WHO SAYS RADICALS CAN’T HAVE NICE THINGS?

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MAY 18.

The Indypendent #246: May 2019 • Indypendent.org

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Play This Board Game
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Where the Power Lies
P16

Take Down the Landlords

Will This Be the Year That Tenants Win Sweeping Rent Law Reforms?
Coverage Starts on P6

The Radical Spring Ball

MAY 18.

Who says radicals can’t have nice things?
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MAY

THRU MAY 26
TUE–SUN, 12PM–7PM • FREE
EXHIBITION: JOAN CORNELLÀ: KEEP IT REAL
Presenting the unique dark and unsettling irony of the interna-
tionally renowned Catalan artist and cartoonist. With no shame
or fear of offending the viewer, Cornellà insists on depicting
surreal macabre situations, always strongly connected with
the latest social issues, where the characters cynically, but al-
ways cheerfully, do what should never be done. Besides some of
his signature pieces, the artist will produce fresh artworks
linked to his time in New York.
GR GALLERY
255 Bowery, Mhattan

MAY 1–JUNE 7
WED, 6PM • FREE
DANCE: BRYANT PARK DANCE PARTY
Top notch bands and dance instructors — an unforgettable outdoor dancing experiences. Explore a different dance genre
each week, including salsa, contra and more.
BRYANT PARK
6th Av. 40th & 42nd Sts & Fifth & Sixth Aves., Mhattan

MAY 8–JAN 3
SUN–THU 10AM–9PM, FRI 10AM–5PM • $16–$25
EXHIBITION: AUSCHWITZ: NOT LONG AGO. NOT FAR AWAY.
Dedicated to documenting the historical significance of the
notorious death camp with over 700 original objects and more
than 400 images.
MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE
9 Battery Pl., Mhattan

THE MAY 9
5PM–8PM • FREE
ART OPENING: ON GENTRIFICATION: MI CASA ES SU CASA
Set in a historic and architecturally significant landmark, this group ex-
hibition investigates notions of home (metaphorical and literal),
belonging, displacement, street life, urban renewal, gentrifica-
tion and activism. On view May 9 to June 6, by appointment
only: 848-541-5357
REVIVAL ROMANESQUE ROW
HOUSE GALLERY
413 E. 14th St., Bronx

THU MAY 16
7PM–9:30PM • FREE
BOOK LAUNCH: BREAKING BLACKENGLISH: BLACK-ARAB LITERARY SOUARDITIES
& THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE
Michelle Hartman explores the black-Arab relationship through language, with a focus on Arab-
American literature that uses the English language creatively
to put into practice many of the ideas advanced by black-Ameri-
can thinkers.
BLUESTOCKINGS BOOKSTORE,
CAFÉ, & ACTIVIST CENTER
172 Allen St., Mhattan

MAY 17–MAY 19
THU–SUN, 11AM–8PM • FREE
DANCE: SLACKFEST
Three nights with Brooklyn ska legends the Slackers and their
friends. Fans can vote on the band’s playlists: theslackers.com/polls.
THE KINGSLAND
269 Norman Ave., Bklyn

SAT MAY 18
11AM–6PM • FREE
RECORD FAIR
Mark hunt from dozens of
vinyl vender stands while djs
spin live.
SMORGASBURG
East River State Park, Bklyn

MAY 16–MAY 26
THU–SUN, 11AM–8PM • FREE
EXHIBITION: EROTIC FEMINISM IN THE #METO ERA
Through photography, oil paint-
ings, sculpture, and film, 10 artists from around
the world signify what eroticism means to them in the context of
the #MeToo rebellion.
THE ARTIST OUTPOST
501 E. 118th St., Mhattan

MAY 25–JUNE 6
BY APPOINTMENT
BROKEN ENGLISH: BLACK-
ARAB LITERARY SOLIDARITIES
This monograph tells the story of a key but under-recognized
figure of the second Harlem Re-
naisance and a popularizer of the phrase “black is beautiful.”
SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RE-
SEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE
515 Malcolm X Blvd., Mhattan
ON THE CARVING BOARD, P4
Butchers at seven Key Food stores are locked out. Their bosses want to gut their contract.

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF SEPARATION, P4
The SCAR Act will help migrant parents find their children after they were separated by Trump.

FOR FREEDOM, P5
NY State recently reformed its parole system, but more can be done.

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NINE JUST IN TIME, P7
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By Peter Rugh

Butchers with a Beef

Their bosses say it’s time to trim the fat. But these meat workers won’t back down.

There’s a promotion for pork shoulder in the supermarket window. A photograph, blown up larger than life, shows chunks of pink meat carved away from the bone. It looks delicious. Below the image, however, at this Key Foods here on 44th Street and 5th Avenue in Sunset Park, is a bit of false advertising.

“This is a union shop,” reads a much smaller placard you almost wouldn’t notice, tucked on the lower left corner of the window-pane below the giant slab of pork. The grocery store’s meat department workers are members of Local 342 of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union. But they’re not in the shop. They’re on the pavement outside, worrying about how they’re going to put food on the table for their kids.

“We need our jobs back,” Franky Mendez, a 50-year-old father of three, told The Indypendent on April 25. “They’re showing us no mercy.”

Mendez is one of 38 UFCW members who were locked out by their bosses at Pick Quick Foods Inc., operators of seven Key Food franchise stores, members of Local 342 have far less leverage.

The company spokesperson insisted there was nothing wrong with its product. “We have no issue with the quality of the meat,” he said. “It’s USDA choice or better.”

Mendez said shoppers should be skeptical. “They don’t wear hats, gloves,” he said of the scabs. “I don’t know who’s washing those tables. I feel sorry the neighborhood is buying that meat.”

Despite Pick Quick complaints of nonunion competition, the supermarket sector has generally remained a bastion of collective bargaining, even as private-sector unionization rates have steadily declined in recent decades.

UFCW represents workers at more than 20 chains, including Kroger, Albertsons, Gristedes and Shoprite, and counts 1.3 million members in its ranks — an enormous figure, given that just 7.6 million Americans are members of private-sector unions. UFCW represents workers at more than 20 chains, including Kroger, Albertsons, Gristedes and Shoprite, and counts 1.3 million members in its ranks — an enormous figure, given that just 7.6 million Americans are members of private-sector unions.

In April, an 11-day strike by 31,000 UFCW members at the Stop & Shop chain in New England beat back the company’s demands for a two-tier contract that would have cut health and pension benefits, particularly for future workers.

But with fewer than 40 employees at Quick Pick Key Foods franchise stores, members of Local 342 have far less leverage. Workers with UFCW Local 1500 — which represents supermarket employees who handle non-perishable items and is the largest grocery union in New York State — joined them at a recent protest outside Quick Pick’s Key Food in Park Slope and temporarily halted food deliveries, but community support will also make a big difference in this labor battle.

In the meantime, Mendez is living on unemployment benefits and $20 a week in strike pay from the union. He says he’s in for the long haul: “I’ve been here 20 days. I’ll be here 20 more if I have to.”

THE INDEPENDENT May 2019
Even after Gov. Andrew Cuomo met Judith Clark and was so struck by her "exceptional strides in self-development" that he commuted her sentence, New York parole commissioners voted in 2017 not to release her from prison. They refused to move on from Clark's former life as a young revolutionary and getaway driver in a 1981 Brinks truck robbery that left a security guard and two cops killed. She had since apologized to her victims and renounced her crime, and her warden said Clark had changed "into one of the most perceptive, thoughtful, helpful and profound human beings I have ever known."

Finally, in April, a three-member board granted Clark parole at age 69. While one commissioner dissented, the majority wrote that "in view of thus evidence of transformation and serving 38 years in prison, we no longer believe that your release would so deprecate your offense as to undermine respect for the law."

Now criminal justice reform advocates want commissioners to conduct similar comprehensive case reviews and hearings for some 10,000 more elderly men and women who remain in prison, often long past the time they are eligible for release. They say the simplest way to make this happen is for Cuomo to fill seven empty seats on the 19-member parole board. In February, two commissioners were sick — leaving the board with its lowest staffing numbers in its history.

"We are calling on Cuomo to fully staff the board with commissioners who believe in redemption and value rehabilitation and transformation," said Jose Saldana, director of Release Aging People from Prison (RAPP). "Because it makes no sense to have a fully staffed board of punitive commissioners."

Saldana was 66-years-old when a three-member review panel included one of six commissioners Cuomo added to the board in 2016. These newer commissioners have more diversified professional backgrounds than past members, who tended to come law enforcement.

"She questioned me for 40 minutes as opposed to the usual eight minutes, not about my crime in 1979, but about what I've been doing throughout those decades since," Saldana recalled. "After that long interview she determined I no longer posed a risk to public safety and they released me. That is the difference it makes to have commissioners who can measure whether the person is a threat to public safety or isn't."

Low staffing levels have resulted in short interviews, and frequent postponements when review boards reduced to just two members come to a split decision. Last month the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Caucus in the Legislature wrote in a letter to Cuomo that the "conditions have devastating consequences for... many seeking parole who are aging and infirm and cannot afford to wait any longer for their appearances."

Lawmakers already approved a state budget that funds 17 of the parole board's 19 seats, but Cuomo has yet to fill them even though Democrats control the Senate and are expected to approve his appointments.

"Our message to Cuomo is no more excuses," Dave George, Associate Director of RAPP, told The Independent. He says lawmakers should find additional funds in the state's $2 billion prison budget to pay the other two commissioners.

Anyone Cuomo appoints must be vetted by two senate committees, and RAPP wants the hearings to start now in order to ensure public input and transparency, instead of rushing through them in the final days of the legislative session in June.

A rally organized by RAPP scheduled for May 14 in Albany is set to bring hundreds from across the state to meet with legislators and urge Cuomo to act.

"It all is teed up of him to move forward," said George. "This is a chance for Cuomo to continue what he says is a legacy of criminal justice reform. We think he needs to do more, and this is an easy way for him to do it."

More: RAPPcampaign.com

“Smart and compelling ... This book is one part inspiration, and an equal part handbook for a life of purpose lived in the law.”

– Bill Ayers, Portside

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‘IT’S DO OR DIE’
TENANT MOVEMENT LOOKS TO SEIZE ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY

By Steven Wishnia

For more than 20 years, the Republican majority in the New York State Senate was the main obstacle to strengthening the state’s rent laws and tenant protections. The Senate’s 63 districts were gerrymandered for a narrow GOP majority, and that majority, almost all from upstate and New York City’s outer suburbs, collected millions of dollars from the city’s landlords without any risk of being voted out by city renters.

That changed dramatically last November, when Democrats won a 39-24 majority in the Senate. Six of the eight Democrats whose alliance with Republicans had preserved GOP control of Albany’s upper house were unseated by primary challengers running on a strong pro-tenant platform.

The result is that this year, the Legislature is considering a package of nine bills that would both repeal the loopholes in the state’s rent-stabilization laws — most notably the 1997 vacancy-decontrol law — and expand tenant protections far beyond the about 1 million apartments currently regulated by rent stabilization and rent control. But while some of the bills are almost certain to pass, the real-estate lobby — the economic sector that is the largest single source of campaign contributions in New York — is working to water them down and kill the most expansive proposals.

“This is a unique opportunity,” DeRhena Glover of Tenants and Neighbors told the more than 1,000 people at a raucous rally on Apr. 11 in Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church. But she added, “it’s do or die.”

The nine-bill package was developed by the Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance, a coalition of tenant-advocate groups from around the state, as part of a platform called “universal rent control.”

Four of the measures would close loopholes the state punched in the rent-stabilization laws in 1997 and 2003. This would repeal vacancy decontrol, which enables landlords to take vacant apartments out of rent stabilization if their rent is high enough, make “preferential rent” discounts last as long as the tenant stays in the apartment, instead of expiring at the end of the lease; repeal the 20 percent increase allowed on vacant apartments; and lengthen the four-year statute of limitations on illegal rent increases. A fifth would lower the rent increases allowed for the about 22,000 rent-controlled apartments left.

Two others would prohibit rent increases for renovations, for both building-wide major capital improvements (MCI), which are often used to raise rents on occupied apartments, and individual apartment improvements, most commonly used to raise rents on vacant apartments.

The other two would expand tenant protections statewide. One would allow local governments outside New York City and Nassau, Westchester and Rockland counties to enact rent-stabilization laws. The other would prohibit eviction without “good cause” in all but the smallest owner-occupied buildings. It would cover the newer and smaller buildings now exempt from rent stabilization, and require landlords trying to evict tenants for nonpayment to prove that rent increases were not “unconscionable.”

Campaigning for more than simply strengthening rent stabilization, need to organize new members and speak out for unorganized workers to avoid becoming a weak minority.

“Free million New Yorkers have no renter protections whatsoever — simply because of where or what kind of housing they live in,” the Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance says. Since 1994, it adds, “we have lost nearly 300,000 units of affordable, rent-stabilized housing” and the rent-regulation system “has been weakened with loopholes that encourage tenant harassment and allow sudden and permanent rent hikes.”

“What’s different this year is you have tenants all over the state organizing. It’s a reflection of how much worse the situation has become,” says Tenants PAC treasurer Michael McKenzie, a longtime tenant activist and political fundraiser.

But legislatively, he adds, it will be “less of a lift to close the loopholes” in the current system than to expand tenant protections statewide.

The battle in Albany will pit longtime pro-tenant legislators and the new crop elected last year against the influence of the real-estate lobby, which gains more power the legislation is determined behind the scenes — as when a “pied-a-terre tax” on absentee owners of luxury apartments got deleted from the state budget in last-minute negotiations earlier this year.

State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Westchester) has not yet announced the upper house’s rent-law agenda. The Assembly’s agenda, announced in early April, endorsed eight of the nine bills, but omitted good-cause eviction, although Speaker Carl Heastie says he’s open to it. Assemblymember Harvey Epstein (D-Manhattan) says one possible change could be targeting the more toward owners of multiple properties.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s office says he’s committed to strengthening the rent laws — but he has not endorsed MCI repeal, letting upstate communities enact rent stabilization or the good-cause eviction bill.

“If there anyone here who believes and trusts Governor Cuomo?” Public Advocate Jumaane Williams asked the Harlem rally. “Not!” the crowd shouted back.

Carmen Guzman of the West Side Neighborhood Alliance in Manhattan told the rally that all nine points of the universal rent control platform were essential “because they work together as a unit.”

“Displacement is going on citywide,” Carmen Vega-Rivera of CASA in the southwest Bronx elaborated, saying that a studio apartment in her building that was $800 a month when the previous tenant moved out last year went up to more than $2,000 after the landlord renovated it.

“It stops now,” DeRhena Glover said.

But with the rent laws set to expire June 15, will tenants’ movement power be able to overcome the real-estate lobby’s influence in Albany, and enable the huddled masses of New Yorkers to breathe free of the economic chokehold of exorbitant rents?

RENT CONTROL HISTORY

New York City’s rent regulations that cover roughly 900,000 apartments emerged out of federal price controls enacted during World War II. The federal government allowed local governments to continue them in 1947, to prevent rent gouging during the post-war housing shortage. In 1969, the city enacted rent stabilization to cover postwar buildings.

In 1971, the state mandated that all rent-controlled apartments be deregulated if the current tenant moved out. This proved disastrous: It drove up rents, gave landlords an obvious incentive to harass tenants and failed to stem the epidemic of building abandonment. It also prohibited the city from enacting stronger rent controls than the state’s.

The state Emergency Tenant Protection Act of 1974 repealed vacancy decontrol, putting vacated rent-controlled apartments under rent stabilization. But it limited rent stabilization to New York City and Westchester, Nassau and Rockland counties, forcing the phaseout of rent control in the Albany and Buffalo areas.

In 1994, the City Council allowed landlords to deregulate vacant apartments that rented for $2,000 a month or more. Three years later, with the state Senate’s Republican majority leader, Joseph Bruno, threatening to kill rent stabilization by blocking the law’s renewal, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver agreed to make high-rent vacancy decontrol a state law.

The idea was sold as a measure that would affect only a handful of rich people in Manhattan. But over the past 25 years, gentrification, weak state enforcement against illegal overcharges and a widespread business model of pushing rent-stabilized tenants out to take advantage of the increases allowed for vacant apartments have pushed rents up throughout the city.

Estimates of the number of rent-stabilized units lost range from 150,000 to 450,000 — and apartments renting for $2,800 or more can be found in Brownsville and Hunts Point.

— STEVEN WISHNIA
NINE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER
HOW MANY ITEMS WILL TENANTS BE ABLE TO CHECK OFF THEIR LIST?

By Independent Staff

Tenant organizations across the state are pushing for the New York State Legislature to approve a package of nine bills that would amount to what they’ve termed “universal rent control.” Here’s what each measure would do.

1 TENANT PROTECTIONS EVERYWHERE ($5040/A7046)
This bill would expand the Emergency Tenant Protection Act (ETPA) of 1974 to allow localities anywhere in New York State to enact rent-stabilization laws, if they have a “housing emergency,” defined as a vacancy rate of less than 5 percent in rental properties. The ETPA as it now prohibits municipalities outside New York City and the three suburban counties of Nassau, Westchester and Rockland from regulating rents.

2 GOOD CAUSE EVICTION ($2892/A5930)
Rent stabilization generally covers only buildings with six units or more that were built before 1974. This bill would expand tenant protections, such as the right to renew a lease, to tenants everywhere in the state, including those in smaller buildings and in mobile home parks. With exemptions for small owner-occupied buildings, it would mandate landlords show “good cause” before initiating eviction proceedings or refusing to renew a lease, and would restrict excessive rent hikes. This is the only one of the nine measures that Assembly Democrats did not include in their housing platform this spring.

3 NO MORE “VACANCY DECONTROL” ($2591/A1198)
This bill would repeal the 1997 amendment to the ETPA that lets landlords deregulate vacant rent-stabilized apartments if their rent is $2,733 or more a month — which enables them to raise rents as high as they want and to refuse to renew leases without cause. This vacancy decontrol has led to hundreds of thousands of units going market rate, and if it is not eliminated, it will lead to the eventual deregulation of all rent-stabilized housing stock.

4 ENDING “PREFERENTIAL RENT” HIKES ($2845A/A4349)
Rent stabilization sets maximum rents. Landlords are allowed to charge tenants less, a discount called “preferential rent.” This is common in areas, such as much of the Bronx, where the increases allowed on vacant apartments have brought the legal rent up to more than the market value. But when the lease comes up for renewal, a 2003 amendment to the ETPA lets landlords raise rents to the legal limit, which could be hundreds of dollars more. More than 260,000 families in New York City have preferential rents, which makes their housing situation tenuous. This bill would make preferential rents last as long as the tenant stays in the apartment, limiting rent increases to those set annually by the city Rent Guidelines Board (RGB).

5 GOODBYE EVICTION BONUS ($165/A2351)
Every time a rent-stabilized apartment turns over to a new tenant, the ETPA grants landlords the right to start charging up to 20 percent more for it. This gives landlords an incentive to try to force tenants out. This bill would end the 20 percent vacancy bonus, another loophole enacted in 1997.

6 & 7 THE LANDLORD PAYS FOR REPAIRS ($3633/A6322; $3770/A6463)
When landlords fix up their property, be it in a whole building (major capital improvement) or a single apartment, the ETPA allows them to pass the cost of those repairs on to tenants. This cost, prorated over several years, becomes a permanent addition to the monthly rent. Often such repairs are long overdue and the price of the improvements is exaggerated, while the rent increase remains permanent. These bills would prohibit such increases, so landlords would pay for repairs.

8 EXPANDING THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON CHEATING LANDLORDS ($4169/A5251)
Even with all the loopholes granted to landlords, illegal rent hikes are common and often go unnoticed by tenants. This bill expands the time tenants have to complain and hold landlords accountable to at least six years. The current limit, also enacted in 1997, is four years, after which whatever dubious rent hikes the landlord has enacted become permanent.

9 LOWER RENT-CONTROL INCREASES ($299A/A107)
There are currently two systems regulating rents in New York. The ETPA and rent stabilization, cover nearly 1 million apartments, but about 22,000 units, occupied by the same family since 1971, are still in the pre-1974 system of rent control. Rent-controlled apartments can be subject to hikes of up to 7.5 percent a year. Such increases are far more than the annual raises allowed by the RGB for rent-stabilized tenants, which have ranged from none to 4.25 percent over the last decade. This bill would make increases for rent-controlled apartments similar to those set by the RGB.

CAPITAL CRIMES:
Ending “major capital improvement” rent hikes is just one of the measures up for a vote in Albany this year.

A tenth bill, “home stability support” legislation, would offer homeless people or those on the verge of homelessness financial assistance. Due to the state-wide housing affordability crisis, there are currently 89,000 homeless people in New York, including 22,700 children living in the New York City shelter system. Under this measure, the state would provide up to 85 percent of local “fair market rent” costs as determined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Local governments would have the option of paying the remaining 15 percent. HUD’s 2019 fair-market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is $1,831 a month in New York City, $1,907 in Suffolk County, $1,115 in Albany and $838 in Buffalo.
When Doreen and her husband split up five years ago, the pair reached an agreement. Doreen and the couple’s 7-year-old daughter could continue to live at her husband’s parents’ old place off Delaware Avenue in Albany. In exchange, Doreen would pay him $500 in rent out of the $700 she receives each month from Social Security — her sole source of income.

Doreen says the breakup, though it was never finalized in divorce, was the culmination of years of abuse that left her with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and social anxiety. (The Independent agreed to withhold her last name in order to protect her from possible retribution.) Despite paying more than 70 percent of her monthly income in rent and receiving no child support, Doreen says she has learned how to get by, living off food stamps and groceries from a local pantry and finding clothes for her and her daughter, now 12, in bargain bins downtown.

But on April 8, Doreen came home to the house she has resided in for 28 years to find a note taped to her door that threatened to upend the life she has built for herself and her child. The eviction notice, signed by her sister-in-law, charged that Doreen was obstructing the family’s ability to make repairs and sell the house. When her husband’s mother died three years ago, that left him and his four siblings executors of her estate. One of them, her husband’s older sister, wants to sell the home, and is eager to boot Doreen out.

She was given 30 days to vacate.

“You can’t just give me 30 days, when I’ve lived here 30 years,” she recalled saying to herself when she found the notice, tearfully recounting her story. “I thought I had rights as a tenant, but I guess I don’t.”

A Legal Aid Society attorney whom Doreen spoke with told her it could have been worse. She was lucky she didn’t get a 10-day notice, which is also permissible under Albany’s lax tenant protections.

Doreen is not alone. She is one of millions of people living in New York State with virtually no protection or security as a tenant.

“There were well over 5,000 eviction proceedings filed last year just in our local city court alone,” notes Laura Felts, who runs a homelessness prevention program for United Tenants of Albany.

This year, however, Felts and other longtime upstate housing advocates aim to flip the tables on landlords and put the cards in the hands of renters. They’ve formed a first-of-its-kind coalition with activists downstate to push for an overhaul of the state’s rent laws. And with Albany having turned fully Democratic last November, this might be the year to do it. The only thing standing in their way: millions of dollars and equivocating politicians with price tags hanging from their necks.

In Albany, years of disinvestment and lax code enforcement have led to deterioration of the city’s housing stock, but tenants are often afraid to complain for fear their landlord will throw them out. While there is a city law that defends the right to complain, most tenants who wind up in Housing Court represent themselves, and it is hard to prove that they are being evicted for expressing dissatisfaction.

The near-complete lack of renters’ rights means that most tenants upstate and on Long Island live at the mercy of their landlords.

In Albany, downtown revitalizations and urban renewal have burdened tenants elsewhere with another. Kingston, a city of some 23,000 people about 90 miles up the Hudson from New York, underwent an economic slump in the 1990s after its biggest employer, IBM, left, but things began to pick up again in the early aughts, as New Yorkers started to move north into the Hudson Valley to escape rising rents. The arrival of the newcomers meant rent hikes in Kingston.

According to one recent study compiled using data from Kingston Landlord Support, which helps landlords identify ten...
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seen tenant rights as an issue affecting their constituents, but Farkas upstate elected officials’ coffers.” Those politicians generally haven’t
Rent Stabilization Association — they have poured tons of money into
the landlord lobby — REBNY [Real Estate Board of New York], the
advocates are making it harder for landlords to fill the geographical
branch, and by joining forces from Westchester to Rochester, housing
they came up for renewal.

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landlord lobby gave heavily to upstate Republicans, who controlled
zation laws, which protect some 2 million tenants in New York City
Legislature to step in. It’s an opportune time. The state’s rent-stabili-

“New York City for the longest time has been ahead of the game in
rent-protection laws,” says Tyler, though hearing of New Yorkers
“Things are not perfect down there. I know that. But upstate
eyes roll. “Things are not perfect down there. I know that. But upstate
in rent-protection laws,” says Tyler, a lifelong Kingston resident, “Is the Hudson Valley Turning Into the Hamptons?”

There’s been a disconnect between rent laws here
and in the city, even though we’re starting to feel the forces of people
moving up north.”

With rent regulations and tenant protections sparser in the city that
ever sleeps and virtually nonexistent beyond its bedroom com-
munities, tenant advocates across New York have teamed up and
formed the Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance to push the state
Legislature to step in. It’s an opportune time. The state’s rent-stabiliza-
laws, which protect some 2 million tenants in New York City
and its inner suburbs, are up for renewal in June. In the past, the
landlord lobby gave heavy to upstate Republicans, who controlled the
state senate and were invulnerable to the wrath of the downstate
constituents their Democratic colleagues serve. This has regularly led
to the weakening of New York City’s tenant protections when they
came up for renewal.

This year is different. Democrats have full control of the legislative
branch, and by joining forces from Westchester to Rochester, housing
advocates are making it harder for landlords to fill the geographical
divides with campaign cash.

“Now there’s been a history of tenants and the tenant movement being
on the defense,” Aria Farkas, the founder of the New York City-based Met-
ropolitan Council on Housing, told Indy Radio in April. “Landlords, the
landlord lobby — REBNY [Real Estate Board of New York], the
Rent Stabilization Association — they have poured tons of money into
upstate elected officials’ coffers.” Those politicians generally haven’t
seen tenant rights as an issue affecting their constituents, but Farkas
says the Housing Alliance is “making this issue hit home for them” by
bringing issues of their districts to their doorsteps.

Tenant activists statewide are visiting and calling their state repre-
sentatives, knocking on their neighbors’ doors and taking turns going to
Albany each Tuesday to rally for rent-law reform.

“Private organizations have been growing these memberships and to become more organized,” says Felt. “What we’re opposing has so much capital be-

Another key measure in the package is a ban on eviction without
“good cause,” which would effectively give tenants the right to renew
their leases — and would also restrict evictions for not paying rent
increases defined as excessive. This would affect Big Apple neighbor-
hoods like East New York and Bushwick as well, where many build-
ings have less than six apartments and are therefore too small to be
subject to the ETPA.

Would it also cover renters like Doreen in Albany and the residents
of Akron Mobile Home Park, about 25 miles east of Buffalo, which
Florida-based Sunrise Capital Investors (SCI) purchased in 2017 for a
$1 million down payment and quickly informed tenants of plans to
double their rent. Hiking rents is part of a strategy SCI chief executive
Kevin Bupp follows nationally, explaining on his real-estate podcast that
he does so in order to get “rid of the idiots” and get more value from
the property.

Freshman state Senator Julia Salazar (see interview, page 10), who
represents Brooklyn, introduced the legislation earlier this year, and
Syracuse Democrat Pamela Hunter is sponsoring it in the
Assembly. Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie has endorsed eight of the
bills put forward by the Housing Alliance and has acknowledged sup-
port within the Assembly’s Democratic Conference for universal rent
control. But when the conference put out its housing platform in early
April, the good-cause eviction legislation, which would go farther than
any other measure toward achieving universal rent control, was
not included.

The Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance has volunteers going
door-to-door in Heastie’s Bronx district and has not given up on per-
suading lawmakers to seize the moment and ensure New York is a
state affordable for all. They have until June 13, when the rent-sta-
bilization laws expire, just before the legislative session is scheduled to
close.

HOW TO FORM A TENANT UNION
• The Department of Housing Preservation and Development
  (nyc.gov/hpd) provides a list of 311 complaints at your building
  and any code violations that
• The Department of Finance
  (nyc.gov/acris) offers financial
  information.
• The Rent Guidelines Board (nyc.
  gov/rgb) will tell you if your
  building is rent stabilized.
• At the Department of Build-
  ings website (nyc.gov/rdh)
  you can learn whether your
  landlord has filed for permits
  to make alterations.

Once that first meeting is under way, allow
time for participants to express how condi-
tions in the building are impacting their lives.
What are the problems that need to be most
urgently addressed? Come up with a list of

A CULTURAL PRESENTATION BY THE WORKERS’ UNION GROUP ON GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURE AT YALE UNIVERSITY
Following cultural critic Sara Ahmed’s insight that “use is a small word with a big history”, we approach the various ways that “use” enters into and exercises power within our lexicon and politics.

questions/answers: indystaff.marxedproject.org

S U P P O R T E D B Y

THE MARXIST HISTORY PROJECT

Marx and Engels

Karl Marx

Capital

Volume

Political

and

Historical

Writing:

part one

11:00 am • 12 week CLASS & DISCUSSION
at THE PEOPLE’S FORUM • 320 W 37 ST
KARL MARX

MONDAYS • beginning MAY 6
7:00 pm • 8 week CLASS & DISCUSSION
at THE BROOLYN COMMONS • 388 ATLANTIC AVENUE
THE GRAPHIC NOVEL
and NEOLIBERALISM

SPECIAL PANEL DISCUSSION
FRIDAY, MAY 10 • 6:30 to 9:00 pm
USE,
A Users’ Guide
at UNION DOCS • 322 UNION AVENUE
BROOKLYN

Use a collective presentation by the workers’ union group on globalization and culture at Yale University.

S E P T E M B E R

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PUSHING THE ENVELOPE
NEW SOCIALIST SENATOR INSISTS ON PROTECTIONS FOR ALL TENANTS, NOT SOME

By John Tarleton

Julia Salazar was another ousted tenant looking for a place to land when I sat down to interview her in mid-April. Due to Byzantine state regulations, the freshman state senator’s original district office near the Myrtle-Wyckoff subway station in Bushwick had been a temporary one. Now she was moving into another temporary space outside her district office in South Williamsburg.

For many of Salazar’s constituents in the rapidly gentrifying 18th State Senate District, the prospect of being displaced from their apartments is a menace with no end in sight. Salazar’s vow to be an unabashed fighter for their interests played a major role in her upset victory last year over Martin Malave Dilan, an eight-term incumbent who was seen by many as being too cozy with the real estate industry.

Both the youngest woman in the history of the state Senate and the first openly identified socialist to serve in the legislature in nearly a century, Salazar has kept her promise. While many Democrats want at most to shore up the patchwork of laws that cover currently rent-stabilized tenants, she is the co-author of the Good Cause Eviction bill that would expand tenant protections to almost every tenant in the state.

Sitting on a plastic table in the middle of her sparsely furnished new office space, Salazar described her journey from being an outsider to an insider, what’s changed in Albany and what hasn’t, and what it will take for tenants to win major victories that are within their reach for the first time in decades.

JOHN TARLETON: The tenant movement is pushing an ambitious rent reform agenda this year. From your vantage point, what is at stake and why is it important that all nine planks in the tenant platform be enacted?

JULIA SALAZAR: The political dynamic has changed profoundly in Albany in the last year, particularly in the state Senate. These nine bills collectively constitute Universal Rent Protections for all Tenants, no Not some. These nine bills constitute a major rent reform agenda this year. From your vantage point, what is at stake and why is it important that all nine planks in the tenant platform be enacted?

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NY STATE ASSEMBLY FOR SALE?

LAWMAKERS SAY THEY ARE FOR RENTERS, THEIR DONOR BASE TELLS ANOTHER STORY

For the past half century, New York Democrats dominated the state Assembly while their Republican counterparts controlled the state Senate with the help of heavily gerrymandered districts. Progressive legislation routinely sailed through the Assembly only to die a quiet death in the Senate.

That arrangement ended in 2018 when a “blue wave” swept aside Senate Republicans and many of their corporate friendly Democratic allies. The Democrats now control the Senate 39-24 and hold a whopping 107-43 advantage in the Assembly. But a funny thing happened as the Senate moved to the left. Assembly Democrats started to have second thoughts about some of their past commitments.

A universal health care plan for all New Yorkers? It needs further study.

Universal rent control? Well, how do we really know if it’s their first or million dollar second homes of the 1% that would rake in $600 million per year for public schools. Well, how do we really know if it’s their first or second homes?

Which way will Assembly Democrats go in the battle over rent law reforms? The money raked in from the real estate industry by Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and the Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee (DACC) doesn’t bode well. Heastie and his top lieutenant who control the DACC can use this money to disburse campaign contributions to rank-and-file Democratic assembly members who fall in line and do their bidding. The ability to deliver desired outcomes to their wealthy backers then assures the leadership more generous “donations” in the future. And on it goes.

The big question: Will this top-down, money-driven version of politics prevail in Albany in 2019? Or, can the tenant movement and its allies put enough fear into wayward Democrats of being primaried in 2020 to force them to break with the landlord lobby?

ORGANIZED MONEY VS. ORGANIZED PEOPLE

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

NUMBERS GAME

Total real estate contribution to Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee since 2012: $1,235,079

REAL ESTATE GROUPS DONATING TO THE DACC:
- Rudin Management
- Glenwood Management
- Durst Organization
- Time Equities
- Extell Development

REAL ESTATE GROUPS DONATING TO HEASTIE:
- Extell Development Company
- Goldmont Realty
- Time Equities

PUT ‘EM ON SPEED DIAL

The struggle to expand New York State’s rent laws will likely go down to the wire before they expire on June 15. Because it’s Albany, final negotiations will likely come down to “three people in a room” — Gov. Andrew Cuomo, State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie. If you want stronger rent laws, pick up the phone and make your voice heard.

ANDREW CUOMO
518-474-8390 (Albany) 212-681-4580 (NYC Office)

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS
518-455-2385 (Albany) 914-423-4031 (District Office)

CARL HEASTIE
518-455-4812 (Albany) 718-654-6539 (District Office)
Voters boot the Republicans out of power in the State Senate for the first time in a half century and overthrow the GOP-allied Independent Democratic Conference.

Upstate and Downstate tenants form a coalition to expand tenant protections across the state and build a larger, more diverse base of support for pro-tenant legislation.

Not enough tenants to organize resistance, too many have been evicted and are looking for new homes.

Tenant activists canvass their neighborhoods to build public support for sweeping rent law reforms.

State legislators are bombarded each week on Tenant Tuesday with phone calls demanding they support Universal Rent Control. Meanwhile, busloads of citizen lobbyists travel to Albany to personally visit legislators and urge them to vote with tenants, or else be primaried in the next election cycle.

A mass rally held for renters rights ramps up pressure on lawmakers.

Landlords drop millions of dollars on non-stop media scare campaign.

Landlords give hundreds of thousands of dollars to Democrats in the State Assembly who previously supported sweeping rent law reforms but now refuse to say if they still do.

Governor hosts $25,000 per plate fundraiser that draws many of NY’s leading real estate barons.

Governor backs modest rent law reforms, but refuses to support Universal Rent Control.

• To start the game, roll a single die. The highest number becomes the landlord. Everyone else is a tenant. The more tenants in the game, the better their chances of winning.

• Tenants win when any one of their pieces lands directly on the final square (universal rent control, or “URC”) before the landlord lands directly on the next-to-last square, which signifies the defeat of the tenant movement.

• To move across the board, roll a single die and advance according to the number that comes up. If you roll a six, roll again. If your number is higher than the number of squares left on the board, remain in place.

• The landlord goes first. Class privilege has its advantages.

• The chutes and ladders are reversed for the landlord, i.e. a tenant setback (the chute) allows the landlord to climb and a tenant gain (the ladder) sends him sliding backward.

• Solidarity can make the difference. If the landlord is on the verge of winning, tenants can give their next roll of the die to another tenant who is further along on the board. However, a tenant can only do so once and must exit the game at that time.

• When the tenant side has three or more players who roll the same number consecutively, each tenant gets an extra turn.

TENANTS VS. LANDLORDS
A BOARD GAME FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

CHUTES & LADDERS

12
TENANTS VS. LANDLORDS
A BOARD GAME FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

RULES OF THE GAME

DESIGN: MIKAEL TARKELA
ILLUSTRATIONS: TIFFANY PAI

TEXT: JOHN TARLETON
They are a mass migration of thousands of young people from Central America, yet each one travels alone: solito, solita.
SEE MORE OF MNN THAN EVER BEFORE.

No one tells the story of New York better than New Yorkers, and now the story just got bigger. Presenting MNN’s HD Community Channel: We built this channel specifically for MNN Community Producers to tell their stories. Love stories, documentary stories, action stories, BIG stories. Join us at MNN HD on Time Warner Cable channel 1993 for the biggest New York stories there are - the story of your life.

AMPLIFIED LOCAL VOICES

TIME WARNER CABLE CHANNEL 1993

STREAMING WORLDWIDE ON MNN.ORG
REAL ESTATE RULES, BUREAUCRACY OBEY AND COMMUNITIES RISE UP

By Tom Angotti

Utterous rent increases. Illegal evictions and buy-outs. It’s not just bad landlords doing this. It’s big real estate and real estate has trusty allies in government. The only thing that stops them is when tenants organize and communities rise up.

New York City, the historic center of global finance, claims to be “The real estate capital of the world.” The Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY), whose members are the biggest contributors to elected officials, shapes city housing and planning policies through campaign contributions and aggressive lobbying. Big real estate also includes corporations and investors who profit from “affordable housing” development. This broad umbrella encompasses all development—from luxury high-rises to subsidized, income-limited apartments—and provides perfect cover for the real-estate industry and a wealthy political class that presumes to represent the public interest. Private and public sectors make up this powerful growth machine that is built on the myth—the neoliberal fantasy—that the city needs private capital and “flexible” government regulation to sustain itself.

Two government agencies are critical to the growth machine. The Department of City Planning (DCP) regulates how land is used through its zoning powers. Zoning sets limits on how much can be built in any location. The agency is misnamed because it doesn’t really plan; it helps configure development, mostly in response to the interests of real estate investors.

Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) runs programs that are supposed to promote “affordable housing” in partnership with for-profit and non-profit developers. Along with the State of New York, it is responsible for enforcing rent regulations. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), an authority set up by the federal government and run by mayoral appointees, is the largest provider of subsidized housing.

After New York City’s fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s and the global shift toward neoliberalism, these agencies and the city’s political leadership have increasingly functioned as a well-oiled machine that makes way for luxury towers, abandons low-income housing in favor of “affordable housing” that isn’t affordable and turns its back on violations of the rent laws. New York City has one of the highest rates of housing displacement in the country.

For real estate and its government allies, rent regulations, strict zoning rules, community boards, preservationists and environmentalists are responsible for the housing crisis. Their solution is more growth, more tax subsidies, fewer regulations and defeat of what they call “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) sentiment—opposition to new development. Their alternative is YIMBY (“Yes In My Backyard”), real estate-funded attack squads that opportunistically accuse those objecting to new development. While low-income people of color are displaced, YIMBYs blame the victims, implying that they stand in the way of “integration” and advocate a form of reverse racism.

In this real estate world, elected and government officials compete with one another to demonstrate how much housing has been built under their watch. Jobs are the other big treasure. The criterion for judging “progress” is always based on how many housing units and how many jobs have been created. Never mind whether the housing is for those who need it most or that the jobs are temporary, unsafe or poorly paid. Nobody in government ever checks to see if the numbers ever materialize, who benefits and who loses.

For real estate, more housing is always the solution. It’s pure trickle-down economics: the market builds for the wealthy and as their needs are met the benefits filter down to lower-income people in the form of lower rents. Or government-subsidized “affordable housing.” It sounds neat but it never works that way. Instead higher land values and rents trickle down and make everything more expensive, displacing tenants and homeowners with the lowest incomes. New York is one of the most racially segregated cities in the world and low-income communities of color face intense displacement pressures while having fewer alternatives because of pervasive discrimination in housing.

Yet nobody in government is responsible for dealing with displacement, historically the greatest threat to the survival of communities of color.

PUBLIC HOUSING

It wasn’t always like this. During the Great Depression, the New Deal financed the construction of housing for working people throughout the nation and provided capital and operating subsidies to local housing authorities. NYCHA was the largest and arguably one of the better-managed authorities in the nation. In the 1970s, the Nixon administration cut subsidies and channeled funds toward public-private partnerships. This became the foundation of neoliberal housing policy and was embraced by a national bipartisan consensus. While cutting funds for public housing, policy makers accepted the conservative idea, promoted by reactionary southern Democrats during the New Deal, that public housing
Despite this gloomy picture, signs of long-overdue changes are emerging. Thanks to tenant organizing, an overhaul of rent regulations that increases tenant protections may soon be approved in Albany. Tough community organizing forced Amazon, one of the biggest corporations in the world, to back out of a sweetheart deal to move part of its headquarters to Queens. And every one of Mayor de Blasio’s community rezonings to promote development in communities of color has faced fierce opposition, slowing down developers.

Too often reformers have underestimated the depth of the problem and relied only on getting better candidates in office. This can lead to minor advances while leaving in place real estate’s power, the highly centralized city bureaucracy and powerful agencies. They are indebted to one of the two major party machines and, more importantly, their donors from real estate and finance. The more diverse and representative City Council can only respond to mayoral initiatives and chip away at power. Control of the budget is concentrated in the Mayor’s Office of Management and Budget and the Council negotiates around the edges.

The permanent government has deep roots in the city’s history as a global center of finance and real estate. But it has always faced opposition from communities and labor. This opposition gave us the first rent laws over a century ago and workplace health and safety laws, following the disastrous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911.

Important reforms came out of civil rights struggles, although most of these were incomplete and subverted by real estate. Following protests in the 1960s against urban renewal (then known as “Negro removal”), a major reform of the city charter that took effect in 1975 established 59 community boards and mandated that all major changes in zoning and land use go through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), in which community boards had a vote (without control over the final outcome). Another reform in 1989 spurred by civil rights challenges eliminated the Board of Estimate as the main decision-making body. Each of the five borough presidents had an equal vote on that board. Multiracial, populous Brooklyn had one, as did tiny, mostly-white Staten Island. The more representative City Council gained some additional power through the ‘89 reform but overall the system remained as it is today, with power concentrated in the mayor’s office and executive branch. The Council is now leading another major review of the city charter, but powerful special interests, led by real estate and finance, abetted by elite civic groups and city agencies, control the agenda.

The city faces the enormous challenges of coastal flooding and climate change. The question now is whether the community and social justice movements can rise with the tides. The environmental and climate justice movements are consciously building on the radical roots of the civil rights, community and labor movements. A new generation is starting to cross the historic racial, class, gender, ethnic and other divides, bringing together tenants, homeowners, and other groups that have often been pitted against each other. Occup, Black Lives Matter and other radical initiatives that seek to value differences instead of reinforcing inequalities are generating hope.

A major challenge we face is deeply understanding this monster of a permanent government so we can change it. It is not good enough to get a seemingly progressive figure elected as mayor or city council representative. We need more radical community activism. We need more “guerillas in the bureaucracy” to cripple the institutional resistance to real democratic and just alternatives. When brave leaders like Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez step forward to run for office, they need more allies in government. Veteran community activists know that a strong “inside-outside” strategy is essential to every struggle against the powerful real estate machine.

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A Neighborhood Remembers
An Oral History Preserves Bushwick
One Story at a Time.

By Chelsey Sanchez

At an April Community Board 4 meeting in Bushwick, city planners were repeatedly interrupted by the audience. “Affordable to whom?” locals wanted to know, as the Department of City Planning outlined a proposed rezoning of the neighborhood that it says would create more green space and affordable housing in return for allowing developers to build higher. Seen by some as the next Williamsburg, the neighborhood is already going through dramatic demographic changes and longtime residents are on edge, concerned about being priced out.

The Independent spoke with Cynthia Tobar, an assistant professor and head of archives at Bronx Community College, about her oral history project, “Cities for People, Not for Profit.” By interviewing residents, artists and activists, the project aims to document the ongoing effects of Bushwick’s gentrification and to establish different points of connection between neighborhood newcomers and old-timers.

How did “Cities for People” come about?

I was walking through the neighborhood one day, close to Morgan Avenue, and there was this art space. The gates were open and I walked in and there were all these artists working in an abandoned parking lot. It starts to come to me how, years ago, something like this wouldn’t have been that feasible in that neighborhood — all these supposedly gentrifying white artists coming into a neighborhood to create art. I started talking with the person who was running the event, and I said, “I would love to interview folks here about the changing face of Bushwick from their perspective.”

That’s how it started, with me documenting the artists in the neighborhood, the young ones who get labeled as scapegoats of gentrification. The more people I interviewed, the more it became apparent that, regardless of race and background and privilege, everyone is being squeezed out of the neighborhood.

Then, I wanted to reach out to the local activist community, to get these folks at a table talking about affordability, gentrification and housing in New York. Just trying to get the different perspectives of, “Where do you see this coming?” and “How is Bushwick a case study for this larger battle for working-class people?” and “How can we keep New York City vibrant and diverse, while trying to not succumb to the pressures of these elite structures dominating the city?” How many more Starbucks and Bank of Americas do we need, really, in a neighborhood?

It’s interesting that you mention that young white people are blamed for gentrification, yet, they’re still being squeezed out too. It seems to speak to this bigger forces that are at play behind the scenes.

As sources of information for their activism or their scholarship or just to inform themselves.

The last few years of the project, I’ve been working a lot in collaboration with other organizations. We had a series of events over the summer called “Bushwick Love Letter,” which was the project started by the 5 Boro Story Project. We had these public programs in order to link the stories we’ve been collecting and putting online with spaces outside of the digital realm, to engage face to face and bridge the digital divide, because not everybody has access to technology in the same way.

We used the stories as a springboard for more conversations to bring people together because what we see now is that displacement just further stratifies people. Now people are even more distant from one another. If you’re in one of these god-awful housing developments that have concierge service and all kinds of amenities within the same building, what would compel you to even leave to say hello to your neighbors? It amplifies the class divisions that exist between people. Public programming is great because we’re reaching out into the community and meeting people where they’re at.

When I first heard about this project, the idea of oral history seemed like a surprising and even archaic choice. Is the communal aspect part of the reason why you chose to put this project together?

I’m a first-generation Ecuadorian American. My family — we love to read. It’s the most tangible first point of connection you can make to anybody. Like, “Tell me your story. Tell me your background.” You’re getting a person’s perspective, whether or not that’s factual. Memory’s a funny thing, but it sort of lets you get to the core impact events have on people, especially when you think about linking it to social justice issues. I think of oral history as this wonderful tool that provides a counternarrative to history-making, which we need. We need to open up the historical narratives to include marginalized people who have been left out of the narrative.

What do you think is in store for the future of Bushwick?

It’s got a very special personal resonance for me. I feel that, of all the neighborhoods I’ve lived in, Bushwick has always welcomed me when I’ve been at my lowest. There is just a certain level of independence and freedom that I’ve always associated with living in this neighborhood. There was my neighbor who passed away a few years ago. Bless his heart, he used to grow corn stalks and weed in his backyard. But no one bothered him. Everybody just does their own thing.

I was a single mother living on my own and this was the only affordable place I could find to live and survive while I was trying to pick up the pieces of my life and move forward. There’s a striver mentality to Bushwick, which is something I don’t want to see disappear. But, we can only hope that if we welcome all members within our community and have this be an available place for everyone, I love this neighborhood and I refuse to leave. I’ve invested in it and I want to get to a space where it can be not just for folks who want to make a profit, but a place for folks who have sacrificed and lived through the worst moments of the community to stay.

What are some tangible strategies that people can use to combat gentrification?

I’d say building a sense of community, even if it starts within your own block or within your own building. I don’t know how they do it in these fancier buildings, but the smaller, old-fashioned six-family buildings, you got to bump into your neighbor at some point in the stairs. Say, “hello.” Learn a little bit about them. Look out for one another. Get plugged in with the local activists. Show support to the local businesses and the supermarket. The C-Town down the street may not have your petits cornichons and fresh mozzarella, but if you need a box of cereal and milk, go and support the local businesses here, too. Also, plug in with existing activist organizations that are doing the heavy lifting of having to deal with City Council members, and rally and attend the meetings.

What do you think is in store for the future of Bushwick?

It will be a different Bushwick. It can never stay the same. But I’m hoping that there is an increased level of awareness with all the people coming in. Just be aware of the past. As long as there are those of us that choose to stay to help inform and educate and remind people of what our past has been, that can help inform a better future.

Read and watch the oral histories that Cynthia Tobar has collected at CitiesForF职l.org.
Below
14TH to 96TH ST
SEWARD PARK LIBRARY
320 W. 137TH ST.
HAMPTONS LIBRARY
10 E. 85TH ST.
LES PEOPLE'S FEDERAL CREDIT UNION
330 AVE C
TOMPKINS SQUARE LIBRARY
331 E. 10TH ST.
MULBERRY BRANCH LIBRARY
10 JERSEY ST.
BLUE STOCKINGS
172 ALLEN ST.
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VENDOR’S MARKET/ May 5
12:00PM – 5:00PM | FREE
LULA: ‘TRUTH WILL PREVAIL’ - NEOLIBERALISM, POLITICAL PERSECUTION AND POLARIZATION
PANEL DISCUSSION/ May 9
6:30PM – 8:30PM | FREE
NOSOTROS LAS PIEDRAS/ WE THE STONES
FILM SCREENING + Q&A/ May 10
6:00PM – 8:30PM | FREE
Award-winning documentary by filmmaker Álvaro Torres Crespo.
POLITICAL PRISONERS IN PALESTINE AND THE NAKBA
TEACH IN/ May 15
6:00PM – 9:00PM | FREE
JOINT BOOK LAUNCH WITH BARBARA FOLEY AND MARGARET STEVENS
BOOK LAUNCH/ May 17
6:30PM – 9:30PM | FREE

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May 2019
THE INDEPENDENT
By Derek Ludovici

Hudson Yards, New York City’s newest neighborhood, costing the city 5.6 billion taxpayer dollars, opened March 15. Who asked for an elite, gated high-rise community on the last significant open space in Manhattan? Who pulled the pursestrings, who stands to benefit?

Two recent books, *Brooklyn Tides: The Fall and Rise of a Global Borough* by Benjamin Shepard and Mark J. Noonan and *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State* by Samuel Stein, offer two ways of thinking through questions of how the city is chang­ing and for whom. Activist scholars are behind both books.

Written by two CUNY professors, *Brooklyn Tides* is a complex social and political history of Kings County focusing on how Brooklyn has and continues to be affected by global forces. In particular, Shepard and Noonan are concerned with agency and the spaces activists have been able to promote as alternatives to the rising tides of gentrification and racialized police brutality that plague the borough, as well as the literal tide that swallowed parts of Brooklyn during Superstorm Sandy — an early harbinger of global warming’s threat.

The authors take a multi-disciplinary approach, incorporating literature and their personal histories of taking part in social movements. The first half of the book provides a history of Brooklyn. Beginning with its in­digeneous past, it describes the settlers’ colonial project that displaced na­tives, imported slaves and eventually industrialized Brooklyn. Throughout the first four chapters, this history is coupled with literature, providing a glimpse of how writers were attempting to think through the socio-politi­cal issues of their day.

The authors draw on works like *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Ber­ty Smith, in which a young girl relates the stench of the heavily-industrialized Newtown Creek as “the worst stink in the world,” yet accepts the smell because it signaled a waterway connecting Williamsburg to a larger world. For another view, they take a look at Arthur Miller’s *A View from the Bridge,* set when demand for shipping jobs was outracing supply, only a decade before the Navy Yard would be closed permanently in 1964.

The second half of the book takes a participant-observer­ship approach, with Shepard sharing his experiences marching with Black Lives Matter, agitating for transpor­tation alternatives and taking a direct action approaches to hurricane recovery and community gardens. All in all, the book does what it sets out to do — highlight the agency of everyday activists residing in the bor­ough. Shepard recounts the initial days after Sandy de­stroyed homes and infrastructure along Brooklyn’s coastal geographical space of the borough. At times this coverage feels thin, but this is a qu­am that could be raised with any study that attempts to take on such a large project.

*Capital City* on the other hand, attempts to understand the history and ideas of a different set of actors in New York: its urban planners, Stein, a PhD candidate in geogra­phy and a planner himself, writes a book meant to explain both the behind-the-scenes apparatuses that lead to gentri­fication and how we can fight for alternatives.

If *Brooklyn Tides* is about the rise of a global borough, *Capital City* is about the global dynamics of the real es­tate market underpinning that rise. The book begins with the astronomical figure of $217 trillion. This is the value of real estate globally with $1 trillion string within NYC. Stein poses the question, if real estate constitutes so much capital, are city planners really wealth managers?

Stein’s main category is what he terms the “real estate state,” “a political formation in which real estate capital has inordinate influence over the shape of our cities, the parameters of our politics, and the lives we lead.” Stein traces the real-estate state’s genesis to the 1975 economic crisis that hit hardest in cities already reeling from white flight and the abandonment of manufacturing. To boost their ailing tax base, cities transitioned to finance and real estate as their main generators of wealth, requiring a con­tinual growth of land values.

In this cogent and clear work, Stein is able explain the jargon-laden discipline of urban planning to the non­worked. He demonstrates how tax schemes, zoning and the prioritization of increasing land values in order to increase the city’s tax base leads to uneven investment, resulting in gen­trification and displacement in some neighborhoods and disinvestment in others. The book is a challenge to the bipartisan consensus that for-profit real-estate development is the solution to all that ails the city: underfunded schools, overcrowded or under-serv­ing public transit, segregation.

An entire chapter of *Capital City* is dedicated to how our developer­turned­president fits with the rise of the real-estate state. Although Stein is careful to say Donald Trump’s asc­ent is not solely connected to land mark­ets — economic decline, bigotry, most notably the failures of liberal­ism are also cited — he points out that Trump, his father, Fred, and Trump’s grandfather all enriched themselves through the help of city planners. Each were able to take advantage of chang­ing approaches to urban development, such as Fred Trump’s construction of segregated housing developments like Beach Haven in Brighton Beach, which were in step with the Federal Housing Administration redlining policies of the day.

Stein ends his book with a call for alternative approaches to urban plan­ning. Some of the current tools in the planner’s arsenal could actually be used for a more equitable city. If inclusionary zoning policies, which result in mixed-income housing, were only used in wealthy white enclaves, rather than working class neighbor­hoods of color, it would force some integration, Stein writes.

Ultimately, Stein lays blame on the contradictions of capital­ist planning. He goes on to highlight radical alter­natives to current planning models, drawing inspiration from groups like Take Back the Bronx and activist net­works such as New York Not for Sale. While the future is uncertain and the city will undoubtedly change, Stein argues that activists should fight to dismantle the real-estate state and de­mocratize planning so that residents rather than capital decide how the city grows.

Urban struggle is precisely where *Capital City* and *Brooklyn Tides* intersect. Stein concludes the book with a vision of planning that is messy, where coalitions merge to represent diverse constituencies and where marginalized voices are expressed in a way that neat and simple top­down planning models do not. Shepard and Noonan highlight the diversity of struggles occurring in, but not unique to, Brooklyn — efforts to swim against toxic waves of racist policing, eviction and climate catas­trophe in order to reach a just, inclusive and ecologically sound future.
American Factory
Directed by Steven Bognar & Julia Reichert
Netflix, 2019

By Mark Read

Established in response to the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the Tribecca Film Festival has, since its inception, concerned itself with defining the cultural and political landscape of the United States. Promoted by its founders (including Robert De Niro and Martin Scorsese) as a means to reinvigorate downtown Manhattan in the wake of the destruction, it was seen by many at the time as a vehicle through which the filmmaking community could put forward a version of America and Americaness that stood in contrast to the saber-rattling, “just-go-shopping” version of America on offer from the likes of Rudy Giuliani and George W. Bush.

Fast forward 17 years and a lot has changed about the landscape of the United States. Promoted itself with defining the cultural and political landscape, the festival has, since its inception, concerned itself with defining the cultural and political landscape of the United States. Promoted by its founders (including Robert De Niro and Martin Scorsese) as a means to reinvigorate downtown Manhattan in the wake of the destruction, it was seen by many at the time as a vehicle through which the filmmaking community could put forward a version of America and Americaness that stood in contrast to the saber-rattling, “just-go-shopping” version of America on offer from the likes of Rudy Giuliani and George W. Bush.

The scene is but one of many striking moments in this truly remarkable film, which lays bare the stark and disorienting reality of U.S. workers in the era of globalization. American Factory methodically and sensitively exposes the specific, localized impacts of historically tectonic shifts in global economic and political power that have radically altered the lives of millions of working people across the world.

What these shifts portend not only for U.S. workers but all workers and indeed all people is the central question here — one that the filmmakers ultimately answer, albeit provisionally. Spoiler alert: It’s not a happy ending.

American Factory tells a far more complicated and ultimately more troubling story. In 2014 that same GM factory was purchased by the Fuyao Glass company, a Chinese-owned global powerhouse in the automotive glass industry. Fuyao, upon being induced with generous tax subsidies from local and state governments, retrofitted the facility, hired thousands of U.S. workers and brought over hundreds of Chinese workers to live in the United States while they trained and supervised the Dayton workforce. Positive PR was the explicit goal of closure of a major automotive factory in Dayton, Ohio. Bognar himself is a Dayton native and as a team the filmmakers have been documenting the region for the last 20 years. Almost 3,000 jobs were lost as a result of the 2008 closure, a devastating blow to the Dayton community. It is an all-too-familiar “rust-belt” story, a tragedy wherein American workers lose their jobs to workers in countries with looser regulation and lower wages.

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Fuyao’s CEO Cao Dewang, who hoped that the Chinese would come to be seen as friends to U.S. workers, rather than a threat. This was supposed to be a feel-good story about globalization, a redemptive story of hope and possibility. So optimistic was Dewang about the PR potential of his endeavor that he reached out to Bognar and Reichert in order to commission them to make a documentary film. Luckily for us, they politely declined, and instead offered to make an independent documentary. They requested and received complete access to company executives, board meetings and the factory floor.

The lessons are clear. Devotion to the company is ultimately meaningless to the company, which will gladly replace any worker it can with a machine. But workers do have power and there is the possibility of solidarity, of rising expectations, of a refusal to lie down and accept the meager crumbs on offer from the bosses. With any luck, perhaps this cohort of Chinese workers will take that lesson back to their homeland and begin to organize.

The feel-good narrative that Fuyao hoped to promote was reported and repeated by mainstream U.S. media outlets for months. In the film, we see the U.S. executives absorb this fawning coverage with hearty self-congratulation and sober observations about the responsibility they have to make it work. We also hear from the workers themselves, though, and this is where the story gets more complicated.

When China Comes to the Rustbelt

It was a feel-good story about globalization. But then things got complicated.
Hi Billy, I just read how Anita Hill won’t cut Joe Biden any slack for dragging her name through the mud all those years ago. She says she wants real change and accountability. I’m a Christian and I believe in forgiveness. But we as a nation got to start keeping it real. Where do we begin?

— WANETTA, Jersey City

Dear Wanetta,

In the Senate hearing room, the old-hardwood walls and tables lend a solemn air. Seated in a long row on the bench above the rest of the people are Senator Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Senator Ilhan Omar, Senator Stacey Abrams, Senator Maxine Waters, Senator Ayanna Pressley, Senator Toni Morrison, Senator Lori Lightfoot, Senator Shirley Chisholm, Senator Carol Moseley Braun and Senator Michelle Obama. Below them, seated at a microphone, facing the 10 senators and a national audience of millions, is a witness named Joe Biden.

Justice begins in the imagination.

— Rev

That Mueller report is some good reading, Reverend. The man’s a regular W.P. Wodehouse and doesn’t even know it. But it stuck in my craw watching Assange get carried from the Ecuadorian Embassy like a big hairy baby in the arms of the bobbies. I’m all for taking on The Donald and Assange ain’t no saint, but to go down for exposing the dirty deeds of the Pentagon. That stinks of bull, Reverend. My friends say he bad it coming. I couldn’t disagree more. You as peed as I am?

— TIM, Boerum Hill

I have to catch myself, because I feel like I should fire off a snarky jab at the hacker. He has boldly gone where no man has ever been so annoying — and worse than that if the rape charges are true.

But whether or not I like him is not important, because I know that I dislike American exceptionalism — the force that has Assange in its crosshairs. It is the reigning toxin of our culture. It is far more noxious than Julian Assange.

The Pentagon is a murderous band of gangsters and exposing its inner workings couldn’t be more important. Assange did that. He also vividly warned us about the national security state in the computer era. He doesn’t come off smelling like Jesus Christ, after his confusing deals with various devils, but it is startling with Assange gone, if he is gone, that there isn’t an outlaw left to face American Empire on such a scale.

May you travel in wildness,

— Rev

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OPENING NIGHT
SALUTE UNITE HERE, NYC RETIREES ROCK!

PROGRAM 1:

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 2: YOU CAN FIGHT CITY HALL AND WIN! (WITH A UNION)

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 3: UNION ORGANIZING MEETS THE TWILIGHT ZONE

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

SAT, MAY 11TH | CINEMA VILLAGE
SALUTE TO THE NYLHA - CLIMATE CHANGE IS A LABOR ISSUE

PROGRAM 4:

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 5: WORKERS TAKE ON THE WORLD’S BIGGEST RETAILER (EXPLOITER)

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 6: FILM SCHOOL. ZOMBIES. PRO-ART, ANTI-BIZ THEME. FUNNY!

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

SUN, MAY 12TH | CINEMA VILLAGE
HAPPY MOTHER’S DAY!
BIRDS SAVE THE EARTH AND NO KUKUS!

PROGRAM 7: FAMILY FILM. STUNNING ANIMATION

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 8:

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 9: BILLIONS FOR NEW WEAPONS. SERVICE MEMBER SAFETY? NOT SO MUCH.

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

MON, MAY 13TH | CINEMA VILLAGE
PROGRAM 10: THE UK’S OBAMA IS COMING! FREE EARLY SHOW

11:00 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 11: FROM GUERRILLA TO RAPPER & WHO WATCHES THE NYPD?

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 12: ARGENTINA ON THE MOVE!

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

TUES, MAY 14TH | CINEMA VILLAGE
PROGRAM 13: WORKER, POET, GRAVEDIGGER | FREE EARLY SHOW

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 14: HERE’S YOUR DREAM JOB. OOPS, NO PAY! PLUS UK STAR POWER SHORTS

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 15: OUR BACKYARDS ARE NOT BATTLEFIELDS!

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

WED, MAY 15TH | CINEMA VILLAGE
SALUTE TO SAG-AFTRA, WGA AND AFM - HOW TO STAY UNION ON A LOW BUDGET FILM

PROGRAM 16: FREE EARLY SHOW | ENCORE SHORTS AND PRIZEWINNERS

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 17: SAG-AFTRA & WGA-EST, AFM PANEL WITH SPECIAL GUESTS A LOW BUDGET FILM THAT SHINES

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

THURS, MAY 16TH | CINEMA VILLAGE
SALUTE TO THE INDEPENDENT DRIVERS GUILD

PROGRAM 20: HOW THE YELLOW CAB INDUSTRY WAS DESTROYED IN Nyc

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

PROGRAM 22: ENCORE SCREENING OF THE ZOMBIE COMEDY PRO-WORKER FILM

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

FRI, MAY 17TH | PEF HQ
PROGRAM 23: THE WOMEN OF THE PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FEDERATION, NY STATE, SUPPORT THEIR SISTERS (BROTHERS TOO!) (PEF MEMBERS PRIVATE EVENT)

SAT, MAY 18TH | DC 1707 AUDITORIUM

PROGRAM 24:

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

SUN, MAY 19TH | DC 1707 AUDITORIUM

PROGRAM 25:

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

MON, MAY 20TH | SUNY EMPIRE STATE | WORKERS UNITED AUDITORIUM

PROGRAM 26:

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

TUES, MAY 21ST | WORKERS UNITED AUDITORIUM

PROGRAM 27:

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

THURS, MAY 23RD | PENN SOUTH MUTUAL REDEVELOPMENT HOUSES

PROGRAM 31:

11:00 a.m. | BFA12
11:30 a.m. | BFA12

TICKETS & FULL SCHEDULE | WUFF WEBSITE AND EVENTBRITE