Workers’ Movement
BY STANLEY ARONOWITZ
VERSAL, 2014

In 1955, when the country’s two contend-
ing labor federations merged to form the
AFL-CIO, the combined organization
represented more than one in three American
workers. Unions then were strong enough,
employers cautious enough and the economy
juiced enough to create a working class that
for the first time in history was for the most
part not poor. Today the number of union
members in the civilian labor force alone is
just a hair above one in nine. The numbers are
worse for private sector workers, where
just one in 14 are unionized — this in a peri-
on when pay is frozen, real wages fall and an
explosion of young people work at part-time
or contingent jobs, when they work at all.

The reasons for the collapse of the “House
of Labor” are many: the failure of the post-
war drive to organize the South, the purges
at the onset of the Cold War of radicals who
were often labor’s best organizers, insu-
lar union leaders who emphasized contract
unionism, allowing employers free rein to
run their own enterprises with no voice from
workers. Union leaders even traded away the
right to strike for more or less steady work.
Then there’s the sheer power of U.S. capital,
home and unchained.

Even in their debilitated state, unions re-
main by far the largest and most deep-pock-
eted institutions on the left and, in theory,
have the potential to be the anchors of a
broad-based, multiracial progressive move-
ment. Yet, organizing the unemployed and
making alliances with community groups
and radicals are sadly rare. Even the support
Occupancy received from labor — which in
New York City was a lot — was episodic. And the
outstanding things Occupancy did, including
intervening in home foreclosures, are not yet
on any union’s agenda.

None of this is new to people who fol-
low labor closely. What’s new is the way it
is understood by Stanley Aronowitz, former
factory worker, union organizer with the
Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the
Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers unions,
 prolific author and sociology professor at the
CUNY Graduate Center. His latest book,
The Death and Life of American Labor: To-
ward a New Workers’ Movement is a slim,
compelling and highly readable treatment.
It builds on work Aronowitz has done over
the past four decades since the publication of
his seminal work, False Promises: The Shap-
ing of American Working Class Conscious-
ness. This latest not only harks back to the
labor movement’s glory days in the 1930s
and charts the present hard times for working
people, but also looks at a problematic future
and charts the present hard times for working
labor movement’s glory days in the 1930s
and charts the present hard times for working

New face of labor: Striking fast-food workers demand a $15 hourly wage.

‘collective begging’
Aronowitz targets collective bargaining itself
as the rock in the shoe. Contracts have their
good points: they lock in wages and benefits,
codify work rules and prescribe a transpar-
ent and agreed-upon due-process system for
handling grievances, discipline and firings. In
return, workers give up their birthright: the
right to strike and challenge the employer’s
arbitrary right to manage.

In the postwar boom years such a strat-
yeg bought labor peace. With the flight of
manufacturing jobs, first to the South, then
to Mexico and overseas in search of a work-
force that would work for almost nothing,
good jobs at home shriveled and unions
workers were forced to make major conces-
sions on wages, benefits, working conditions
and even job security. Collective bargaining
today, Aronowitz says, “is now mostly a kind
of collective begging.”

For the author, the era of labor-manage-
ment cooperation initiated by the New Deal
and welcomed by unions has come to an end.
At this point business isn’t even looking for
laid-off, let alone labor allies. It’s a brave
new world where business-driven automation
across many sectors of the economy is gain-
ing speed and destroying more U.S. jobs at
home than are outsourced overseas. Worst of
all, the unions’ dependency on management
circumscribes revolt. Labor-led struggles,
such as they are, are either defensive efforts
in support of Social Security and Medicare
or parochial battles to preserve defined ben-
efit pensions for government workers while
private sector employees must rely on 401K
plans that are contingent on a booming in-
vestment market that regularly goes through
bust cycles.

Act boldly
Aronowitz’s advice: encourage direct action
in the workplace (such as the walkouts that
galvanized the fast-food workers movement),
don’t leave the fightback at protracted griev-
ance handling and fight for a guaranteed ba-
ic income — even a $15 minimum wage is
below the poverty level. He wants working
people to intervene in the process of techno-
logical change by demanding control over its
introduction and design, as well as a say in
how the product or service is made. (The first
step: recognizing that they currently have no
choice in these matters.) He wants unions
stop thinking of workers as purely wage
earners or their clients, but as partners in
job and community struggles, among them
raising[ing] hell about the virtually closed-
down state of mass transit.”

More, Aronowitz wants the movement
to “take seriously the question of workplace de-
mocracy,” to stop investing in polluting in-
dustries and take seriously that the war mea-
tures taken by the last two presidents are as
much about spiking war production, with its
fading hope of creating large numbers of new
jobs, as with actual ongoing imperial ambici-
tions.

to its credit, the book reads like the words of
a secular prophet, but without the bector-
ing or sanctimony. Where Aronowitz misses
the target, and he doesn’t miss it much, is in
not quantifying the trends to some of his
more startling predictions. He first floated
the idea of job shrinkage as the wave of the
future in his coauthored 1995 book The Job-
less Future, and the present book holds that
the jobless wave morphed into a tsunami of
lost work and blown opportunities for labor.
He uses the specter of mass unemployment
throughout, a problem that for him outstrips
even the creation of a precariat, but he relies
on anecdotal evidence for that, when a look
at the last 20 years of Bureau of Labor Statis-
tics data would better demonstrate actual job
loss trends. Absent that, Aronowitz’s book is
a wonder.

— MICHAEL HIRSCH
They used to deliver ice on those horses.” At the Ralph Fasanella exhibition currently on view at the American Folk Art Museum, an elderly tour group reflects on the tiny details of New York City, a bustling 1957 painting by Fasanella made in celebration of the place where he was born, raised and lived his whole life. There are horses in the painting, and also traffic cops and subway operators, park benches and fire escapes, parents and children, billboards, bridges and a thousand other things.

Fasanella taught himself to paint while in his early 30s, by which point he’d already been a garment worker, a truck driver, a gas station operator and, importantly, a union organizer. His paintings seem to bear the weight of a dense and demanding life: each Fasanella canvas is its own richly populated world. Fasanella’s left-wing politics, born out of his days in the labor movement, are a deeply felt presence in his works right through Farewell Comrade/End of the Cold War (1993-1999), his unfinished final painting. In it, Lenin’s oversized corpse lies surrounded by teeming crowds, and by books and placards named with progressive heroes (Upton Sinclair, Arthur Miller, Mother Jones); Gorbachev, Clinton and the Pope all make appearances; hapless subway commuters read newspapers in which political power struggles are treated as a giant ball game (“YANKS WIN BIG! USSR FALLS!”).

It would be easy, really, to dismiss much of Fasanella’s work as cutsey, sentimental nostalgia. For example: his 1970s paintings of Lawrence, Mass., depict the great workers’ strikes that happened there in 1912 — two years before he was even born. But beneath the bright colors and winsome little characters, there’s a complex, cranky and mournful political vision at work. In one 1976 painting, giant birds and multiple grinning Nixons hover above marching protesters, a baseball diamond, candy-colored newspapers, funeral processions and a massive pink telephone. The painting’s title? Watergate, of course. Funereal imagery comes up a lot in these paintings, often in the form of memorial and Civil rights leaders. Fasanella’s scenes tend to include sign-waving demonstrators, dwarfed by looming symbols of power: stately cast-iron domes, ornate church steeples and endless newspaper-headline ziggurats. In a piece about the death of JFK, there’s even what looks like a combination brothel/Catholic church, manned by a congregation of robed Klansmen. In such works, it seems that Fasanella is questioning the nature of power in 20th-century America, with governmental, religious and social institutions coalescing into a strange, new monsters.

Also currently on view at the museum is an exhibition showing the obsessive, explosive, oddball experiments of Willem van Genk. Like Fasanella, Genk was an old-time left-winger — though it seems he eventually grew distrustful of any ideology whatsoever — but his works do not share Fasanella’s brand of earthy humanism. Using complex collage techniques and intricate line art, van Genk shows us Soviet battleships, Eastern deities, film reels, fighter planes, locomotives and illegible bits of text; he finds a sort of raw fascination in the mechanisms of power. As a point of reference, compare Fasanella’s depiction of the Triborough Bridge — as a soft, sponge-like, pastel-colored thing — with van Genk’s Brooklyn Bridge (1960): hard-edged and imposing, with not a person in sight.

After decades of struggling to get his artwork shown, Fasanella eventually achieved more widespread recognition. His paintings can be seen in libraries, museums and universities around the country; the city of Lawrence even declared a “Ralph Fasanella Day.” This exhibition, then, is a chance to go deeper. Beyond Fasanella’s bright colors and fun details, there’s a dark and deeply personal sort of dread. In his art, Fasanella’s wistful memories of populist glory days are offset against a forward-looking sadness, an encroaching sense of injustice and corruption in an increasingly stratified America.

Looking at New York City, the tour group talks about how the streets of Manhattan aren’t so different now from how Fasanella depicted them 57 years ago, except that where there used to be mom-and-pop businesses, there are now impersonal chain stores, and where there used to be working-class families, there are now luxury apartments and empty condos. Fasanella intended the painting as an apologetic homage to his hometown — it was the mid-fifties, after all, and he was getting in trouble for his Communist leanings. But even without overt political reference, that old lefty populism still comes through. At a time when, it seems, so many New Yorkers are being displaced by the movements of capital, it helps to see the city envisioned as a loud, busy, colorful place, one whose life force comes from ordinary people and everyday concerns.

— Mike Newton


BOTTOM: Willem van Genk. Untitled (Brooklyn Bridge), 1960.

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Because the revolution will be drawn!
ELLO, GOODBYE?

By Alex Ellefson

The new social networking site Ello has generated an enormous amount of interest due to its promise to be ad free and not to sell user information to advertisers. Interest in the company has exploded — at one point it was the fifth hottest trend on Google — indicating there is a tremendous appetite for an alternative to social media giants like Facebook and Twitter, which endlessly monitor their users’ activity and sell that data to advertisers.

“Your social network is owned by advertisers,” reads Ello’s manifesto, posted on its website. “Every post you share, every friend you make, and every link you follow is tracked, recorded, and converted into data. Advertisers buy your data so they can show you more ads. You are the product that’s bought and sold.”

Ello launched in early August as an invitation-only service and almost immediately received media attention after a group of drag queens, similar to the non-commercial media companies that were created before the Internet, could open the door to a more democratic and equitable web.

But even if the company is able to overcome the enormous challenges that face any emerging business, there is a treasured credit score, the company explained that it had one-third of the companies listed in their portfolio company to an acquirer, however there are other possible methods of exit including recapitalization and public offerings.

In previous interviews with the press, Budnitz insisted the venture capital would never cause his company to abandon its principles. However, a brief analysis of FreshTracks’ website reveals that at least one-third of the companies listed in their portfolio were eventually acquired by larger companies. FreshTracks’ website states that it expects “the sale of the portfolio company to an acquirer, however there are other possible methods of exit including recapitalization and public offerings.”

And there’s a reason why venture capitalists would pressure Ello to abandon its principles — data mining and online advertising are extremely lucrative. Last year, Facebook reported total revenue of more than $7.8 billion, while Google announced that it earned almost $50 billion in annual revenue for 2013. Meanwhile the social media site Reddit, which has advertisers but refuses to sell its users’ information, remains unprofitable despite attracting 114 million monthly users.

“We have a desire and we have an alternative to Facebook and provide a refugee for those seeking to escape advertisers doesn’t go much further than the manifesto. At least, for now.

Social media expert Randall Craig, author of The Everything Guide to Starting an Online Business, told The Independent that social media sites need to reach a “critical mass” of users in order to be sustainable, and that the jury is still out on whether Ello will draw enough people to secure its future.

“Ello launched in early August as an invitation-only service and almost immediately received media attention after a group of drag queens, similar to the non-commercial media companies that were created before the Internet, could open the door to a more democratic and equitable web.” — Kenzo Shibata, the Nation

“With Ello, we have a desire and we have an alternative that’s probably going to have a hard time sustaining itself and still public subsidies are way off the table. Why can’t we have this conversation?” she said.

In previous interviews with the press, Budnitz insisted the venture capital would never cause his company to abandon its principles. However, a brief analysis of FreshTracks’ website reveals that at least one-third of the companies listed in their portfolio were eventually acquired by larger companies. FreshTracks’ website states that it expects “the sale of the portfolio company to an acquirer, however there are other possible methods of exit including recapitalization and public offerings.”

And there’s a reason why venture capitalists would pressure Ello to abandon its principles — data mining and online advertising are extremely lucrative. Last year, Facebook reported total revenue of more than $7.8 billion, while Google announced that it earned almost $50 billion in annual revenue for 2013. Meanwhile the social media site Reddit, which has advertisers but refuses to sell its users’ information, remains unprofitable despite attracting 114 million monthly users.

“I like what Ello’s manifesto says but you want to know how they’re going to do it,” Astra Taylor, author of The People’s Platform, a book about the inequalities that exist online, told The Independent. “Because you can have principles, but how do you live them? How do you support them and how do you institutionalize them so that other people can embody those principles?”

Taylor explained that there are hidden costs to online advertising and data mining. The practice allows for new avenues of discrimination and exploitation.

For instance, in 2008 a man returned from his honeymoon in Jamaica to find a letter from American Express that said his credit limit had been reduced from $10,800 to $3,800. Although he had an excellent credit score, the company explained that it had taken the action because he had recently used his card at businesses whose patrons have a poor repayment history with American Express.

Taylor said that publicly supported Internet companies, similar to the non-commercial media companies that were created before the Internet, could open the door to a more democratic and equitable web.

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“The privatizers who close public schools and open charters, while making money hand over fist for their friends in the testing industry, seem to win most battles. More Than a Score collects narratives from teachers, parents, students, academics and elected union leaders describing the growing grassroots resistance to testing gone mad.” — Kenzo Shibata, the Nation

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