WHAT’S NEXT?
TWO OCCUPY-INSPIRED ORGANIZERS WHO HELPED LAUNCH THE BERNIE SANDERS MOVEMENT LOOK TO THE FUTURE. P10
A BATTLE WORTH WAGING

BY JOHN TARLETON

We felt the Bern, and then we acted on it.

In the run-up to New York’s April 19 presidential primary, The Independent set aside plans for its regular April issue to co-publish a special edition in tandem with The Occupied Wall Street Journal. The goal was to stage a massive independent media intervention on the home turf of Wall Street, the corporate media and the Democratic Party machine.

Known as The Battle of New York, this extra large, four-page broadsheet newspaper featured beautiful graphic design with contributions from Cornel West, Michelle Alexander, Glenn Greenwald, Jodi Dean, Greg Grandin and Ray McGovern, among others. This project was made possible by an outpouring of support. We received $70,000 in crowd-funded donations courtesy of more than 1,600 backers in the United States and around the world. More than 1,000 volunteers helped distribute hundreds of thousands of copies in the New York City area as well as across upstate New York. While Bernie Sanders did not win in New York, this project gave us a glimpse of what people-powered media can achieve.

THE NEWSIES ARE BACK: And helping pass out papers in Brooklyn.

UPSTATE RUN: With help from Solidarity Movers, we made a two-day run across Upstate New York dropping off papers with local distributors.

IN THE SUBWAYS: A commuter takes a copy on the way into the Union Square station.

VOLUNTEER POWER: Ready to distribute freshly arrived papers.

IN SOLIDARITY: Striking Verizon workers from the Communications Workers of America District 1 with copies of The Battle of New York.
TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY

Towering human rights attorney Michael Ratner died May 11 at the age of 72. A former president of the National Lawyers Guild and of the Center for Constitutional Rights, Ratner was perhaps best known for his efforts on behalf of prisoners being held indefinitely and tortured in the U.S. military prison in Guantánamo, Cuba, but his involvement with Guantánamo goes back to the 1990s, when hundreds HIV-positive Haitian refugees were held there in inhuman conditions.

Although he raked up many important legal victories, including the overturning of the NYPD’s notorious stop-and-frisk policy and a Supreme Court ruling that terror suspects held in Guantánamo were entitled to habeas corpus rights under the U.S. constitution, he took on cases with little regard for their winnability, but rather on the basis of whether they would advance the cause of human rights and justice.

He viewed the legal arena as only one of many fronts in the pursuit of progressive radical change, and he took part in many demonstrations and other activist events. He and his wife, journalist and filmmaker Karen Ranucci were also central to a vital community of progressives, and they are legendary for hosting an annual July Fourth barbecue and softball game, where legal, media and other activists battled it out on a baseball diamond.

As part of a “Shadow Cabinet” special issue of The Indypendent published at the onset of the second Obama administration, Ratner outlined his first steps if he were appointed attorney general. The article — “Toward a Revolutionary Transformation of Society” — is re-published here.

— ELLEN DAVIDSON

It will be a cold day in hell when a person with my politics is appointed attorney general of the United States. The attorney general is the head of the mis-named Department of Justice, better named the Department of Injustice. She (one woman has held the job since 1789) is the chief law enforcement officer of the United States and enforces or does not enforce federal criminal and civil laws including civil rights laws. Agencies such as the FBI (U.S. political police) and the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) come under its umbrella. Even within the context of a capitalist structure and a legal system that currently oppresses the majority of the population, the attorney general could turn this society on its head and take important steps toward a more equal, less oppressive and freer society.

What I have suggested below are arguably transitional steps that contain within them the potential for adding a revolutionary transformation of society. I want to stress that none of these can be achieved without a massive mobilization of the people in the streets. Ultimately, only with socialism will we live in a society where law will work for the full well-being of people and not for the benefit of the ruling class.

Let’s assume I take office on January 20, 2013, the same day Obama takes the oath of office for his second term.

What do I do on the first day? I could number a sheet of paper from one to 100 that would reflect many of the actions I would take. However, for today, let’s start with the top 10. I would begin by not enforcing certain laws, which I have thought to do; then I would investigate and prosecute the real bad guys.

1. Handcuff the FBI riot activists. Protect our right to dissent and protest by ending FBI surveillance, spyng, wiretapping, racial and ethnic profiling, use of informants and entrapment of activists and others not engaging in criminal activity.

2. No criminal prosecutions of those involved in the sale or personal use of all drugs.

3. Recommend parole for tens of thousands in federal prisons including those convicted as juveniles, political prisoners such as Native American activist Leonard Peltier and those serving more than 20 years. Those remaining should be treated humanely (no solitary), and given educational programs. Ultimately, prisons must be abolished. “When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out.” — Ho Chi Minh

4. No prosecution of the undocumented. No more criminal enforcement of immigration laws including Operation Streamline, which has resulted in criminal prosecution and jail sentences for scores of thousands of immigrants.

5. End the prosecution of truth tellers and internet activists. Bradley Manning, Jeremy Hammond, Julian Assange, Barrett Brown, the late Aaron Swartz and untold others who seek to expose criminality and challenge corporate control of information which should be free to all.

6. Don’t enforce the tax laws against those forced to carry the burden for the rich. The attorney general cannot change the tax code, but can refuse enforcement of its unequal burden. No criminal prosecution or civil enforcement actions against people or families who earn under $40,000 and who refuse to pay taxes. Tax the rich, not those with lower incomes.

7. Indict and prosecute Obama and administration officials for murder by targeted assassination. A federal judge recently said, in the context of the drone killing of Anwar Al-Awlaki, that the President could be subject to prosecution under a U.S. statute prohibiting “foreign murder of United States nationals.”

8. Indict and prosecute the George W. Bush torture team. Bush, Dick Cheney, former CIA head George Tenet, scores of others and the lawyers such as Alberto Gonzales and John Yoo, who tried to justify the practice.

9. Too big to fail; too big not to be in jail. Bank and financial institutional fraud was one of the main causes of the 2008 continuing crash. Yet, 2011 saw prosecutions of financial institutions fall by half from the decade before. Prosecuting bank and financial fraud is a necessity. Another crash is inevitable under our current capitalist system, but its severity can perhaps be limited by going after the big, bad banks.

10. Propose a law similar to that in Bolivia, Law of the Rights of Mother Earth (Ley de Derechos de la Madre Tierra). The law gives a legal personality to the human community and life/ecosystems. Even prior to trying to pass such a law I would ensure that all of the federal agencies under the Department of Justice protect Mother Earth and her life systems. I would attempt to enforce those rights in court by seeking to protect indigenous communities and their culture and the right to clean water and air and to live free from contamination.

While the above actions are possible under our current capitalist system, as I said, they are unlikely without a mass movement making militant demands.

I want to conclude with a paragraph by my friend Michael Smith, who is co-editing a forthcoming book entitled Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA:

“Law in America is sold as an impartial force for justice and equality. The frauds of formal equality of rights and the apparent neutrality of judges was brilliantly pierced by Anatole France’s oft-quoted remark that the law in all its majesty forbids all persons, whether rich or poor, from sleeping under bridges. With socialism in America, the people will own the bridges, and they’ll sleep peacefully and contentedly with a roof over their heads knowing full well that they have created a society where the law won’t work against them and in the words of that great manifesto ‘where the full development of each is the condition of the full development of all.’”

This article originally appeared in the January 21, 2013 issue of The Indypendent.
By Steven Wishnia

This is not just a strike against Verizon, Commu-
nications Workers of America (CWA) President
Chris Shelton told the more than 1,500 people
who packed the block outside a Verizon Wireless
store on Wall Street May 5. “This is a strike because
this country’s lords and corporations have decided they want to get
rid of unions. It’s about every person with a union card. It’s
about every person who works for a living.”

The strike began April 13, when 39,000 workers from Mas-
sachusetts to Virginia walked out, virtually all of them in Veri-
zon’s landline division. It came eight months after the compa-
nany’s contracts with the CWA and the International Brother-
hood of Electrical Workers, the two unions representing those work-
ers, expired.

“They are just really not the money,” CWA official Bob Master
told LaborPress in April. Verizon has offered workers raises av-
eraging 2.5 percent a year for three years. But the company’s
April 28 “last, best, and final” contract offer would increase
workers’ health-care payments by about 20 percent, end family
leave for new hires, and cut off pension accruals for workers who
spend more than 30 years on the job. Most important, it says it
will only guarantee job security if the unions accept “workforce
flexibility changes.” Those changes include increased ability to
hire outside contractors for tasks like maintaining and repairing
telephone poles and cable, to ship call-center work to low-wage
lands like India and the Philippines and to transfer workers so
they have to commute as much as 80 miles each way.

Verizon workers and union officials see this strike as a crucial
moment for American organized labor. This is not a case of
a beleaguered industry asking for concessions to avert massive
layoffs, like the Big Three auto companies at the beginning of
the recession, or more recently, the steel industry swamped by
cut-rate Chinese competition. This is a highly profitable compa-
nity—it made $18 billion in profits last year, and paid $13 billion
to shareholders—trying to snuff its unions down.

“This is one of the last big fights. We have to stay strong,” Al
Medina, a 43-year-old power technician from Brooklyn, said at
the May 5 rally. “You know how unions are these days. A lot of
people are looking at us to see what we do.”

So what are the Verizon unions doing to win beyond the traditional strategy of
“one day longer, one day stronger?” Verizon
says its landline division brings in
29 percent of the company’s revenue, but
only 7 percent of its profits. Its wireless
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sei-
ter Verizon complained to the National Labor Relations Board
that it was an illegal “secondary boycott” of a neutral party.
UPS drivers won’t cross picket lines to deliver to Verizon facili-
ties, CWA head Shelton told the May 5 rally, and their union,
the Teamsters, is giving strike pay to truckers laid off for refusal-
to cross a picket line.

They are also urging the public to boycott Verizon — “Don’t shop at Verizon Wireless, don’t get FiOS, nothing,” CWA Lo-
cal 1101 President Keith Purce declared May 5—and launched
picketing of Verizon Wireless stores around the nation. (Al-
though fewer than 200 wireless technicians and retail workers
are union, their existence means strikers can picket those stores
without being accused of a secondary boycott.)

New York’s building-trades unions are coordinat-
ing picketing at stores for continuous coverage,
said an organizer.

“I think Verizon is seriously underestimating
both our membership and the general public’s
mood,” says CWA District 1 research economist
Pete Sikora. He believes the public is supporting
the strike because it “understands that there’s a cri-
sis in America,” with the rich getting richer and the
delay in middle-class jobs.

Outside the Verizon call center in Brooklyn,
the picket line on a rainy day three weeks into the
strike is much quieter than it was April 13, when
more than 400 people loudly cheered presiden-
tial candidate Bernie Sanders as he proclaimed,
“You’re telling corporate America that workers in
this country are not going to continue to be pushed
down and down and down.” The about 100 pick-
eters occasionally blow whistles and airhorns, but
most are hanging out and talking, many sitting in
camp chairs.

That doesn’t mean they’re in a mood to give up.
“I don’t like the way they paint us as just hungry
to the general public, support from other unions and the de-
termination of members. In April, three New York City hotels
kicked out strikebreakers after Hotel Trades Council members
wouldn’t cross picket lines outside. (On May 9, a federal judge
issued a temporary restraining order barring that picketing, af-

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CUNY PROFS APPROVE STRIKE VOTE

Members of the City University of New York’s faculty union have over-whelmingly approved a strike authorization vote. More than 10,000 members of the Professional Staff Congress cast ballots and 92 percent of them voted in favor of empowering the union’s leadership to call a strike if it deemed it necessary.

“The union remains absolutely committed to achieving an acceptable contract through the negotiating process, but we are prepared to take action if there is no alternative,” PSC President Barbara Bowen said May 12 when the vote totals were announced. Bowen added that the earliest a strike would take place is in the fall.

The PSC’s 25,000 members have worked without a contract since 2010 and have not had a raise since 2009. During that same time, the cost of living in the city has gone up an average of 23 percent, according to the union.

Dozens of PSC members were arrested in November for blockading CUNY administration headquarters and again in March while conducting a “die-in” outside Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s midtown office. Years of underfunding by Albany have prevented a contract settlement and raised concerns about deteriorating conditions for both faculty and students at the nation’s largest urban university system.

Strikes by public sector unions are illegal under New York’s Taylor Law and are rarely attempted, as striking workers and their union can be slapped with heavy fines and union officers can be jailed for leading such an action.

But Bowen says that won’t weaken the resolve of PSC members.

“We are prepared to fight to defend our working conditions and our students’ learning conditions. Our own lives and the life-chances of our students are at stake.”

— INDYPENDENT STAFF

Hope in the Dark

Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities

Rebecca Solnit

with a new foreword and afterword

A radical case for HOPE as a commitment TO ACT in a world whose future remains uncertain and UNKNOWABLE.

“Time and again she comes running towards you with a bunch of hopes she has found and picked in the undergrowth of the times we are living in. And you remember that hope is not a guarantee for tomorrow but a detonator of energy for action today.”

— JOHN BERGER

“Hope in the Dark changed my life. During a period of pervasive cynicism and political despair, the first edition of this book provided me with a model for activist engagement that I have held dear ever since. . . . Despite all the obstacles, we must not lose sight of the fact profound transformation is possible.”

— ASTRA TAYLOR

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MARCH 21

A Toast to Those Who Are Gone:
Matt Jones/Phil Ochs Tribute with Magpie

“35 years of celebrating music of peace and resistance!”

— ASTRA TAYLOR

The Indypendent
DEATH BY INDIFFERENCE
NYPD OFFICERS SHOW LITTLE INTEREST IN CPR TRAINING

By Nick Malinowski

"Why nobody do no CPR?" — the question pierces a cell-phone video documenting New York Police Department officer Daniel Pantaleo choking Eric Garner to death. Garner lies handcuffed, facedown, on a Staten Island sidewalk as nearly a dozen officers, and eventually emergency medical services employees, stand around him. No one provides assistance. Nearly two years later, after another death at the hands of the NYPD, the trial of a different officer has provided some clarity.

Peter Liang, the rookie NYPD officer who shot 28-year-old Akai Gurley in a darkened East New York stairwell in November 2014, testified to a Brooklyn jury on February 10 that he had never really been trained in CPR at the Police Academy, despite receiving a certification for the skill. “There were two to three hundred people in the class. During our test they gave us the answers,” he said. Liang’s partner, Shaun Landau, also testified to this effect, acknowledging that his CPR training lasted about two minutes, that he was fed the answers and that every cadet received the certification.

After being shot, Gurley bled to death in the stairwell. Neither Liang nor Landau provided aid, arguing instead about who would call their supervisors. At some point, they stepped over Gurley’s dying body in an effort to locate bullet fragments from the discharge. It was Gurley’s companion, Pink Houses resident Melissa Butler, who called an ambulance and tried to keep him alive. Liang said in court that he would have helped, but didn’t know how.

Both he and Landau have since been fired from the NYPD. Liang was convicted of manslaughter and misconduct and eventually sentenced by Judge Danny Chun to the Police Academy, despite receiving a certification for the skill. “There were two to three hundred people in the class. During our test they gave us the answers,” he said. “I believe [Mendez] should go through his trial, but he should be indicted for his negligence. He should not be a police officer. My daughter died. She’s not coming back. And now he’s in another precinct? Does that make sense?”

OPENING THE DOOR TO CHANGE

For the last six years the Ojedas have been shuttling back and forth between their Brooklyn home and Albany, N.Y., lobbying to get legislation passed that would require officers to be retrained in CPR every two years. They’ve spent tens of thousands of dollars on the effort, in advertising and organizing bus trips with advocates to the capital. Every year the bill passes through the State Assembly, but hasn’t gained traction in the generally more conservative State Senate, which is controlled by Republicans.

“The [Liang] thing has opened the door a little bit,” Michael Ojeda said. According to court documents. Instead, Mendez began investigating Carmen Ojeda a traffic ticket and held her for 15 minutes while her daughter gasped for air in the back seat.

“By the time they reached the hospital, just three blocks away from where Mendez stopped them, Briana was dead.”

“My daughter won’t have a sweet 16 party, she won’t graduate from college. She told the officer, ‘I can’t breathe,’” she said. “I feel that there was injustice done. I believe [Mendez] was not, doesn’t sit well with Carmen Ojeda.”

“I feel our case was just brushed aside,” she said. “I expect the Commissioner and his department finally realize that CPR saves lives and that there is absolutely no excuse not to properly train officers.”

Michael Ojeda agrees that the scrutiny is long overdue. “For someone training police officers to just have the audacity to tell 200 cadets, don’t worry about this part, we got you, he’s got to be very comfortable with that. It’s not the first time he’s done this,” Michael Ojeda said of the CPR instructor’s decision to give the exam answers to Liang and his classmates. “We’ve got to look back and see how long this has been going on,” he said.

POLICE BRASS ‘TALKING OUT OF THEIR ASS’

Nearly two years later, after another death at the hands of the NYPD, the trial of a different officer has provided some clarity.

Peter Zimroth, a federal monitor overseeing changes at the NYPD’s stop-and-frisk program, has pointed to a similar disconnect at the police department. In a report published in February, he wrote that although the department has issued new guidelines for stops and initiated new trainings, many rank-and-file officers remain unaware that any changes were made. Other officers are intentionally ignoring the new rules out of fear of legal liabilities, he wrote.

Recently, a Black NYPD officer interviewed by the New York Times also described conflicts between the public statements of police brass on quotas—that they do not exist — and the reality of her day-to-day work, in which she is forced to meet them. “It’s like they’re talking out of their ass and their mouth at the same time,” she said.

DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Michael Ojeda sees Akai Gurley’s death as a result of the NYPD not taking the issue of CPR seriously, and history predictably repeating itself. “It’s a feeling that other people who have lost family members to police violence share.”

Nicholas Heyward Jr. grew up around the corner from the Ojedas’ house. Michael Ojeda, whose father ran a deli in the neighborhood, said he remembers working with his dad and seeing little Nicholas coming in all the time for basketball tournaments to keep his son’s memory alive. Gurley’s death in such similar circum-

Continued on page 12
Afer presiding over a chaotic Democratic presidential primary on April 19, the New York City Board of Elections released its certified election results on May 6 showing that it had rejected 91,000 provisional affidavit ballots, or about three out of every four cast on election day.

Diana Finch, who has served as a poll worker for nearly a decade, said the number of affidavit ballots in her Bronx election district far exceeded the usual number.

“The envelopes that are provided to each election district to put the affidavit ballots in were all filled to bursting at my poll site; we had to squeeze the affidavit ballots in,” Finch told The Independent. “Clearly the Board of Elections never anticipated having so many affidavits.”

There were a total of 121,036 affidavit ballots submitted, according to the Board of Elections. Finch explained that the 90,998 ballots excluded from the final tally have not been discarded, but have been set aside for possible further review.

The burden of proof, however, has now shifted from the Board of Elections to voters. According to Jonathan Clarke, a lawyer with voter advocacy group Election Justice USA, the voters behind those 91,000 affidavits must request the status of their ballot in person at the BOE’s office and contest it in court if they feel it was wrongly set aside.

People whose votes were excluded must act quickly to contest their affidavit status by the May 25 deadline, given the BOE’s recent certification.

DISENFRANCHISED

At the BOE’s two public hearings following the primary, hundreds of voters catalogued instances of alleged disenfranchisement — including polling places that didn’t open on time, a lack of interpreters and, most prominent, widespread confusion about affidavit ballots.

Affidavit ballots are reserved for voters whose names don’t appear on the voter rolls, but an unusually high number of affidavit ballots were cast, giving fuel to claims that voters were wrongly removed from the rolls.

At a raucous public hearing May 3, Angelica Thornhill, 30, of Crown Heights, told the board that she painstakingly took steps to ensure she was a registered Democrat, yet when she showed up to vote the rolls showed her registration as unaffiliated.

“If that’s your mistake, my vote should be counted,” she said.

“More often than not, you’re finding invalid affidavits in primaries because people are trying to vote parties that they’re not registered,” BOE Executive Director Michael Ryan told reporters.

Under New York State’s closed primary laws, only registered Democrats and Republicans can vote in party primaries.

It is unclear how many of the 121,056 affidavit voters were wrongly removed from the rolls—but the BOE has suspended two senior officials without pay pending investigation into their roles in an improper purge of 126,000 Brooklyn Democrats from the voter rolls.

Ryan blames the mistaken purge on a New York City Department of Investigation report published at the end of 2013 that criticized the BOE for “leaving too many people on the rolls.”

“The Brooklyn office identified voters who hadn’t voted in a long time, and conducted a purge,” Ryan said, adding that “the proper procedure wasn’t followed.”

Both State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer have launched separate investigations into the BOE’s actions.

As for the contingent of concerned voters that lodged complaints to the board over the past two weeks, Ryan rejected their concerns, saying they were part of an organized group with a specific agenda.

“We were warned in advance that there were folks out there that don’t like the New York primary system, and were going to advance a narrative,” Ryan said. “And they were well in the process of advancing that narrative and trying to make their pitch for why the process should be open primary like other states and not a closed primary.”

Manhattan resident and voting rights activist Nisi Jacobs disagreed.

Jacobs, a Bernie Sanders supporter, said the board’s dismissive response to its critics “highlights the juvenile, contemptuous, unprofessional and abusive relationship that exists between the New York City Board of Elections and the residents of New York City.”

“Instead of a customer service relationship” Jacobs added, “it is one built on power, disrespect, subjugation and alienation.”

‘ADVANCING A NARRATIVE’

But the board claims that most of the voters who believe themselves disenfranchised are actually just confused about the primary laws.

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Both State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer have launched separate investigations into the BOE’s actions.

As for the contingent of concerned voters that lodged complaints to the board over the past two weeks, Ryan rejected their concerns, saying they were part of an organized group with a specific agenda.

“We were warned in advance that there were folks out there that don’t like the New York primary system, and were going to advance a narrative,” Ryan said. “And they were well in the process of advancing that narrative and trying to make their pitch for why the process should be open primary like other states and not a closed primary.”

Manhattan resident and voting rights activist Nisi Jacobs disagreed.

Jacobs, a Bernie Sanders supporter, said the board’s dismissive response to its critics “highlights the juvenile, contemptuous, unprofessional and abusive relationship that exists between the New York City Board of Elections and the residents of New York City.”

“Instead of a customer service relationship” Jacobs added, “it is one built on power, disrespect, subjugation and alienation.”

‘A BYZANTINE AGENCY’

Whether the BOE will be forced to make any significant reform remains to be seen, as the board has a long history of obfuscating votes.

Sam Massol, executive director of the government transparency group Bridge Roots, told The Independent, “This is a long-term, systemic problem in an institution that has zero accountability.”

Although the board’s handling of the April primary is currently receiving a lot of attention, Massol noted that the extra scrutiny is driven by the ability of white progressives to garner media attention for the abuses they experienced.

In New York City’s 2013 mayoral primary at least 1,000
I drew a heart next to Bernie Sanders. I almost wrote, “All Power to the Soviets” or “Bern Baby Bern” but didn’t and just danced in the voting booth. I smiled, kissed my ballot and cast it.

While leaving, a poll worker stared at me, “Having a good time in there?” I ducked her eyes, but outside, raised my hands as if touching clouds and wondered, what if he wins? What if this elderly man, who looks like a crazy hair pencil, who collects the agony of the poor and yetts it at the media, what if he wins?

I did a silly two-step and just felt it. This hope. Felt how rare it was. Felt how it flowed from a clenched place under my navel. A year ago, I barely spoke about the campaign and now I was drawing hearts on ballots. Foolish? Yes, but millions had let that feeling free and it moved the mountain of No, inside us. No from the liberals saying we can’t win. No from the conservatives saying we were communists. No from Marxists saying elections are a trap. No. No. No.

Now we had a self-described socialist within spitting distance of the American presidency. The world was watching, because when you peeled off the ideology, what was left was a simple thing. We wanted to love our neighbors. We wanted everyone to have enough because we’re tired of hurting each other to get it.

Strangers wearing Bernie stickers walked by me. We waved at each other. And then one of them thrust his arms in the air and shouted, “BERNIE!” I pumped my fists and shouted back, “BERNIE!” We kept yelling and raising arms, just random strangers, reaching above ourselves for something higher, something better.

CYNICISM 101

“He’s an idiot.”

“What?” I flinched on the phone.

“You see his Facebook post?” my friend Eric chortled, “He’s all in for the Sanders campaign.” I bit my tongue, not wanting to debate someone who can make an airtight argument even when he is wrong.

But it was strange, I thought, why would Yotam do that? He was a well-known New York organizer, the kind who kept his chin up when being arrested. He was so eerily handsome that he looked like a movie star in handcuffs. He’s bally too. Half the fun of protesting was seeing him stare at cops with so much contempt you’d think their guns would melt.

“No theory,” my friend said, “He’s got no theory. He can’t see Sanders is a sheepdog, his role is to get the Left excited then have them fall in line to the Democrats for the election. Jesse did it in ‘84 and ‘88, Dean did it in 2004. Same bait-and-switch. Same hustle.”

Months ago, I remembered a news clip of Sanders telling a few reporters he was running for president. He announced it on his lunch break then hurried back to Congress for a vote.

I forgot about the senator. I forgot about a lot of things when Black Lives Matter ebbed from the streets. I forgot how to see other faces as mirrors of my own. And how the weight pressing on me was also what caused my neighbors to drink hard, fight hard, yell hard. It was the same one that made friends burst into tears as they talked of dreams being blown away like kites in a storm.

I was going numb too. I hid inside earphones and my cell phone. Got lost in the Internet’s endless maze of glowing worlds. Inside this virtual life, I became like a Russian doll, shrinking into tinier versions of myself until I was a pile of empty shells, rolling out of my virtual life, I became like a Russian doll, shrinking into tinier versions of myself until I was a pile of empty shells, rolling out of my virtual life.

In once a while I saw Sanders on TV at a rally, where mostly white, mostly young but adoring crowds chanted his name. Surely, it sounds good, I thought. But who cares, he’s never going to get the nomination. Nobody serious, nobody smart thought he would. The world is what it is. A heavy mountain of No.

“Hey you still there?” he asked. The phone had been quiet.

“Oh, Sorry,” I stared at the ceiling, “Am I here? I don’t know. I don’t know where I am.”

PILOT LIGHT

My phone buzzed, I got a text, opened it and saw a photo of a guy in a crowd, smiling as he held a banner that read, “Brons is Berning.” My man Ziggy sent it, so I walked outside, called him.

“Yo, Nick,” his voice was blurred by the roar of people cheering, “You still in California? When you coming back?”

“You at the Bernie rally?” I shouted. He said he was, he said it was massive and that all this love electricity made his dreads tingle; he said fuck Hillary and that we can change the world. I was feeling him.

We talked about the accidents of history. The Republicans had imploded and Donald Goddamn Trump was going to be their nominee. America was looking left for a sane choice. And there was Hillary shutting back and forth like a soccer goalie in front of the White House as Bernie kept weaving around her. It was funny. It was sad. But it was dangerous.

We talked about Bernie winning and Team Left stepping up. The ruling class would come down hard. They’d cut a deal with whom- ever they could. If Trump won because we couldn’t get our shit together, Nightmare America would be very, very real. I was scared. But I was hopeful because the prize, if we won, was our lives.

We talked about what it could mean. Free health care. Free college. A jobs program, a New, New Deal. I told him how Mom struggled caring for me as a child, how Reagan gutted programs left and right and we fell through the shredded safety net. Sometimes, I saw her crying on the couch, sitting through bills on the table as if they were strange, unreadable Tarot cards. I told him how scared I was of poverty. Even now, on my street, I saw folks begging on corners or who died before hitting 50 years old, wheeled out on stretchers. I just wanted all this useless pain to stop.


WINDOW SEAT

At 36,000 feet in the air, America was a patchwork quilt of land. Forehead on window, I stared at my nation, my home and wanted to feel “the Bern” but we’ve been here before. Hope and change. That whole thing.

Far below me, Democrats and Republicans were crisscrossing the states, waging internal battles for their base while fighting each other for the undecided voter. I imagined the red state, blue state political map over the earth. Here lived the voters they wooed. Some were loyal to a vision, many were undecided, many just fucking ignorant. Half didn’t even vote. Which pissed me off.

But a lot of non-voters were, I knew, poor, they worked too many hours to go vote or if they were free, couldn’t find transport. They move a lot and couldn’t register on time or afford ID. They can’t wait in line for hours. They are exhausted by the lies.

Night came and swallowed the land. Cities looked like tiny glittery anthills in space. All the light we create, I thought, with our media, our stories. And yet most people live in the darkness outside.
face in real time, pick up all the sublim-
inal bodily cues obscured by cameras 
and microphones. He will sweat right 
in front of me. Maybe even spit. It could 
be a baptism.

Friends called me over, we talked, 
caught in the rising joy. People held 
signs, wore “Bernie 2016” t-shirts. Smiles 
multipled with every hug. We stood 
under the bright sun, laughing at 
the smell of marijuana, at how stupid 
Trump was, how wild it is that a social-
ist got this close and again how stupid 
Trump was. But I felt it was time to 
leave, even if I missed Sanders, I had to 
go.

I took the 3 train, got off at the Van 
Siclen stop and walked around the pro-
jects aimlessly, blindly, compulsively. 
Not knowing why. Maybe thinking 
how New York has very low voter turn-
out and the poorest areas like this one, 
filled with the most people, are barely 
seen on election day. Maybe it’s (was) 
because from 36,000 feet in the sky 
most of America looks like it lives in 
darkness.

I replayed the memory of the mostly 
white crowd at the rally and imagined 
them cheering Bernie in this public 
housing plaza. And laughed. Wow. 
That’d grab attention. But to do that 
they’d have to leave their roles in the 
invisible story they told themselves about 
race and class. One that goes, I’d be 
robbed, raped or killed. Or I’d be wasting 
my time because they’re too fucking up, too poor to vote. They’d have to 
leave that story and create a new one 
with the people here.

A young man passed by me, rapping 
to himself. I remembered a document-
ary on the rise of Hip Hop in 1970s 
New York. Just as bad then as it is now. 
Gangs cut neighborhoods apart. If you 
crossed the line, you’d splash in your 
own blood. But those young men, under 
pressure from the cascading grief pour-
ing from every face they knew, held a 
gathering and signed a treaty. In the 
early fragile peace, Afrika Bambataa 
and DJ Kool Herc plugged sound sys-
tems into city streetlights and blasted 
the pain from people’s bodies with giant 
speakers booming planet-sized beats.

How we needed that now. I stared at 
the projects and imagined all of us to-
gether, the white people from the Bernie 
rally dancing alongside everyone from 
the Hip Hop documentary but those

70s Black and Latino New Yorkers 
were old and dancing with their adult 
children who now had kids of their 
own. Some of whom were trapped in 
these same buildings today.

It was fun to think. All of us rewriting 
with our limbs, a new story for us to 
live. And driving the music was fucking 
Bernie, one hand on his headphones as 
he leaned over his DJ laptop, toggling 
knobs, yelling as his white hair flew, 
“I’m about to drop a YUGE BEAT!”

Since it was an impossible act of 
imagination, I let myself see my mom, 
young and wide-eyed, dancing as she 
throw all those unpaid bills in the air. 
God, we could have used Bernie in the 
’80s.

Then I laughed and came back to 
reality. Dream on, nigga, dream on. I 
got home and, the next morning, saw 
a report of Sanders visiting the projects 
in Brownsville, Brooklyn. “It is ab-
surd,” he said in his earnest raspy voice, 
“That 35 percent of African-American 
children are living in poverty.”

He’s so sweet. It’s like he heard me 
yesterday. I kept saying where’s your DJ 
equipment, Bernie, where is it?

ELECTION DAY

“You voted for Hillary, right?” the 
older Black woman teased the hipsters 
walking down the street. One turned 
around. “I’m with her,” he beamed as 
they cheered. Gritting my teeth, I called 
my friend Lady Dragonfly.

“What’s up.”

“You’re the craziest reverse racial con-
descending just happened. An older 
sis, grandma level, just hollered love 
at white hipsters,” I was nearly panting 
from walking fast, “For — get this — voting for Hillary!”

“What,” her voice nearly broke, “Oh 
checkmate. They must be so happy. 
They got a seal of approval. Whatever. 
Just cause she’s an elder don’t make her 
right.”

“I know,” my free hand was pulling 
at my hair, “They act like she’s fucking 
Maya Angelou. What the hell does she 
know? Really? Did she do the research 
before going for Hillary? Grandmothers 
don’t even know who got molested in 
their families, how am I supposed to

Continued on page 12
Winnie Wong: There has been an ongoing conversation among Native Nations United, People for Bernie, Democratic Socialists of America and a number of other groups about doing something between the California primary and the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia to ensure that the participation in this moment would not dissipate and that we could figure out what to do next in a context that we think is still happening.

What would you like to see happen?

I would like to see a progressive platform supported by elected officials who will be attending the conference, as well as run by the elector who are running for office and progressive political organizations that will be attending as well. It's going to be a big space with people from many different backgrounds and political allegiances coming together to figure on a new path of their power. They will see this as a part of their power, whether it is a part of their movement or not, but it will be a way to see the power that we have. This is an opportunity to open up the debate.

John Tarleton: It’s been a long primary battle between Sanders and Hillary Clinton that has exploded many people’s expectations. What do you see the future of the Sanders campaign looking like?

Tarleton: I think the Sanders campaign has a lot to build on, a lot to work with. If they can find a way to connect with the people who are already there and build on that, then I think they can be successful. But it’s not going to be pretty. It’s going to take a lot of work. But if they can find a way to connect with the people who are already there, then I think they can be successful.

Do you have a sense of whether the Sanders campaign will continue or not?

I don’t think that things are ever really going to go back to the way they were. I don’t think that there will be an end to the movement. I think that there will be a movement that is going to continue. But it’s going to be different. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more decentralized. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more grassroots. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more about people power. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more about community power. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more about transforming our culture and people can adapt to these new very challenging times. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more about building a new world.

SUMMER GATHERINGS

The Peoples’ Summit will take place in Chicago from June 17-19. This gathering of thousands of people across multiple platforms will be the largest of its kind for a people’s convention in the last 50 years, and will be a massive celebration of the power of the people. For more information, see thepeoplessummit.org. — INDYPENDENT STAFF

CHARLES LENCHNER

On the Left is prismatic in so many different directions. How do you avoid that, so the unity of the force is not destroyed after the unification of a campaign is no longer present?

I think that we need to understand that the unity of the force is not going to be destroyed after the unification of a campaign is no longer present. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more about people power. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more about community power. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more about transforming our culture and people can adapt to these new very challenging times. It’s going to be a movement that is going to be more about building a new world.
The Independent

turned toward others, keep open to all forms of struggle. wrestling with myself because his tone was saying, yes, keep your heart damn ... just vote, please.”

privilege to say reforms that save lives don’t matter. And reforms don’t could have stayed together. So when I hear them say voting doesn’t add enough to feel shame. If Bernie had been president maybe our family call my friend and talk about poor people as if they were echoes.

Houses’ public housing plaza. Nothing changed in the real world. Young after he lost New York’s primaries. He was chastened, sad eyed. When

ons, in practical terms, the poor and homeless.”

Planes flew like giant dark arrows shot across the sky. Evening had come and I was on the roof, pacing back and forth, cellphone next to my ear. “When we say that child who is hungry is my child, I think we

raised his eyebrows and pointed to himself, “I hurt.” He circled his desperation. I have it too.

search for sincerity. It’s a survival mechanism when you grow up around

out his truth, working class people do that a lot, use a kind of radar to

about his spirituality?”

8, some live in public housing, they nodded their heads to his words as if

by-point why poverty was absurd. Some of my students are on Section

up with him in the projects, squinting in the sun, breaking down point-

presidential candidate to visit Brownsville.”

Questions flickered in their eyes so I called up the video. The screen lit up with him in the projects, squinting in the sun, breaking down point-by-point why poverty was absurd. Some of my students are on Section 8, some live in public housing, they nodded their heads to his words as if some inner tide was moving through them.

“Professor,” a student said, “Can you click on the one where he talks about his spirituality?” I did. The class leaned in, listened, sifting his words and tone to map out his truth, working class people do that a lot, use a kind of radar to search for sincerity. It’s a survival mechanism when you grow up around desperation. I have it too.

“At some level, when you hurt, when your children hurt,” Sanders raised his eyebrows and pointed to himself, “I hurt.” He circled his hands. “When we say that child who is hungry is my child, I think we are more human. That’s my religion. That’s what I believe in.” I saw the light from the screen reflected on their eyes and glasses. I felt what they felt. The need to believe that someone hears us. That our needs can be answered. That we are not alone. And here was this man who said we were in this together. Needed that feeling. And I was scared of hope dying in the cold machinery of politics.

“Bernie! Bernie!” the chant came from the back row, Kango hat slid sideways, “His whole rap is how inequality is wrong. I was feeling him. I was like check out this old white man strolling in the

row, Kango hat slid sideways, “His whole rap is how inequality is wrong. Over the chuckling, I wagged a finger at her and mouthed “stop it”.

“What’s your ideology,” I spread my arms, “You have to fi gure that

out to navigate the world. On one hand, conservatism holds that in-

equality is good, whether because it is seen as natural or traditional.” I

putting the soul in socialism

“What if Trump wins,” I asked the class.

“My mom was on welfare in the ‘80s,” I said, “Not long but long enough to feel shame. If Bernie had been president maybe our family could have stayed together. So when I hear them say voting doesn’t add up to much, I get heated. You gotta be coming from a serious place of privilege to say reforms that save lives don’t matter. And reforms don’t even get people what they need, you know, we survive without it but

damn ... just vote, please.”

“I think that’s a good line,” he assured me, maybe he sensed I was wrestling with myself because his tone was saying, yes, keep your heart turned toward others, keep open to all forms of struggle.

We said goodbye and I felt the heaviness of Bernie not winning the Democratic nomination. But I was grateful to this man. He made socialism a clean word. He reconnected a fractured Left. He showed us a new, small donor model of challenging the establishment. He made us visible to other families, such as Gurley’s, have been made to suffer. None of the officers involved in Eric Garner’s death have been arrested or charged criminally; meanwhile, Ramsey Orta and Taisha Allen, whose cell-phone videos of his death went viral, have both been arrested since. Their respective attorneys have categorized the arrests as retaliation for the videos.

Both Nicholas Heyward Sr. and the Ojedas have petitioned Brooklyn District Attorney Kenneth Thompson to reopen criminal investigations against officers George and Mendez. Late last year, Thompson agreed to reinvestigate the Heyward case.
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The problem with natural gas

While it is true that natural gas emits 59 percent less carbon dioxide than coal when burned, it is composed primarily of methane—a gas 70 times as potent as CO₂, for retaining heat in the atmosphere. Research suggests that if as little as 3 percent leaks during the drilling process, natural gas’ climate impact is on par with coal’s.

How much methane regularly leaks into the atmosphere is difficult to gauge precisely. Data compiled by the nonprofit FracTracker Alliance in August estimated there are 1.7 million active oil and gas wells in the United States, and gas drilling and the build-up of related infrastructure have spiked in recent years due to fracking technology.

A significant body of research suggests that large amounts of methane are being released as a result of fracking. A 2013 study led by scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found that 6.2 percent to 11.7 percent of gas extracted in Utah’s Uintah Basin wound up in the atmosphere. In a 2014 study that drew on inspection reports from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, researchers at Cornell University determined that fracked wells in the Keystone State were leaking at a rate of 8 percent.

Tony Ingraffea, the lead author of the Cornell study, frequently avers that natural gas isn’t a “bridge fuel” to the time when renewable energy becomes practical, as the drilling industry would have us believe, but “a gangplank to more warming and away from clean energy investments.”

— Peter Rugh

**Fossil Fuels**

**Pipeline Battles Multiply**

By Peter Rugh

**Ingredients:**

One high-pressure natural gas pipeline, 3.5 feet in diameter

Two 50-year-old nuclear reactors

**Preparation:**

Situate each ingredient beside the United States’ largest metropolitan area. Combine.

The above recipe was provided courtesy of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Spectra Energy and Entergy Corporation.

Spectra’s Algonquin Incremental Market Project, also known by its acronym as the AIM pipeline, will pass about 1,200 feet from Entergy’s 50-year-old Indian Point 3 nuclear reactor in Buchanan, N.Y., on the Hudson River approximately 45 miles from Times Square. FERC approved the pipeline last year after an NRC specialist claimed it would pose no risk to Indian Point’s two reactors.

The AIM pipeline, scheduled to be completed in November, will connect the existing Algonquin pipeline in northern New Jersey with Boston and ports in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. It will be able to carry 342,000 dekatherms of natural gas per day, roughly equivalent to 342 million cubic feet. Spectra paid Entergy a one-time licensing fee for the use of its property, which Entergy said was “in line with industry practice.”

The AIM pipeline is among the natural-gas infrastructure projects that have been built recently or are under way along the East Coast. They are driven by the use of hydraulic fracturing, or fraking, to extract natural gas from the massive underground Marcellus Shale formation. New York State banned fracking in 2014 after years of protests about its environmental and health dangers, but it is still very much in use in other states above the Marcellus Shale, particularly Pennsylvania.

After their success banning fracking, environmentalists in New York have turned their attention to the new wave of gas pipelines and compressor stations. “We want New York State to be a stopping point, where they can’t use our state as a conduit for gas,” said Kim Fraczek, an organizer with Sane Energy Project. “Fracking is still going on in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. They want to compress, pipe and ship their gas throughout New York and New England. But if we stop these pipes, they won’t have the ability to get their product to market.”

Grassroots pressure exerted by Sane Energy and other New York environmental groups has continued to pay off. In April, the state Department of Environmental Conservation, after receiving approximately 15,000 written comments, mainly from pipeline opponents, rejected water permits for Williams Partners’ Constitution Pipeline, which would have carried fracked gas into New York from Pennsylvania. The energy giant Kinder Morgan had planned to use the same right-of-way passage through New York for its Northeast Energy Direct pipeline, but scrapped the $3.3 billion project to pump gas from Pennsylvania to New England shortly after the Constitution pipeline was rejected. Last November, Gov. Andrew Cuomo mixed plans for an offshore liquefied natural gas export terminal about 18 miles south of Long Island. Long Island and New York’s power authorities are currently weighing whether to build an offshore wind farm in the area.

“We’re finding that these infrastructure battles, while localized, taken together are part of a larger movement toward more climate-friendly energy sources,” said Patrick Robbins, also with Sane Energy. New gas infrastructure, he added, helps fracked gas “directly compete on the market with renewable sources.” He points to coalitions such as Beyond Extreme Energy, which works to unite local communities opposing pipelines and to advocate renewable energy instead.

Proponents of natural gas insist it contributes less to climate change and produces less air pollution than coal and oil do. Other talking points for gas include its low price and widespread availability. Spectra Energy’s website frames the argument as a gateway to untapped markets abroad. “With its nearness to the Marcellus Shale basin, New York should participate in prices lower than those experienced from 2000 through 2010 and more similar to those of the last few years,” the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority declared in its 2015 Energy Plan. It projected that gas prices for the residential sector will grow by less than 1 percent a year over the next decade. Ironically, the authority is headed by Richard Kaufman, a former Goldman Sachs executive who Cuomo tapped as his “energy czar” shortly after Hurricane Sandy to move the state toward cleaner sources of power.

New York uses more gas than any other state in the Northeast. Gas-fired plants produced 44 percent of the state’s energy last year, compared with 35 percent in 2009, when the gas boom had only just begun.

But in the long term, according to Robbins, the growth in gas infrastructure has little to do with meeting domestic demand, since increased drilling has led to a glut of cheap gas. It has more to do with using the Eastern Seaboard as a gateway to untapped markets abroad.

In reaction to the 1973–74 “energy crisis,” Congress passed the 1975 Energy Policy and Conservation Act, which banned the export of both crude oil and natural gas. While the Commerce Department developed regulations prohibiting crude-oil exports, however, it never did so for gas. In fact, the House approved legislation to expedite the approval of liquefied natural gas export terminals in November, and a version of the bill is currently before the Senate. A host of new terminals has already begun cropping up, including Cove Point in Maryland, where Dominion Power plans to ship nearly a billion cubic feet a day. Environmental groups estimate the Cove Point facility will spawn some 3,000 new fracked wells in Pennsylvania.

**AFTER THEIR SUCCESS BANNING FRACKING, ENVIRONMENTALISTS ARE SEEKING TO STOP A NEW WAVE OF GAS PIPELINES AND COMPRESSOR STATIONS.**
“As gas companies scramble to recoup profits, they are looking for new places with secure demand,” said Robbins. “Building gas generation while they wait for markets to recover is a great way for them to appear profitable in the meantime.” Their long-term payoff, he added, will come when they can reach foreign markets where their gas will fetch a higher price.

The biggest long-term issue with natural gas, however, is that it’s current cheap price masks the future costs of global warming caused by the continued burning of fossil fuels. “Climate change represents the greatest threat to our homes and well-being in the coming century,” Robbins warned. “Locking us into a fossil fuel-based energy system is a guaranteed way to raise those costs.”

It also entails sacrifice on the part of those who live beside industrial well pads on what was once farmland, near power plants and compressor stations that thicken the air with smog and along the polluted path of pipelines.

“Like a lot of people when you hear, ‘They’re going to put a natural gas pipeline right next to a nuclear power station, right next to your kids’ school, and right next to your house,’ you think, ‘No way is the government going to let that happen,’” said Courtney Williams of Peaks Kill, New York, whose home sits beside the AIM pipeline’s slated path. “But, yes, as preposterous as it sounds, that exactly is what’s going on.”

Williams, a Princeton-trained physicist and mother of two small children, has joined with her neighbors to rally against AIM. The Indian Point nuclear plant has already had a string of accidents, including a leak of radioactive tritium gas in January. Opponents warn that the pipeline, which will pass less than 120 feet from the plant’s backup electrical switches and diesel-fuel tanks, will compound the risk of an explosion. Since last fall, they have performed a string of civil disobedience actions halting construction of the pipeline. Meanwhile, an online petition calling on FERC to retract Spectra’s permit has collected over 27,000 signatures.

Groups like Sane Energy and their allies hope they can build a movement big enough to pressure decision makers to move toward renewable energy and away from fossil fuels and the cataclysmic climate impacts they entail. The state Public Service Commission is expected to release details soon of its “Reforming Energy Vision” (REV) plan, which pledges to cut the state’s greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent and to generate 50 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2030.

However, Cuomo and his energy czar, Kaufman, appear to have taken a page from President Barack Obama’s “all of the above” energy strategy. Gas remains a heavy fixture in the state’s plans, even while significant investments in renewable energy are under way, including a $900 million solar panel manufacturing plant in Buffalo. The governor may have had less than altruistic motives for promoting that project, though: His administration is under a Justice Department investigation for awarding the contract to build the plant to LPCimrnelli, a top campaign contributor.

“A lot of what’s in REV looks great on paper,” said Kim Frazek. “But none of it is going to move forward in a genuine fashion if we don’t conduct the activism we need to do.”

BOARd OF ELECTIOnS
Continued from page 7

South Bronx ballots were lost, Massol said, and it “didn’t even make the news.”

“This is a bigger problem than just the Sanders campaign getting disenfranchised,” Massol added.

The Democratic and Republican party leaders in each of the five boroughs appoint the 10 commissioners who head the BOE. And it is the BOE’s ties to deeply entrenched party machines that make it what Massol describes as “one of the last great patronage mills in the State of New York.”

The same insular political culture that nurtures the BOE produced the laws that exclude non-party-affiliated voters from participating in primaries. So says Megan Ahearn, program director at the nonpartisan government watchdog New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG). The six-month deadline New Yorkers have to change parties before a primary “was brought about because the BOE system is run by the parties,” Ahearn told The Indypendent.

“In some elections, you don’t even hear from the candidates that far in advance,” Ahearn said. “How do you know what conversation [or] election you want to be a part of?”

ROCKING THE BOAT

“The state is not going to fix itself,” Massol said. Instead, it will take a concerted effort from independent good-government groups and outraged citizens to create the momentum for change.

NYPIRG’s Megan Ahearn wants same-day registration, as well as a nonpartisan BOE to “help bring the politics out of decision making and be more accessible to voters.”

Some at the BOE’s public hearings have called for a re-count, others for the U.S. attorney general to intervene. In April Mayor Bill De Blasio offered the BOE nearly $20 million in exchange for “commonsense” reforms.

There is no shortage of ideas, but Massol warns that advocates for reform also “need to be realistic, not make promises or say things we can’t deliver on.” The veteran of good-government efforts continued, “There’s not going to be a recount” in a contest that Clinton won by 58-42 percent with a statewide margin of 290,000 votes.

Separate investigations launched by State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and City Comptroller Scott Stringer may provide some insight into the BOE’s missteps, but political calculations may water down any findings—Schneiderman’s is eye on a future run for governor and Stringer is widely thought to be weighing a 2017 mayoral bid.

In the second public hearing after the primary, BOE executive director Ryan informed the public that if they don’t like the law, “you have to petition your legislators to change it, and then we’ll follow the new law.”

But it is common knowledge that a majority of legislation fed to state Democrats by voter advocacy groups runs the high risk of becoming a so-called “one-house” bill—one that passes the Democrat-dominated State Assembly only to die in the Republican-controlled Senate with the behind-the-scenes blessing of Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

“The powers that be don’t want this change,” Massol said.

“You have a lawnmower that’s broken,” the Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, resident added. “I know how to fix your lawnmower, I know what’s wrong, but you don’t want me to touch it, because you don’t want to seem unable to fix it yourself.”

5 WAYS TO MAKE NEW YORK VOTING EASIER
The NYC Board of Elections has earned its share of public outrage. However, it’s important to remember that many of the problems we saw on April 19 stem from outdated laws that New York State legislators have so far refused to change. Here are five reforms that would make a difference.

• IMPLEMENT AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION
California, Oregon, Vermont and West Virginia now automatically register eligible voters when they provide their personal information to a state agency while applying for a driver’s license or government assistance or enrolling in a university, among other examples. More than two dozen other states including New York are considering legislation that would do the same.

• INSTITUTE EARLY VOTING
Early voting allows more people to vote who might otherwise be deterred by their personal schedules or concerns about long lines on election days. Thirty-four states have early voting. New York does not.

• CREATE A PRE-REGISTRATION SYSTEM FOR 16 AND 17-YEAR-OLD VOTERS
Millennials have already shaken up this election year with their overwhelming support for Bernie Sanders. Now imagine if we made it normal and easy for the young to register to vote well in advance of their 18th birthdays?

• END CLOSED PRIMARIES
Three million New Yorkers were ineligible to vote in the presidential primaries because they are not registered as a Democrat or a Republican. If you wanted to change your party affiliation to vote in a primary you had to do so by Oct. 9, 2015, the earliest cut-off date of any state in the nation.

• IMPROVE THE CANDIDATE POOL
OK, this is changing the topic a bit. But if we’re going to overhaul the rules around the voting process to make it easier and more inclusive, let’s also work on getting big money out of politics. It’s also time to jettison laws that make it difficult for third parties to grow and easy for the major parties to take their supporters for granted. Only then will we consistently have candidates worth voting for.

— INDYPENDENT STAFF
**ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE**

*Democracy Now! Twenty Years Covering the Movements Changing America*  
By Amy Goodman with David Goodman and Denis Mohnihan  
Simon & Schuster, 2016

**Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities**  
By Rebecca Solnit  
Harvard Books, 2016

By Beatrix Lockwood

Never are the corporate media more out of their element than when covering rising social movements. The reasons for this are many: the corporate media generally don’t pay much attention to the conditions that produce a movement like Occupy Wall Street or Black Lives Matter. But they emerge in the streets. Most mainstream journalists have little or no familiarity with social movements or their participants. The chaotic, egalitarian nature of many movements, their seemingly “unrealistic” demands and their spirited earnestness can be jarring for journalists who are more attuned to the conventional wisdom emitted from the corridors of establishment power.

Yet, the same corporate media outlets that are always late to grasp these movements’ import are the first to proclaim their demise and write them off as misguided failures. In such a milieu, we are fortunate to have independent, non-corporate journalists like Amy Goodman, who has been at the side of social movements for decades and can help us put some of their remarkable accomplishments in perspective.

Goodman’s new book, *Democracy Now!* Twenty Years Covering the Movements Changing America, written with her brother David Goodman and longtime collaborator Denis Mohnihan, revisits some of the stories that she and her team at Democracy Now! have covered since they launched their small, independent radio broadcast in 1996. Now, 20 years later, *Democracy Now!* is the largest single-day protest in history. Goodman revisits some of the many movements that she and her team have covered. She has chapters on the anti-war movements that erupted in 2003, the efforts of whistleblowers to expose our growing surveillance state, Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter and movements for LGBT equality, immigrant rights and environmental justice.

Goodman challenges the conventional narrative that many of these movements failed, arguing instead that many of their efforts are simply still unfinished. She gives credit to grassroots organizers and activists who use the results of their hard work — sweeping and incremental, intended and unintended, near and far away.

Although Goodman’s reflections on her time as the host of *Democracy Now!* will resonate most with longtime listeners and fans, this is a book for anyone interested in how social movements work. She relies on her interviews and broadcasts to form her narrative, but the story is less about the show than it is about the broader social movements that it has touched over the years. She begins her chapter on climate justice, for example, with a transcript of an interview she conducted in 2012 with Kumi Naidoo, the executive director of Greenpeace International. They spoke while he was hanging suspended from an oil rig in the Arctic Ocean to protest Gazprom, the first oil company to drill in the region. The interview alone is striking, but especially so when placed in the broader context of the climate justice movement. In the rest of the chapter, Goodman looks at other activists who have fought against the corporations that have enriched themselves while destroying our planet. She tells the stories of the Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed after he helped expose Chevron’s “drilling and killing” program in his home country. The protesters who stopped the 1,200-mile-long Keystone oil pipeline and of the indigenous people who have won significant victories against corporations in Canada, the United States and around the world.

At a time when covering climate change is often characterized by despair and cynicism, it is refreshing to be reminded of the victories activists have already achieved.

In this way, *Democracy Now!* has much in common with Rebecca Solnit’s *Hope in the Dark*, which was reissued in March with a new foreword and afterward. The book was first published as an online essay in 2003, shortly after the Bush administration launched its “shock and awe” bombing campaign in Iraq. While pundits and journalists dismissed antiwar demonstrations as the global day of protest on February 15, 2003 — the largest single-day protest in history — Solnit looks at them alongside struggles such as the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Mexico and the 1999 protests at the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle. She rejects the impulse to dismiss movements as irrelevant when they fail to meet major goals. Instead, she highlights the power of incremental change and the small triumphs of grassroots organizers that often go unnoticed, even by the organizers.

Though both Goodman and Solnit take on much of the same political and historical material, their approaches are quite different. Goodman, the resident journalist, approaches the subject of social change head on, present-
MEET THE PARTY OF UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS LIBERALS

Listen, Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened to the Party of the People?
By Thomas Frank
Metropolitan Books, 2016

By Steven Sherman

Listen, Liberal, by historian Thomas Frank, makes a major contribution by bringing into focus the base for the neoliberal turn of Bill Clinton and Obama, upper-middle-class professionals. The focus on this group is a far cry from Occupy’s denunciations of “the 1%” or Bernie Sanders’ rhetoric about the “millionaires and billionaires.” Frank’s sociology is richer than that, but the book has one serious weakness, which muddies its understanding of the future.

Frank describes the ideology of professionalism, the belief that credentials demonstrate worth. Liberal professionalism also involves a strong sense of trend-following and often complex and needlessly complexity. It is an ideology of expertise over democracy. Frank considers professionals to be “the liberal class.”

Professionals began to take over the Democratic Party when college-educated liberals succeeded in getting George McGovern nominated in 1972. Dismissive of the concerns of unionized blue-collar workers, who they saw as pro-war, sexist morons, many looked forward to the end of the New Deal. McGovern lost in a landslide, but the unions never returned to the central place they held in the Democratic coalition between the 1930s and the late ’60s. Industrial workers were no longer important; what mattered was to give free rein to those who used their minds and demonstrated their value through their degrees. From McGovern to Dukakis, the Democrats struggled to put together a majority coalition in presidential elections, with each loss followed by cries that the Democrats needed to move further to the right. Finally, Bill Clinton ended the losing streak. Although Clinton had some economic populist elements in his speeches, he soon learned that the situation turned into an embrace of its logic. Clinton was the Democrat who learned to love Wall Street, which, with its needlessly complex products, was naturally appealing to meritocratic professionals. And so Clinton largely demonstrated their value through their degrees.

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OPPOSITION FROM THE STREETS

After the Decatur uprising, Frank ignores virtually all opposition to the neoliberal Dems from the left. Unmentioned or barely noted struggles include the 1997 UPS strike; the Battle of Seattle; the Nader campaign; the anti-Iraq War movement; the Howard Dean candidacy; immigrant rights protests; the Wisconsin uprising; Occupy Wall Street; the Chicago teachers strike; the elections of Elizabeth Warren, Kshama Sawant and Bill de Blasio; Fight for $15, and Black Lives Matter. These struggles have been coming much faster and fiercer since OWS broke the dam in 2011, culminating in Bernie Sanders’ campaign for president (apparently under way as Frank was completing Listen, Liberal), which will claim over 10 million votes.

There is a class divide within the professional class. The professionals who provide the backbone for neoliberalism are upper-middle-class, such as doctors, lawyers and corporate middle managers. They make enough money to be pleased with the current direction of the country. But this group constitutes only a minority of college-educated professionals. There is a larger group, including teachers, nurses, and social workers. This group might be described as “aspiring professionals,” as it is not unrealistic to believe that one might ascend into the upper-middle class. Or they might be described as the “college-educated working class,” to emphasize that they are often the targets of cuts and speed-ups and are sometimes even unable to make a living wage or find secure employment (for example, adjunct professors).

“Aspiring professionals” captures the dominant consciousness of this group throughout the 1980s and ’90s. Few identified with the unions that were being crushed. When Bill Clinton won, aspiring professionals were relieved to see one of their own reclaim the White House. But things have changed over the last 15 years. Rising health-care costs, increasing college tuition and lousy job markets have robbed many of these professionals of a sense that they can achieve a middle-class livelihood. This has created the grounds for solidarity with a broader working class. This is the context for Occupy Wall Street and the Sanders campaign, as well as the considerable sympathy for Fight for $15 and Black Lives Matter. Hillary Clinton has little to offer the “college-educated working class,” even if many will pull the lever for her in November to fend off the Republicans. She may breathe a sigh of relief if she is victorious, but she resembles the cartoon coyote who does not notice the ground has disappeared beneath his feet as he runs off a cliff. At that point, he goes into freefall.
The death of Prince made me pause, in the same way the deaths of Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston and David Bowie did. Shock at their untimely, unexpected passings was part of it, of course, but there was more. I was born in 1976, and Prince, Bowie, Jackson and Houston provided a huge chunk of the soundtrack to my life. It’s hard to believe we lost them all in the space of less than six years. Their talent can’t be replaced, and their influence was huge.

I’ll admit, I’m not Prince’s biggest fan, but the songs I like by him are ones I’d want to take with me to a desert island. “Erotic City,” “Controversy,” “Thieves in the Temple,” “Money Don’t Matter 2 Night,” “A Love Bizarre.” All meet my simple criteria for great music — you can play them multiple times and not get bored. “Purple Rain” was Prince taking his heart out of his chest and laying it at our feet. I’m embarrassed it took his death for me to realize that.

But that’s the thing about a famous person’s death. It forces us to consider (or reconsider) a life — and the life of Prince Rogers Nelson was a fascinating, joyful, controversial and complicated thing. Musically, Prince covered a lot of ground — disco, pop, rock, jazz, R&B. One of his biggest influences, he told Rolling Stone, was Carlos Santana. The magazine called Prince one of the top 100 best guitarists (#33, specifically), but the general public didn’t see him as a guitar guy. Our stupidity.

Prince wrote both sweet, romantic ballads you could play at your wedding and baby-making music with titles that seemed to come directly off adult-movie marquees. He was the brains behind “Nothing Compares 2 U” and “I Feel For You,” two songs that couldn’t be more diverse, sung by two artists (Sinead O’Connor and Chaka Khan, respectively) at opposite ends of the pop spectrum. He also gave “Manic Monday” to The Bangles and co-wrote “Stand Back” for Stevie Nicks. Other than “I Feel For You,” none seem like typical Prince songs. But that was Prince. He surprised.

His songwriting matched the sophistication of his music, exploring themes like the end of the world in “1999,” religion in “I Would Die 4 U,” AIDS, gangs and drugs in “Sign O’ The Times,” nuclear holocaust in “Ronnie, Talk to Russia,” poverty and war in “Money Don’t Matter 2 Night” — while keeping it all catchy.

And while his music spanned all sorts of genres and subjects, his presentation spanned genders. He wasn’t afraid to wear ruffles, heels, eyeliner and long hair, and he flocked to gory purple like it was a long-lost cousin. And yet he appeared, for all intents and purposes, straight. Was he secretly bisexual, a repressed trans woman or just a really feminine straight dude? If Prince was out, he would have likely run into some trouble, but as a sexual question mark, he was safe, and what’s more, he intrigued.

Prince’s sexual lyrics indirectly changed the record industry when, in the mid-’80s, Tipper Gore, future Vice President Al Gore’s wife, created the Parents Music Resource Center, in part after hearing “Darling Nikki.” (“I knew a girl named Nikki/I guess you could say she was a sex fiend/I met her in a hotel lobby/Masturbating with a magazine.”) The PMRC led to the creation of the Parental Advisory label, still in use today. But the artist who was too hot for Tipper eventually became sexually conservative himself.

According to Billboard, in 2001, Prince “cut a number of songs from his repertoire that he deemed too explicit, and even stopped swearing. Paisley Park [his home/studio complex], which always had been dry, felt to many more like a junior-high dance than the sex-drenched den of sin from years past.” He became a Jehovah’s Witness around that time.

His relationship with the gay community was also problematic. He revealed to Chris Rock on a 1997 MTV News show that he didn’t sing on Michael Jackson’s “Bad” because he took issue with the lyric “Your butt is mine.” “Now listen,” Prince said in a half-joking, half-tough manner, “who gonna sing that to whom? Cause you sure ain’t singing it to me. And I sure ain’t singing it to you. So right there we got, you know…. Right there we got a problem.”

In a 2008 interview with the New Yorker, Prince said gay marriage wasn’t “right,” and was quoted as saying, “God came to earth and saw people picking it wherever and doing it with whatever, and he just cleared it all out.” (A source who spoke to celebrity gossip columnist Perez Hilton claimed Prince was misquoted; the New Yorker disagreed.)

And yet, one can not deny he was a champion of civil rights. “Albums still matter,” Prince said at the 2015 Grammy awards. “Like books and black lives, albums still matter. Tonight and always.”

This time last year, Prince’s song “Baltimore,” about the deaths of Freddie Gray and Michael Brown, was making news. He also gave money to Trayvon Martin’s family and funded Yes We Code, a nonprofit group helping inner-city youth develop skills for careers in tech-related fields.

It’s hard to believe all these different Princes existed in the same person — including the more troubling side we didn’t know about until recently. “Pop Life” contains lyrics that could sadly wind up being prophetic after the cause of his death is revealed:

“The river of addiction flows/You think it’s hot, but there won’t be no water/When the fire blows.” Prince’s fire is out, but man, those flames were surely something to look at while they lasted.
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