JOURNEY TO A NEW LIFE
TRAVELING ACROSS EUROPE WITH SYRIA’S REFUGEES
BY SHAWN CARRIE, P10
SUNDAYS NOV 15–DEC 20

2pm • $15

PERFORMANCE: THE EARTH WANTS YOU. Join performance artist Reverend Billy Talen and the 50-member Stop Shopping Choir for their annual holiday show. With its wild anti-consumerist gospel shunting and its passionate embrace of Earth-friendly urban activism, this event is one of a kind. Can we have an Earth-ahyah??

Joe’s Pub
425 Lafayette St
212-539-8778 • revbilly.com

FRI NOV 13

6pm • Free

BOOK LAUNCH: WRAPPED. GAY NORMALITY AND Queer ANTI-Capitalism. Author Peter Tucker is a queer antiracist activist and a fellow at the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam. He’ll discuss his work on the speed of victories for LGBT rights and the developing pace of gay “normality” in relation to the continuing need for queer resistance and activism.

NYU Silver Center
31 Washington Pl, Rm 520
773-583-7884 • haymarketbooks.org

SAT NOV 14

1pm • Free

SCREENING: RUBBLE KINGS. This powerful documentary focuses on early 1970s New York City youth and the influence they had on community change and the birth of hip-hop culture. A teen-centered dialogue with director Shan Nicholson will follow the screening. Priority seating for youth.

Schoenberg Center for Research in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Blvd
917-255-8975 • nypl.org

VEN NOV 15

2pm • $30 general/$10 student

BENEFIT PARTY: GRAND OPENING. Revolution Books has reopened in Harlem and will be hosting renowned Kenyan writer, post-colonial literary theorist and former political prisoner Ngugi wa Thiong’o at its opening party.

473 Malcolm X Blvd
212-831-3345
revolutionbooks.org

WEBS NOV 18

2-5pm • Free

DISCUSSION: RIKERS ISLAND: REFORM IT — OR SHUT IT DOWN? A panel of community advocates, elected officials and professors will discuss the future of Rikers Island. Topics will include the reality of and barriers to reform, alternatives to large-scale incarceration facilities within the city and alternatives to incarcerating the mentally ill and adolescents in such facilities. Admission is free but RSVP is required.

The New School
The Auditorium
66 W 12th St
212-229-5800 • newschool.edu

FRI NOV 19

7pm • Free

DISCUSSION: ARTISTS’ RESPONSES TO GENETRIFICATION. Caroline Woolard of the NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative and Eric Lyle of Streetopia and Scam will discuss the responses of artists to gentrification.

172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

FRI NOV 20

7pm • $5 suggested

EVENT: TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE. This day honors the trans* lives lost to oppression and violence. The event will include speakers, educational info and referrals to services. Registration is free on the website and is open to all who would like to express their support. Additional remembrance events will be hosted by the Audre Lorde Project, Wow Café Theater and others.

The LGBT Center
208 W 13th St
212-539-7310 • gaycenter.org/tdor

SAT NOV 21

7pm • Free

SCREENING AND TALK: EVERY MOTHER’S SON. This Emmy-nominated documentary profiles three mothers whose sons were killed by the NYPD and find themselves united to seek justice and transform their grief into an opportunity for profound social change. Panelists will be Iris Baez, mother of Anthony Baez, who was killed in an illegal chokehold by NYPD officer Francis Livott in 1994; King Downing, founder of the Human Rights-Racial Justice Center; and Tami Gold, award-winning filmmaker and activist.

Algin Brooklyn
578 5th Ave, Bklyn
718-788-3940

FRI DEC 2

7:30pm • Free

READING & DISCUSSION: SHAPE-SHIFTERS. Author Aimee Meredith Cox will read from her debut book, in which she explores how young Black women in a Detroit homeless shelter contest stereotypes, critique their status as partial citizens and negotiate poverty, racism and gender violence to create and imagine lives for themselves.

851 Arts
515 Madison St, Bklyn
718-304-1045 • 851arts.org

SAT DEC 5

3–6pm • $10–20 suggested

SKILL SHARE: FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE SURVEILLANCE STATE. Is government surveillance getting you down? Us too. Join Jonathan S. Uss, director of Constitutional Communications, to learn how to keep your communications secure and get your online house in order. Bring laptop, new USB and snacks to share.

Mayday Space
176 St Nicholas Ave, Bklyn
maydayspace.org

FRI DEC 6

12–8 pm • Free

EVENT: HOLIDAY BOOK AND PRINT FAIR. Tons of lefty books, posters and other printed materials will be for sale in one place. Participants include Haymarket Books, Interference Archive, Just Seeds, New York Review of Books and PM Press. If you would like to exhibit contact: info@marxedproject.org or revsgroup@gmail.com. The Brooklyn Commons
388 Atlantic Ave
marxedproject.org

WED DEC 9

7pm • Free

EVENT: THE COST OF AN URBAN CLIMATE CRISIS. A FEED COMMUNITY TOWN HALL. Join local activists, journalists and the community at large to discuss the reality climate change has brought upon Brooklyn. Questions may be submitted prior to the event via social media at #FEED.

BRIC Arts
847 Fulton St
718-683-5600 • bricartsmedia.org

NOVEMBER

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

REVIEW OF REVOLUTION BOOKS

NOVEMBER

2015

THE INDEPENDENT

THE INDEPENDENT, INC.
388 Atlantic Avenue, 2nd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
212-904-1282
www.indypendent.org
@indypendent
facebook.com/TheIndypendent

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
Ellen Davidson, Alina Gold, Anna Schneider, John Tarleton

EXECUTIVE EDITOR:
John Tarleton

MANAGING EDITOR:
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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:
Ellen Davidson, Nicholas Powers

ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR:
Frank Reynoso

DESIGN DIRECTOR:
Mikael Tarkela

DESIGNERS:
Steven Arneson, Anna Gold

CALENDAR EDITOR:
Seamus Creighton

GENERAL INQUIRIES:
contact@indypendent.org

SUBMISSIONS AND NEWS TIPS:
submissions@indypendent.org

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION:
ads@indypendent.org

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS:
On October 15 we celebrated The Indypendent’s 15th anniversary with a benefit house party at my place. Over 60 people came, ate, drank, talked like crazy and had fun. We all contributed money, some a little bit and some a lot, but all of us came away feeling proud to be in solidarity with this band of dedicated journalists who tell the truth and get it out in accessible ways.

The best part of hosting an Indy fundraising party is the joy of having your friends and friends of the Indy hang out in your house, chat up a storm and be a community of lefty activists. I love the buzz of intense conversation and laughter that ring out at an Indy house party. I love the fact that we are all pulling together to keep a great paper alive and well. I love the fact that we can do this together.

What does it take to host such a party? Clean up the house. Go shopping. Cook and set up. Lots of busyness all for a good cause. Folks from the Indy will pitch in as needed. I’m used to hosting large parties at my house but smaller, more intimate gatherings of 15-25 people can be just as fun and meaningful and still give a nice boost to the Indy as well. Whatever you are comfortable with.

I’m not shy about asking my friends to support a good cause. It gives them a chance to get to know the people in the struggle, join a community of good people and do the right thing. Besides, we need to support our media because the rich folks won’t. They are busy supporting the corporate media.

If you are thinking about how you can make a contribution to the Indy, here are some suggestions:

1. Make out a check and/or become a monthly sustainer at indypendent.org/donate — always a good idea.
2. Organize an Indy house party at your place or a friend’s.
3. Gather friends from your neighborhood, college, organizations, workplace, etc. — any place where progressive thinkers and doers exist in your life.
4. Get your house ready for a feast and lots to drink — or use a caterer if you prefer.
5. Enjoy!

When it’s over, lean back and know that your work is well-rewarded with the ongoing survival and thriving of a great newspaper.

Interested in hosting a house party on behalf of The Indypendent as we celebrate our 15th anniversary year? Email john@indypendent.org or call 212-904-1282.
ALL SYSTEMS GO AT MAYDAY

By John Tarleton

“We need a space.”

In a city where rents are soaring and real estate is king, this is one of the most deeply felt laments of New York City activists looking to house their organizations, hold public events or just build a deeper sense of community.

For one group in Bushwick, their dream appears to becoming true. In mid-September, after almost three years of dashed hopes, the Mayday community space moved into its new home at the Iglesia Santa Cruz church building at 176 Saint Nicholas Avenue near the DeKalb station on the L train line.

Mayday’s new home features a 700-square-foot art build room and a kitchen on the first floor, three classrooms on the second floor and a 2,700-square-foot “great hall” and kitchen on the third floor. On any given day or night the space can be found bustling with activities: a panel discussion by climate change activists, a build-out of large, colorful banners and props in support of living wage protesters, a meeting for local residents fighting gentrification and displacement, a training on how to secure your laptop from government spies, a Halloween costume party or a ceremony in honor of Indigenous People’s Resistance Day.

“We love this space and would love to stay for years to come,” said Lucas Shapiro, a member of the Mayday collective and one of two part-time paid staffers who helps oversee the space.

Drawing inspiration from the success of Spain’s “social centers,” the Mayday collective is looking to create a space that is a hub not only for social justice organizing but also for creating and maintaining the human relationships that build community. To help achieve that, they are also working to open a bar and event space in another building around the corner that is expected to open by next spring.

Many of Mayday’s key members have previous organizing experience with Occupy Wall Street or the global justice movement of the early 2000s and they say they are determined to learn from their experiences.

“It’s not Zuccotti Park. It’s not the open, ‘anybody do something’ model,” said Sandra Nurse, another collective member and Mayday’s other part-time staffer.

“It’s about having a strategy to engage not just the people who show up but the people we would like to have get involved.”

To that end, Nurse said, Mayday has emphasized placing people who were born and raised in Bushwick and people of color in general on the group’s Planning Committee. It also holds regular volunteer orientations for neighborhood residents and hosts monthly community potlucks.

“We want to see a movement culture that feels much more inviting and relevant to a much broader set of people.”

Look for more coverage of New York City’s social movement spaces in the December issue. For a longer version of this article, see indypendent.org.
CHANGING THE FRAME
MUSEUMS CHALLENGED TO SEVER TIES WITH CLIMATE DENIERS

By Claire Arkin & John Tarleton

In the past decade David Koch has poured vast sums of money into some of New York’s most prominent cultural institutions — $100 million to renovate and rename the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center, $65 million for the David H. Koch Plaza in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and $20 million for the David H. Koch Dinosaur Wing at the American Museum of Natural History.

Since 1997, Koch, who heads the oil and manufacturing conglomerate Koch Industries, has also provided at least $79 million in funding to groups that deny climate change and thwart government policies that would address it, according to Greenpeace.

His largesse is a particularly striking example of the money poured into cultural and scientific institutions supporting the fossil fuel industry. In Europe, BP sponsors four major arts institutions in the United Kingdom — the National Portrait Gallery, the British Museum, the Royal Portrait Gallery and the Tate; the Italian oil giant Eni is a main corporate partner of the Louvre; and Shell was a sponsor of a climate change exhibition at the Science Museum in London.

This kind of financial support garners a lot of love from its beneficiaries. Daniel Brodsky, chair of the Met, has hailed Koch for “his vision and generosity.” Critics, meanwhile, say that this kind of giving is little more than “greenwashing” and have started a multi-national campaign to pressure scientific and cultural institutions to sever their financial ties to the fossil fuel industry.


In September, a coalition of groups that includes the Natural History Museum, Art Not Oil and BP or Not BP launched a campaign urging arts and cultural institutions and individual cultural agents to sign a pledge refusing to promote fossil fuel interests in their artistic and business practices by divesting from fossil fuels, refusing fossil fuel sponsorship and kicking fossil fuel executives off their boards. The Fossil Funds Free pledge now has over 300 signers, including playwright Caryl Churchill, artist and composer Jen Finer and comedian Francesca Martinez.

Most of the groups that have signed the appeal so far are smaller, progressive institutions that were never likely to gain support from fossil fuel corporations. However, for campaign organizers, the early signers of the pledge provide a baseline from which to pursue larger, more prominent organizations to become signatories.

This initiative follows on the heels of an open letter published in March by the Natural History Museum calling on natural history and science museums to sever their ties to the fossil fuel industry. It was signed by more than 100 climate scientists and received widespread media attention.

“You shouldn’t have a science denier on the board of a science museum. It’s a contradiction in terms,” James Powell, former president of the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, told Democracy Now.

The appeal to museums to steer clear of fossil fuel funding comes at a time when budget cuts to arts and science funding, in the United States alone museums feel more pressure to tap private sector funding streams. According to a report by the American Alliance of Museums, in 2012 more than 67 percent of museums felt economic stress, yet only 18 percent reported increases in government support, versus 35 percent who reported decreases in government support.

Nonetheless, says Powell, citing the debates about the South Africa divestment movement of the 1980s, “there is a right side and a wrong side, and if I were president at one of these institutions today, I would be arguing that my institution needed to get on the right side of this issue.”

While climate justice activists are busy trying to get fossil fuel companies out of museums, they are also developing innovative ways to bring their ideas into museums. Launched in September 2014, the mobile Natural History Museum is modeling what the role of a science museum can be when unbounded by corporate sponsorship and the strings that come attached with it.

Its exhibitions — an iconic polar bear roaming amid the detritus of industrial civilization, a feedback loop of clean water and water polluted by Koch Industries circulating between two tanks and a water fountain — highlight the sociopolitical forces that shape curating in a way rarely seen at a conventional museum.

The Natural History Museum’s co-founder and director Beka Economopoulos has made presentations in the past year at the annual conventions of the American Alliance of Museums and the Association of Science-Technology Centers. Now in the works is a new fossil fuel exhibition that will explain the fossil fuel ecosystem in the United States, which will debut in Houston in the spring.

With more museums in the United States than Starbucks and McDonalds combined, Economopoulos sees an opportunity to make a major cultural impact if museums break with the “authoritative neutrality” that she says has defined their aesthetic for generations.

“They see hundreds of thousands, even millions, of visitors a year, they’re key spaces for bridging science to the public and educating people,” Economopoulos said. “Imagine if this sector, these museums, became hubs for organizing and for communities feeling the brunt of the climate crisis to go and find solace and find solidarity.”

For more information, see fossilfundsfree.org.
WOULD YOU LET THESE MEN CONTROL YOUR UTERUS?

BY AMY LITTLEFIELD

It's at least the fifth Planned Parenthood clinic to be attacked since mid-July, when the anti-choice Center for Medical Progress began releasing surreptitiously filmed videos showing Planned Parenthood officials discussing the donation of fetal tissue to medical researchers — a process that is entirely legal. The videos were deceptively edited to suggest Planned Parenthood was profiting from the donations, and the portions that were edited out showed the officials explicitly saying they do not. Beyond hatchet and arson attacks, the fallout from the videos has also included a spate of state and congressional investigations — none of which have uncovered any wrongdoing by Planned Parenthood, moves by multiple states to cut off Medicaid funding to the organization and surprise visits to Planned Parenthood offices in Texas by state officials, who demanded reams of patient records and employee information.

On the national stage, the public inquisition peaked in September, when a House committee spent five hours questioning Planned Parenthood Federation of America President Cecile Richards. That hearing lasted roughly twice as long as a Senate hearing a week later in which General John Campbell was questioned about the U.S. bombing of a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Afghanistan, a possible war crime. House Republicans have now formed a select committee to do to Planned Parenthood what they did to Hillary Clinton with Benghazi. Who can count the taxpayer dollars wasted by so-called conservatives?

Ironically, when it comes to public opinion, all of these attempts appear to have backfired. An NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll released in late September found that 47 percent of Americans had a positive view of Planned Parenthood. The organization was more popular than the Republican and Democratic parties, all the top presidential candidates and President Obama. Its approval rating had increased slightly since a previous survey in July. For decades, the Hyde Amendment has banned federal funding for abortion. Exceptions are made only in cases of rape, incest or life endangerment. So when Republicans talk about “defunding” Planned Parenthood, they’re talking about funding for family planning provided through Title X — a program signed into law by President Richard Nixon — and Medicaid funding for basic health care services for low-income people. It’s unlikely that Republicans will be able to cut off this funding while Obama is in office. But extremists in state legislatures across the country have provided a frightening picture of what the entire country could look like under a Republican president. What happens when you defund Planned Parenthood? Ask Texas.

In 2011, the Texas legislature implemented radical health care cuts in an effort to target Planned Parenthood, cutting funding for family planning by about two-thirds. The cuts forced 82 family planning clinics in Texas to close or discontinue family planning services. In 2012, researchers at the Texas Policy Evaluation Project (TxPEP) surveyed 318 pregnant women seeking abortions; nearly half reported they were unable to access the birth control they wanted in the three months before their pregnancy.

The situation has gotten worse since then. Despite a people’s filibuster and an 11-hour stand by Texas State Senator Wendy Davis, an omnibus anti-choice law passed in 2013. It gutted abortion access in Texas, causing the number of abortion clinics to drop from 41 to eight as courts lifted or permitted various provisions. Before a court reprieve, the restrictions periodically shuttered the only clinic in the Rio Grande Valley, Whole Woman’s Health in McAllen, putting an internal border checkpoint between undocumented pregnant people in the region and the nearest clinic.

As the Supreme Court decides whether to consider the constitutionality of the Texas law, the number of open abortion clinics in Texas stands at 18 and women are remaining pregnant longer than they want to be. TxPEP found that after the number of clinics in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area was cut in half, women have been waiting up to 20 days on average for an abortion. For many, that inevitably means they will pass beyond the threshold where abortion is possible and give birth to babies they don’t want.

Texas is not the only state where abortion access is under siege. Since 2010, states across the country have enacted nearly 300 restrictions on abortion. These restrictions, which have shuttered clinics and forced people to remain pregnant longer than they want to be, amount to state violence, no less destructive than the hatchet-wielding teenager in New Hampshire. Even though not all of it is making national headlines, resistance to this violence is growing.

On an August day in Virginia, breast cancer patient Leigh Anne Woods stood up at a news conference to defend Planned Parenthood. She removed her shirt. At the podium, Roanoke County Supervisor Al Bedrosian was railing against the local United Way for giving money to Planned Parenthood. That money that is used to fund sex education, not abortion. Woods faced him, displaying her double mastectomy scars.

“You have a problem because they perform abortions,” Woods said, according to local news station WDBJ7. “Look at everything else they do, they save lives!”

“This was about education funding,” Woods later wrote on Facebook. “I took my shirt off, stepped towards him and stood as an example of what education does. Early detection.”

Woods emphasized that her protest was about education, but her actions laid bare what’s really at stake: survival. The stakes are particularly high for low-income people who rely on Planned Parenthood’s affordable health care services.

Since being put on public trial, Planned Parenthood has emphasized that abortion constitutes only 3 percent of its health services. But in the end, that doesn’t matter. The people who want to end legal abortion don’t care how many cancer screenings Planned Parenthood provides to them, embryos and fetuses are people, and that means the people whose bodies they grow in can never be fully human. So while Planned Parenthood is defending itself, the pro-choice movement has gone beyond defending Planned Parenthood; it is unapologetically defending abortion.

Organizations like the Sea Change Program and Shift, founded by Whole Woman’s Health CEO and founder Amy Hagstrom Miller, have focused on ending the shame and stigma around abortion. In September, the hashtag #ShoutYourAbortion caught fire, with thousands of people shedding the stigma and telling their abortion stories without apology. While the experiences shared on #ShoutYourAbortion were as varied as the people who shared them, the overarching message was loud and clear: Abortion saves and improves lives. That’s a beautiful thing.
SOME PLACES YOU CAN FIND

THE INDYPENDENT

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"I’d begun in the first few weeks of 2010, when I made the life-changing decision to release to the public a repository of classified documents that provided a simultaneously horrific and beautiful outlook on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. ... It can be hard, sometimes, to make sense of all the things that have happened to me in the last five years (let alone my entire life). The things that seem consistent and clear to me are the support that I receive from my friends, my family and the millions of people all over the world. "Through every struggle that I have been confronted with, and have been subjected to—militarized confinement, long legal battles and physically transitioning to the woman I have always been—I manage not only to survive, but to grow, learn, mature and thrive as a better, more confident person."
—Chelsea E. Manning (Guardian Op-Ed, 7 May 2015)

Say NO to another Mid-East War before it starts!
SIRA
Iraq    Afghanistan

END THE U.S. BOMBING CAMPAIGN that, because of civilian victims (so-called “collateral damage”), actually recruits for the terrorists instead of defeating them—exactiy the opposite of its stated goal!

REMOVE U.S. BOOTS ON THE GROUND — inserting US forces into Syria’s complex civil war is a dangerous escalation of the war that threatens a much wider conflict.

STOP ARMS SHIPMENTS AND FINANCING OF ISIS BY OUR OWN ALLIES! — America’s allies, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar allow wealthy donors inside their borders to funnel huge sums of money and arms to ISIS and other terrorist groups. ISIS also raises millions of dollars by selling oil drilled on its captured lands on the black market in Turkey, which refuses to stop the sales. The U.S. must insist its allies end this support for ISIS.

SAY NO TO A “NO FLY ZONE” — Such a zone would require substantial U.S. ground troops and cost $1 billion a month, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

SUPPORT NEGOTIATIONS — Strongly support talks among the U.S., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Assad government and other interested parties. Negotiate without preconditions. The horrible Syrian civil war can only be solved by political negotiations, not military force.

AID SYRIAN REFUGEES — Significantly increase the number of Syrian refugees allowed to enter our country and fully fund UN programs that aid the millions of Syrian refugees. During the past 4 years, the U.S. has admitted only 1,500 refugees compared to Germany’s agreement to accept 800,000.

SIGN THE PETITION!  bit.ly/petition-syria

Then call Congress at 877-752-8762 and the White House at 202-456-1111

Tell them we don’t need another war.
ECONOMICS

NO LONGER A DIRTY WORD

By Michael Steven Smith

The word socialism is in the air these days. It gets the most hits on the Merriam Webster Dictionary website. Bernie Sanders, even though he is running for the Democratic Party nomination, calls himself a socialist. Over in England, socialist Jeremy Corbyn was recently elected the leader of the British Labor Party.

Corbyn's election was a consequence of a social movement that saw thousands of young people join his organization. Likewise, in the United States, an estimated 200,000 people have volunteered to work for Sanders. The success of Sanders and Corbyn is reflective of the beginnings of broad anti-capitalist social movements here and abroad, especially in Greece and Spain. Why?

Six people in the Walton family (of Walmart) are worth as much as the bottom 40 percent of the U.S. population, while only some 400 families donate most of the money spent in election campaigns. It has led Jimmy Carter to reflect, at age 90, that “We’ve become an oligarchy instead of a democracy.” Since the 2010 Supreme Court decision in Citizens United v. FEC, corporations are considered people with respect to the amount of money they can donate in an election. I will consider a corporation as a person the day it gets a colonoscopy.

Millions listened with sympathy to what Pope Francis said in his speech to Congress on inequality, poverty, nuclear disarmament and the global arms trade. His encyclical on climate change clearly takes on the capitalist economic system. People understand that it works for the 1% but has been a disaster for the rest of us. In a Pew poll three years ago, 49 percent of young people under the age of 30 responded that they had a favorable reaction to the word socialism.

I recently co-edited a book of 31 original essays called Imagines: Living In a Socialist USA. Before he agreed to publish it, the executice at HarperCollins asked me what my definition of socialism was. I responded, “It is economic as well as political democracy.” He smiled and offered a contract.

Our book shows how almost everything would be different in socialist America: housing, medicine, food, education, sexuality, welfare, art, women’s rights, law, media, immigration, racism and ecological preservation. This is so because, as Albert Einstein wrote, socialism is humanity’s attempt “to overcome and advance beyond the predatory phase of human development.”

Our most renowned moral figure and democratic socialist Martin Luther King Jr. noted in a posthumously published essay titled “A Testament of Hope” that “the real issue to be faced” is “the radical reconstruction of society itself.”

Racism is impossible to eliminate under capitalism because it is used by the system to divide and conquer. Race gives class its intensity. Young activists for Black Lives Matter, immigrant rights, prison abolition, a living wage and climate justice are opening people’s eyes to state violence and the profound impact of racism in our country.

For far too long, socialism has been branded a system of state control. As such, it has not been able to gain a foothold.

In our book historian Paul LeBlanc argues persuasively for a third American Revolution mounted by “a broad left-wing coalition” that could spark a mass socialist movement. Socialism, he writes, “involves people taking control of their own lives, shaping their own futures, together controlling resources that make such freedom possible. ... Socialism will come to nothing if it is not a movement of the great majority in the interests of the great majority. ... People become truly free through their own efforts.”

Socialists have quite a record as participants and leaders in the great reforms of our society. This includes defending civil liberties and starting the American Civil Liberties Union; struggling to end racism, by helping to start the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, participating in the anti-slavery movement before and during the Civil War and now, supporting Black Lives Matter; fighting for women’s rights, including the vote and reproductive justice; and championing public education and the end of child labor. Socialists helped form the Congress of Industrial Organizations and win the eight-hour workday, the weekend, Social Security, worker’s compensation and unemployment insurance. They were leaders in the opposition to nuclear arms and the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. They are for LGBT rights, immigrant rights, prisoners’ rights and universal health care. And on the question of all questions, they side with Pope Francis in understanding that without the abolition of the capitalist economic system of production the destruction of the planet is insured.

As socialist John Lennon sang: “You may say I’m a dreamer / But I’m not the only one / I hope someday you’ll join us / And the world will live as one.”

Michael Steven Smith is a New York City attorney, author and editor. He is the co-host of the radio program Law and Disorder, which airs on WBAI-99.5 FM Mondays 9-10am.

SEATTLE VOTES SOCIALIST, AGAIN

To chants of “Four more years!” from her supporters, Seattle’s socialist city councilmember Kshama Sawant (right) was re-elected to a second term on November 3. Sawant received 54 percent of the vote to 46 percent for Seattle Urban League President and CEO Pamela Banks, who ran as a close ally of the business community.

“There has never, ever been a better time to become a socialist,” Sawant said. “We have shown how working people can stand up to the billionaire class and its establishment.”

Sawant won an upset victory in 2013 after vowing to bring a $15 minimum wage to Seattle. Her re-election bid, which mobilized more than 600 volunteers, was boosted by her success in pressuring other city councilmembers to adopt the $15 minimum wage, making Seattle the first major city to adopt such a measure. Los Angeles and San Francisco have since followed suit.

Sawant ran on an ambitious working-class agenda again this year: a rent control law to reign in Seattle’s soaring housing costs, a millionaire’s tax to pay for improvements to the city’s mass transit system and municipal broadband as an alternative to the high-priced services provided by near-monopoly providers.

“We’re fed up of living in a society that continually re-wards the people at the very top,” Sawant told The Guardian, “while the rest of us languish in various states of poverty in the richest country in the history of humanity.”

—INDPENDENT STAFF
**MNN: Manhattan’s Community Media**

Manhattan Neighborhood Network is Manhattan’s public access cable network with studios in Midtown and East Harlem. We offer all Manhattan residents FREE state-of-the-art studios and equipment and media education classes in studio and field production and digital video editing.

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**The MNN El Barrio Firehouse Community Media Center**

The MNN Firehouse on 104th Street hosts community events and Community Builders media education training. The Firehouse is also home to the Youth Media Center, offering programs, internships, and programming for young people ages 15-24.

Email [firehouse@mnn.org](mailto:firehouse@mnn.org) for more information and follow the Firehouse on [facebook.com/elbarriocommunitycenter](https://facebook.com/elbarriocommunitycenter).
LEBANON, Greece — At dawn, the well-worn pathway of the beach’s landscapers brings a toning breeze to the Karnous, wide sandy beaches of Lesbos’s northwestern coast. It was during this hour, before dawn, after another night of storms, that I met Mahmoud, a Syrian refugee who got in the boat with him, he saw only four others when he arrived on the Greek island of Lesbos. Of the 40 or so people who got in the boat, he was the only one to make it to shore in the darkness for “maybe minutes, maybe hours. I don’t know,” Mahmoud said. In the darkness, he told me later, he thought they would die before they made it to shore.

It was here that I met Mahmoud. He was sitting on the rocks along the shore in the early dawn light. It was a craggy 24-hour busar, part encampment, part mess of tents. There are lines of box trains, lines for as many hours as serve as the only source of water, lines to be checked and guarded. The boat was the only way to get here, and each one costs 45 euros ($60). Everyone has to pay.

“I CAN’T GO TOGETHER!”

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KHALED: A Mechanic Reassembles His Life

I've lived in Spain for a year and a half now. I am 24 years old. I'm originally from Damascus, Syria, where I worked as a mechanic. I left when the revolution in Syria began in 2011 and the government started recruiting young boys to turn them into soldiers, to kill people. My uncle, who has been living in Spain for five years, took me in. I came by plane. First to Beirut and then to Madrid. I was in Lebanon for three months waiting for my papers; that's where I encountered racism. I would talk to people and when I told them I was from Syria some would say, "That's disgusting." My parents stayed in Syria. My little brother, who is 20 years old, went to Germany; he also fled so he wouldn't be recruited by the Syrian army. His journey to Germany started overseas. First he got to Turkey, then took a boat to Greece and then traveled to the other countries. It took him almost a month to get to Germany. Before, a lot of people came to Europe by plane, but now it's not as easy.

He went to a refugee camp in Germany with an NGO and there they helped him with his paperwork. I was in contact with him while he traveled. My sister remains in Syria and she wants to come to Europe with her husband. I think that taking the boat is one of the only solutions for getting out of Syria.

My mother won't leave Syria. "I have been here for so many years, what am I going to do out of here?" she says. But life in Syria is very dangerous. There are soldiers and tanks on the street and you can't leave your house, you can't do anything. What scares me the most is that my family is still in Syria and that every ten minutes things can change.

In Spain it's harder for the refugees than in Germany. I'm going to stay in Spain because my papers are here and the language is easy, but there is almost no economic assistance. People are nice but life is hard due to Spain's economic crisis. In Germany the government helps you get a house. My brother is living. Sometimes he is scared to go in there because there may be military or police officers. If he had a Syrian passport, he was 8,000 euros. My brother went to Germany; he also fled so he wouldn't be recruited by the Syrian army. His journey to Germany started overseas.

I think that the war in Syria will last more than 10 years. I want to go back but I don't know when I will be able to.

DANIELA: ‘You Become Politicized and Empowered’

I am part of the organization called El Espacio del Inmigrante. It opened three years ago when the Spanish government changed the law in regards to the health care system. We realized then that immigrants were literally getting kicked out of the system.

I am originally from Peru. My boyfriend is Palestinian and Jordanian and he fled Jordan two years ago. We realized that he was potentially eligible for political asylum, so he started working with the CEAR (Spanish Refugee Aid Commission). Now he is living in an anarchist house in Vienna. Housemates drive to Croatia to help bring refugees from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq and other places to the house. When I was there, a group of refugees had just arrived. They were really scared because they didn't speak any English. The first contact they had was with our Austrian friends and they thought they were policemen.

On one occasion there was a young Syrian boy in the hospital in Vienna who was dying from cancer. Nobody spoke Arabic and so he couldn't speak to anyone. He was trying to get into Germany because he had some family there, but no family members could come see him. My boyfriend, who spoke Arabic, stayed with him until he died. He was with him for 10 days, talking to him and making sure that a ceremony was carried out for his death. To repatriate the body, the Palestinian community pitched in to cover the total expenses, which were 8,000 euros.

In the anarchist community in Vienna there is a lot of solidarity that has been going on for many years. The economic situation is better than in other European countries. People can receive refugees in their house because they have more space to organize this type of situation. Many times what the refugees need is not so much food or clothes but being able to be with other people who are in their same situation, help finding a lawyer that will work pro bono or help finding a bus station in case they want to go elsewhere. The refugee-migrant network is huge. Usually, the refugees are the first ones to aid other refugees.

Now in Vienna there are a lot of refugees arriving to a train station that is two blocks from the house where my boyfriend is living. Sometimes he is scared to go in there because there may be military or police officers. If he had a Syrian passport, the story would be different, because Syrians, Eritreans and Iraqis are not being deported at the moment.

At the beginning when “they” start to create your identity as an immigrant or refugee you reject it and say, “No, I'm a human being.” After, there is a moment when you embrace your identity as an immigrant and say, “Screw you. Yes, I'm an immigrant and I'm here and I have every right to live here.” Once you are conscious of how the system works you become politicized and empowered. You understand. This gives you a tool to not go crazy, because psychologically, applying for a nationality destroys you, just by the way you're questioned. Initially when the European Union established the framework that people weren't migrants but refugees, I thought this distinction was okay. It was awful to hear how later citizens were repeating, “No, these are migrants, and those are refugees. These are the ones we don’t help.” A month later you could hear: “If we don't deport illegal immigrants, we can't receive these refugees of different nationalities.” So it turned out to be the perfect game they needed to make a big scandal in the media. They needed people to become immersed in the refugee situation and identify refugees as Syrians and reinforce the deportation system.
The refugee crisis is now pushing deeply into Europe — dramatized by gut-wrenching photos of Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi, whose body washed up on a beach in Turkey — started with the cavalier ambitions of American neoconservatives and their liberal-interventionist sidekicks who planned to remake the Middle East and other parts of the world through “regime change.”

Instead of the promised wonders of “democracy promotion” and “human rights,” what these “anti-realists” have accomplished is to spread death, destruction and destabilization across the Middle East and parts of Africa and now into Ukraine and the heart of Europe. Yet, since these neocon forces still control the official narrative, their explanations get top billing — such as that there hasn’t been enough “regime change.”

For instance, the Washington Post’s neocon editorial page editor Fred Hiatt has blamed “realists” for the cascading catastrophes. Hiatt castigated them and President Barack Obama for not intervening more aggressively in Syria to depose President Bashar al-Assad, a longtime neocon target for “regime change.”

But the truth is that this accelerating spread of human suffering can be traced back directly to the unchecked influence of the neocons and their liberal fellow-travelers who have resisted political compromise and, in the case of Syria, blocked any realistic efforts to work out a power-sharing agreement between Assad and his political opponents, those who are not terrorists.

Any suggestion that the only realistic option in Syria is a power-sharing compromise that would include Assad — who is viewed as the protector of Syria’s Christian, Shiite and Alawite minorities — is rejected out of hand with the slogan, “Assad must go!”

The neocons have created a conventional wisdom that holds the Syrian crisis would have been prevented if only Obama had followed the neocons’ 2011 prescription of another U.S. intervention to force another “regime change.” Yet, the far more likely outcome would have been either another indefinite and bloody U.S. military occupation or the black flag of Islamic terrorism flying over Damascus.

GET PUTIN

Another villain who emerged from the 2013 failure to bomb Syria was Russian President Vladimir Putin, who infuriated the neocons by his work with Obama on Syria’s surrender of its chemical weapons and who further annoyed the neocons by helping to get the Iranians to negotiate seriously on constraining their nuclear program. Despite the “regime change” disasters in Iraq and Libya, the neocons wanted to wave the “regime change” wand again over Syria and Iran.

Putin got his comeuppance when U.S. neocons, including National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Victoria Nuland helped orchestrate a “regime change” in Ukraine on February 22, 2014, overthrowing elected President Viktor Yanukovych and putting in a fiercely anti-Russian regime on Russia’s border.

As thrilled as the neocons were with their “victory” in Kiev and their success in demonizing Putin in the mainstream U.S. news media, Ukraine followed the now-predictable post-regime-change descent into a vicious civil war. Western Ukrainians waged a brutal “anti-terrorist operation” against ethnic Russians in the east who resisted the U.S.-backed coup.

Thousands of Ukrainians died and millions were displaced as Ukraine’s national economy teetered toward collapse. Yet the neocons and their liberal-hawk friends again showed their propaganda skills by pinning the blame for everything on “Russian aggression” and Putin.

Though Obama was apparently caught off-guard by the Ukrainian “regime change,” he soon joined in denouncing Putin and Russia. The European Union also got behind U.S.-demanded sanctions against Russia despite the harm those sanctions also inflicted on Europe’s already shaky economy. Europe’s stability is now under additional strain because of the flows of refugees from the war zones of the Middle East.

A DOZEN YEARS OF CHAOS

So, we can now look at the consequences and costs of the past dozen years under the spell of neocon/liberal-hawk “regime change” strategies. According to many estimates, the death toll in Iraq, Syria and Libya has exceeded one million, with several million more refugees flooding into — and stretching the resources of — fragile Mid-East countries.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants have fled to Europe, putting major strains on the continent’s social structures, which were already stressed by the severe recession that followed the 2008 Wall Street crash. Even without the refugee crisis, Greece and other southern European countries would be struggling to meet their citizens’ needs.

Stepping back for a moment and assessing the full impact of neoconservative policies, you might be amazed at how widely they have spread chaos across a large swath of the globe. Who would have thought that the neocons would have succeeded in destabilizing not only the Middle East but Europe as well?

And, as Europe struggles, the export markets of China are squeezed, spreading economic instability to that crucial economy and, with its market shocks, the reverberations are rumbling back to the United States too.

We now see the human tragedies of neocon/liberal-hawk ideologies captured in the suffering of the Syrians and other refugees flooding Europe and the death of children drowning as their desperate families flee the chaos created by “regime change.” But will the neocon/liberal-hawk grip on Washington finally be broken? Will a debate even be allowed about the dangers of “regime change” prescriptions in the future?

Not if the likes of the Washington Post’s Fred Hiatt have anything to say about it. The truth is that Hiatt and other neocons retain their dominance of the mainstream U.S. news media, so all that one can expect from the various mainstream outlets is more neocon propaganda, blaming the chaos not on their policy of “regime change” but on the failure to undertake even more “regime change.”

The one hope is that many Americans will not be fooled this time and that a belated “realism” will finally return to U.S. geopolitical strategies that will look for obtainable compromises to restore some political order to places such as Syria, Libya and Ukraine. Rather than more and more tough-guyjal confrontations, maybe there will finally be some serious efforts at reconciliation.

But the other reality is that the interventionist forces have rooted themselves deeply in official Washington, inside NATO, within the mainstream news media and even in European institutions. It will not be easy to rid the world of the grave dangers created by neocon policies.
SANTA ELENA DE UAIREN, Venezuela — It used to be that to learn about Venezuela’s socialist revolution, the reporting of promi-
nent U.S. newspapers would be as useful as a solitary photo negative; reduced to light and dark, good and evil, the colors would appear reversed, and the chronology of struggle quietly absent.

But while the undertones of doom have been present for over a de-
cade, this year’s 159 percent inflation rate, according to the Interna-
tional Monetary Fund, and a 10 percent decline in the nation’s gross
domestic product have raised serious questions about the impact of
the economic crisis on ordinary Venezuelans and in turn on the gov-
ernment’s ability to maintain popular support.

It’s true, the economy is shot. In the past year, oil prices tumbled
from $105 per barrel to under $50, cutting the country’s foreign earn-
ings by half. A battered exchange system and booming illegal mar-
tet in 2003, there have been phantom importers manipulating the
monthly minimum wage was on par with a 36-pack of diapers or a
few kilos of dried beans, until President Nicolas Maduro doubled it
on October 15.

Car parts are hard to find and vehicles languish in backyards, and
imported on paper were never actually brought into the country.

Despite the best efforts of the state media apparatus — which is
in full campaign mode for the December 6 congressional elections
to ignore these realities, it’s impossible not to witness them on the
ground.

Across the country, the streets buzz with numbers as friends and
strangers compete with stories of outrageous prices: “1,800 bolívars
for a kilo of lentils!” “I paid 600 bolívos for the taxi home!”

The official exchange rate for the bolívar has remained at 6.3 to one
U.S. dollar since February 2013, but its black market value has tumbled
from 110 to the dollar in October 2014 to the current rate of 820.

AN INVISIBLE CATCH-22

Bachaqueros have mutated into an invincible catch-22, as many wage-
earning families make ends meet with profits from illegal sales while
simultaneously driving the cycle of inflation with their cutthroat
prices. Meanwhile, as more people get in on the business, the lines
outside supermarkets with low, government-regulated prices grow
ever longer with hardly anyone buying for themselves.

Yet the telling difference between Chavista complaints and those
of the opposition is that the former analyze causes, starting with the
country’s invariable dependency on oil revenue and a “fast money cul-
ture” fomented by the illegal market. For the latter, a trade of insults
against Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro and Mao Zedong suffi ces.

Despite the best efforts of the state media apparatus — which is
in full campaign mode for the December 6 congressional elections
to ignore these realities, it’s impossible not to witness them on the
ground.

The government favours a simplistic defense, accusing the private
business sector of sabotage. The Central Bank has avoided releasing
any official data on inflation since last year, on the grounds that the
country is at war.

Meanwhile, the media chorus against Venezuela has only gotten
louder since the March 2013 death of Chávez, the country’s charis-
matic leader, and the ascension of Maduro, his hand-picked succes-
sor. Wall Street seizes every opportunity to forecast default, driving
up the interest on Venezuelan bonds. Leading companies have ceased
production, either from a lack of imported dollars or as an act of de-
liberate subversion.

The government instituted a three-tiered foreign exchange sys-
tem in 2003, there have been phantom importers manipulating the
system, resulting in an accumulated $300 billion in capital fl ight. The
manipulations also contributed to scarcity, as many of the items being
imported on paper were never actually brought into the country.

Over the years, the buying and selling of subsidized U.S. dollars on
the illegal market became the most profitable business in the country,
undermining both the program’s intent and the national currency.

But are the government’s hands tied? Victor Alvarez, an economist
and former minister under Chávez, estimated in May that “70 percent
of scarcity and speculation] is due to depletions, deviations and errors
in economic policy, while 30 percent is caused by opposing sectors
who play at destabilization.”

According to Alvarez, currency controls were set in place as a “tem-
porary measure” to reduce dollar dependency, but the government
had no “justifiable reason” to maintain them beyond 2006.

Today, the U.S.-based currency-tracking website DolarToday holds
the bolívar in a vise. Its publishers can set off rounds of infl ation just
by raising the price of the black market dollar on a whim, claiming
empty-handed all the while that their calculations refl ect the “objective street rate.”

Earlier this year, in an attempt to undercut the black market, the
government launched Simadi, a free-floating rate starting at 172
bolívers to the dollar. At the time the black market rate was 185.
In the weeks following, DolarToday ate the black market rate out
of reach, effectively neutralizing Simadi.

On October 23, the Central Bank fi led a lawsuit in the United
States against DolarToday for cyberterrorism, demanding that it be
made illegal for the site to publish unofficial exchange rates and swing
for damages.

While many Venezuelans support the case against the website, left-
ist critics generally accuse the government of putting more energy into
blaming the opposition than into fl xing the problems at hand. The
lack of official economic data has further alienated Venezuelans who
are struggling with infl ated prices and don’t see the state corroboration
of their experience.

CONCRETE SOLUTIONS

However, in the void left by Maduro’s in-
tion, grassroots activists have turned in-
wards and begun to seek concrete solutions.

With the help of key ministries that con-
tinue to grant money to social movements,
these activists have become the motor for a
renaissance of small-scale production in this
oil-dependent nation.

In Guatire, a working-class suburb of the
capital city of Caracas, Alejandro Baiz, a
young filmmaker, and a group of volunteers
have received funding from the Communes
and Housing Ministries to remake an aban-
donned lot into a center of social production
called Territorio Caribe.

The space now boasts greenhouses where
local children learn about urban farming, a community news station
and an educational space that offers classes on everything from car-
pentry to natural childbirth.

The Communes Ministry supports Venezuelans in creating autono-
mous socialist collectives that emphasize self-suffi ciency and self-gov-
ernance, in accordance with Chávez’s dream of gradually replacing
the bourgeois state with a communal state. Thousands of these collec-
tives are registered across the country, with the more prolific examples
focusing on permaculture and participatory democracy.

“We’re not trying to change the world, only create an alternative
from our immediate possibilities,” Baiz explains.

If bachaqueros are the foot soldiers of the economic war, Alejandro
and his crew of around 70 volunteers meet them on the proverbial
battlefield. By producing homemade soaps, deodorants and sham-
poos, the people at Territorio Caribe are bringing their communities
products most commonly monopolized by bachaqueros.

By selling arepa fl our made from yucca, plantain and taro, they
are providing a local alternative to the Harina P.A.N. corn fl our pro-
duced monopolistically by Empresas Polar, Venezuela’s largest private

VENEZUELA AT AN IMPASSE
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS TRY TO FILL THE VOID CREATED BY A FALTERING GOVERNMENT

By Z.C. Dutka

Latin America

November 2015

The IndpendedT

The IndpendedT

The IndpendedT
muralist whose family fled the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in 1984 only to settle in Venezuela during the neoliberal era that preceded Chávez, an opposition win would mean disaster.

Harkening back to Salvador Allende’s brief socialist reign in Chile during the early 1970s, Acosta recalls the rightwing congressional majority that blocked every initiative proposed by Allende’s party.

“We have to prepare ourselves to resist,” Acosta says, while clarifying that resistance from here onward should come “from within the organized commune.”

Now a longtime resident of the Andean city of Merida, Acosta is part of a vibrant campaign that aims to revive Chavista spirit around the country.

Conceived from a symposium of artists from Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Colombia, the campaign flooded social media recently with evocative designs of anatomical hearts and veins intertwining across Latin America.

The beating heart is a reminder of “the deep sentiment that still unites us,” Acosta says.

In the past few years, many Chavistas have experienced a “crisis of morale,” he broods. It’s a collective exhaustion that “comes from seeing many of the revolution’s achievements be abandoned and uncared for.”

The goal is to remind people of their role in Venezuela’s participatory democracy, and to echo Chávez’s parting advice to work together toward a communal state.

“We can’t leave everything to the administration, we can’t sit and wait for a solution,” Acosta avows.

Still, as far as the economy is concerned, there’s little indication of when the hard times will end. Many professionals and young artists have left the country in search of better opportunities, leaving devastating gaps in public services. Crime has risen across the board, causing security forces to focus their efforts on blazes and raids against urban gangs, while the state appears unable to curb petty crime such as chacabuecos, even despite strict new laws.

The 2016 budget was unveiled in October with emphasis on diversified trade and punctual debt payments, but with imports dropping, many economists have questioned this approach. And according to budget documents provided to Reuters, the official exchange rate of 6.3 will be carried into the coming year, making it unlikely that the illegal market will be weakened.

Venezuela’s social movements have a history of confronting adversity, but 17 years into the Bolivarian Revolution, the epoch of high-minded ideas bolstered by abundant resources is long gone.

Corporation.

Farther from the city lights, Gabriel García, 55, keeps busy organizing against genetically modified seeds with help from the Comunidades Ministry.

Born and raised on the fertile land of Lara State, Gabriel is behind Venezuela’s decade-old National Campesino Seed Day and the trailblazing International Seed Forum in 2012 to protect organic seeds native to the Americas.

“But it’s not all talking,” promises Gabriel. “We put it in practice, we grow our own food back. We keep seed banks and make sure they are available to growers.”

Even with the extra labor involved in organic farming, Gabriel says, all-natural and communally grown produce can be even cheaper than conventional counterparts when the high cost of imported agrochemicals and extensive distribution chains are factored in.

Lara has more communes than any other state and a long tradition of subsistence farming. That has, to some extent, protected the region from food scarcity. With government support, the local communes are currently building defenses against speculation by seeking ways to distribute goods in the state capital of Barquisimeto without intermediaries.

“We’ve seen more clearly than anyone that the best way to combat the economic war is by producing, by growing, wherever there is free space,” Gabriel insists.

But if the revolution loses the next elections, he warned, free space may be harder to come by.

“Landowners and cattle herders, these people have tremendous power and are looking to regain their empire,” he said, recalling the segregated and exclusive countryside that existed before Chávez’s 1999 constitutional reforms outlawed large rural landholdings.

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

The international media has hailed the December 6 elections for the National Assembly as a plebiscite on Maduro, but it is highly unlikely that the opposition will win with a majority wide enough to alter the government agenda. A two-thirds majority is needed to revise constitutional law or petition the Supreme Court for presidential impeachment. A three-quarters majority would be required to remove the vice-president or ministers from office.

A poll conducted by the Caracas-based firm Hinterlaces in July saw 67 percent of Venezuelans agree that the opposition garners votes “because of the discontent in the country, but does not have clear backing.”

Aside from a pervasive anti-Chavista sentiment, the opposition coalition MUD (Democratic Unity Roundtable) is composed of a wide range of parties from reactionary to liberal reformist, with no clear leader nor ideological goals to bring them together.

Currently, a pro-government coalition holds just under two-thirds of the 165 congressional seats.

For Rodrigo Acosta, a Chilean...
Apartheid Israel
The Politics of an Analogy
Jon Soske and Sean Jacobs
Foreword by Achille Mbembe

“Offering more thoughtful questions than easy answers, this collection of essays aims to redefine our approach to the Israeli system of militarized racial discrimination and its relationship to South African apartheid.”
—Saree Makdisi

MOVIES

SCORCHING CAPITALISM

This Changes Everything
Directed by Avi Lewis
Klein Lewis Productions, 2015

By Renée Felz

A s a rule, documentaries about climate change feature exotic scenes, endangered species and Hollywood celebrities. In This Changes Everything, Avi Lewis joins with author Naomi Klein to change the script and shape a global discussion on the topic. The film follows Klein as she travels the world to interview activists for what would become her best-selling book of the same name. Among the places she visits is Greece, which is liquidating its natural resources amid an economic crisis and austerity measures that have fallen mostly on the poor.

“You can see all the dimensions of the problem here: how the environment is treated, how the citizens are treated,” says Mary Chrismosinou of the Halkidiki Citizens Committee, which is fighting plans by the Canadian company Eldorado to build a massive gold mine. “You have to realize what is the core problem. Then we can fight it.”

Klein asks her, “What is the core problem?”

“Do you want me to state it on camera?” Christianou responds, sounding both hesitant and emboldened. “I would say it is the economic system. Capitalism.”

Klein elegantly makes this argument in her book, which I have read. But the point is so rarely made that I found the scene as refreshing as if it were my first time hearing it. Perhaps now a broader audience that has yet to read her 576-page opus will feel the satisfying jolt of recognition from openly acknowledging how our global economy is built on unsustainable and endless growth.

Another whiff of fresh air is found in India, where the pursuit of double-digit economic growth is fueled by government subsidies and land grants for private investors to build hundreds of coal-burning power plants. In some areas, residents successfully blocked the construction of the facilities, maintaining their protests despite promises of electricity and jobs. They tell Klein they’d prefer to keep their farms and fishing businesses rather than see a power plant destroy their land and water. They note the factories would actually provide electricity to industrial centers hundreds of miles away instead of locally. This is what “environmentalism of the poor” looks like, Klein argues.

The push for developing countries like India and China to build energy infrastructure as they grow is often blamed for slowing down negotiations on the U.N. climate agreement that have been under way for the last 20 years and are set to conclude this December at talks in Paris. But as charts flash on the screen showing the number of polluted air quality days in China’s major cities, Klein notes the factories burning carbon are often producing goods for Western consumers.

Like polar bears, solutions are a key part of any climate change documentary. By calling out capitalism’s role, Klein and Lewis have a chance to broaden the climate justice movement and sharpen its focus. The steps are clear to the indigenous activists they feature, who use blockades to keep tar sands oil in the ground; to the Germans they follow, who reject nuclear power and create electricity cooperatives sourced by renewable energy, and to the economist they interview, who argues we need a different growth system.

In her book, Klein argues the best way to push forward with cuts to carbon emissions that contribute to climate change is for both “de-growth” of the carbon-intensive parts of the economy and expansion of the low-carbon parts, among which she counts health care and education. In the film, she talks to a Canadian tar sands worker who describes how he and many of his fellow roughstools dream of building and installing wind turbines and other renewable energy projects instead. Afterward, she optimistically reflects how their vision melts away the false dichotomies of jobs versus the environment, and the economy versus the planet.

At minimum, the release of this film in theaters, combined with community and educational screenings, will invigorate those who are aware but feel hopeless and embolden grassroots organizers and foot soldiers. Will it similarly push governments and the bureaucrats at the climate talks in Paris to finally break with the market fundamentalism the movie decries? That could “change everything,” it argues. But it is up to us to demand it.

For more information, see thefilm.thischangeseverything.org.

UP IN SMOKE: Burning sugarcane field in El Salvador. Still from This Changes Everything.
Individual wars are always complex, and yet war itself can, sometimes, feel like something simple or pure. In War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, Chris Hedges writes of how “war makes the world understandable, a black-and-white tableau of them and us.” Tales of noble, virtuous wars are mixed into the bedrock of religious traditions — in the New Testament, for example, Christ rides a white horse out of heaven, “and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” As aphorized by the sinister Judge Holden in novelist Cormac McCarthy’s Blood Meridian, “War is the truest form of divination. ... War is god.”

But if you want to talk about something complex, take a look at the Lebanese Civil War. That conflict lasted for 16 years, from 1975 to 1991, and involved a grim cornucopia of sectarian and secular militias, religious groups, political parties and other countries fighting out proxy wars. For Lebanese artist Walid Raad, the war has always been a subject of fascination. As a child growing up in late-1970s Beirut, Raad collected bullets and shrapnel after days of fighting, keeping detailed notes of where wartime detritus was found and what colors the bullet tips were (bullet manufacturers use colors to identify their products). These detailed notes would eventually form the basis of Let’s be honest, the weather helped (1998-2006), a series of printed notebook pages in which brightly colored dots representing the found bullets are overlaid on gritty black-and-white photos of the sites of conflict. The end result falls somewhere between scientific reportage, grade-school homework and avant-garde collage. On a nearby wall in Raad’s current survey exhibition — up now at the Museum of Modern Art — there’s We Decided to Let Them Say “We are Convinced” Twice (It was More Convincing this Way) (1992-2007), which covers some similar ground. For this series, Raad revisited photos of Israel’s 1982 siege of Beirut that he shot when he was 15. Though the negatives were “carefully preserved,” the prints are mottled and hazy with strange pink and blue coronae, as if a dark energy had been bearing down on them while in storage.

Or, maybe not. The aforementioned works are part of Raad’s remarkable long-term project The Atlas Group (1989-2004), in which he positioned himself as not so much an artist as an archivist or historian presenting mysterious documents rescued from a lost era. This framework is fictitious, and within it the material — evidence, so to speak — becomes unstable. Did a precocious boy really keep such handsome, meticulously compiled notebooks? What are the unnamed disturbances that added corrosive color to those black-and-white negatives? Is it really true that the monochrome blue photos of Secrets in the Open Sea (1994) were not only discovered under wartime rubble, but also contain latent images of men and women who drowned in the Mediterranean over the course of the war? And, did the video known as I Only Wish That I Could Weep (2002) really come from a Lebanese Army officer who, instead of doing his job videotaping pedestrians on a seaside boardwalk, decided to train his camera on the sun as it set, slowly, over the ocean?

More recently, Raad has turned his attention to art history and the art world, specifically in the context of wealthy Mideast cities embracing the globalized art market. Here, Raad presents documentary materials such as floor plans, postcards and financial documents with a bristling current of bizarreness. He tells of objects that have somehow ceased to reflect light or cast shadows, and of messages sent telepathically from the future. In a performative exhibition walkthrough that Raad is doing throughout the show’s run, he (or perhaps a lookalike actor playing Raad?) speaks of how colors are forever altered by war, and tells the story of how his own artwork shrank down to dollhouse size when he tried to exhibit it in Beirut’s first Western-style “white cube” gallery.

This tension between fact and fiction is at the core of Raad’s practice. It often feels as if Raad’s art has emerged from a parallel plane: a world similar to our own, but with some intractable discord at work. It’s a kind of estrangement that, perhaps, reflects the incompatibilities between civil society and life during wartime, rendering the state of war as one of perpetual alienation and remoteness.

This art, then, is a challenge to the concept of war as a wellspring of noble heroism, or as a site of truth or divinity. War is clouded memories, unnamed trauma, confusion and ruptures that can only be understood in retrospect, if that. The Lebanese Civil War began when Raad was about 8 years old, so we can assume that for him, coming to know the world also meant coming to know the war. This art tells us that war is something that cannot — and should not — be known.
The Black Lives Matter movement offers a scathing, clear-eyed assessment of racism, unjust policing and mass incarceration in the United States. This should be welcomed. However, when two movement activists disrupted a Bernie Sanders rally in Seattle in August, a largely white progressive crowd hissed and booed and weeks of furious debates followed on social media.

To those who booed or found themselves shaking their heads at Black Lives Matter tactics: read journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me*. *Between the World and Me* is an open letter to Coates’ adolescent son about the nature of America’s social relations and a deeply personal engaging work. The left utilizes the phrase “institutional racism” to describe systemic racial discrimination and denial of opportunity that is ongoing and destructive — Coates crystallizes the jargon and uses the word “plunder.” Coates writes that his young son has not yet “discovered the plunder everywhere around us,” and then goes on to trace it, from slavery through bad schools to present-day police killings of Black Americans.

What Black Lives Matter and Coates say is unfortunately not new. The Confederate flag symbolizes white supremacy and the South’s support of chattel slavery. Educational disparities encompass everything from Black students getting disciplined more often to higher dropout rates and lower school funding. Black men are 21 times more likely to be killed by police than white males and a Black baby born in 1991 has a 30 percent chance of going to prison someday.

*Between the World and Me* is unique because of Coates’ tone. Coates does not evoke the Black church and is not religious. “You must resist the common urge toward the comforting narrative of divine law, toward fairy tales that imply some irresistible justice,” he writes. “The enslaved were not bricks in your road, and their lives were not chapters in your redemptive history.”

*Between the World and Me* has its tender moments but overall is not a particularly uplifting book. A sharp critic of President Obama, Coates is not buying hope and change. Surveying the United States’s racist past and present, he warns his son to expect more of the same even if the future comes branded as being “post-racial.”

“Dreamers are pillaging Ferguson for municipal governance,” he writes, flipping the script on the American Dream à la Malcolm X. “Dreamers are quoting Martin Luther King and exulting non-violence for the weak and the biggest guns for the strong.”

Nobel laureate Toni Morrison has compared Coates’ unflinching writing on the subject of race to that of James Baldwin. Like Coates, Baldwin also had a gift for writing essays in letter form, as he did with “My Dungeon Shook — Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation.” And now Baldwin is the posthumous recipient of a trove of imagined letters from Congolese expat writer Alain Mabanckou.

In *Letter to Jimmy*, recently translated from French to English, Mabanckou, who lives in Paris and California, ponders Baldwin’s place and time, including his religious upbringing and subsequent rejection of Christianity and choice to flee the United States’s pervasive racism to live in Paris and embrace his homosexuality.

*CHAIN LETTER*

Between the World and Me
By Ta-Nehisi Coates
Spiegel & Grau, 2015

Letter to Jimmy
By Alain Mabanckou
Translated by Sara Meli Ansari
Soft Skull Press, 2014

By Bennett Baumer

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Continued on next page
that precipitated technological advantage and immunity from certain endemic diseases. Hoffman has a different take on the success of European conquest. His reasons are gunpowder technology, “tournament conditions” between European powers and most important, political history.

Gunpowder technology encompasses a lot more than its name suggests. Sure, it refers to the weapons — firearms, artillery, ships armed with guns and fortifications that could resist bombardment. But it also includes the tactics and methods of organization designed to get the most out of the weapons as well as the training that transforms ordinary men into soldiers, forging them into “an imposing fighting force willing to operate with speed and discipline even when under fire.”

With the term “tournament,” Hoffman is describing, in essence, a competition. He argues that the collective prizes of wealth, territorial expansion, defense of the Christian faith, and the glory of victory created a win-at-all-costs mentality. It meant that Europe’s fragmented powers were constantly fighting each other, which led them to spend heavily on war while pushing to improve gunpowder technology, even if it harmed their economies.

Ultimately, Hoffman credits political history as the major cause of Europe’s conquest of most of the rest of the world. For centuries, Europe’s monarchic leaders saw the waging of war as their principal duty. Winning the tournament meant excellence — but it was not until the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period that losing posed any significant political risk.

As far as political history goes, the privatization of war was also uniquely European. American leaders gave gunpowder technology to private entrepreneurs, who then used it to establish settlements and colonies as well as to prey on and pirate foreign trade. As overseas conquest became more and more profitable, individuals and companies were further incentivized to conquer and colonize.

The political history of other potential world conquerors, meanwhile, was different. The Ottomans’ practice of Islamic law prevented them from forming private companies; as a result, they were limited in the amount of private capital they could invest in their ventures and the economic growth they could attain. China, meanwhile, had developed gunpowder a full 400 years before Europe had access to it, but united earlier and found other means of warding off threats — archers on horseback, the Great Wall — to be preferable to the development of gunpowder technology.

While Hoffman’s thesis does hold together, one has to wonder if the question of “why” has been sufficiently answered. Were superior technology, tournament conditions and a unique political history enough to justify the suffering Europe unleashed on the world in the name of conquest? It’s clear that it wasn’t inevitable. China, for example, traded with Africa and India for more than 1,000 years, a period during which China was more technologically advanced. And despite that, not once did China attempt to conquer or colonize its trading partners. Perhaps historian John Henrik Clarke, who asserted that Europe wanted what others had but had nothing to trade and saw conquest as the only option, was right. Hoffman echoes this idea of “Western Europe’s economic inferiority complex,” writing, “Europeans were... convinced that other parts of the world were wealthier — particularly Asia or the southern latitudes that were Columbus’ goal.”

Fortunately, history offers many lessons for those who have suffered under the heel of conquest and oppression. Indeed, most Western European states have also been on the receiving end of it. The conquered groups, if they survive, will be changed, but with struggle, no oppression lasts forever. Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire said it best in Pedagogy of the Oppressed: “The process of recovery from the group trauma that takes place from conquest is a slow one, but one which eventually leads to growth and strength.”
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