HOT LABOR SUMMER

HOW A RESURGENT LABOR MOVEMENT CONTINUES TO GAIN MOMENTUM

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN • PAGE 5
GHANA FEST-NY 2023
SAT AUG 5 • 12–7PM • FREE
Ghana Fest- Ny 2023 is an annual festival that celebrates Ghanaian culture — music, dance, food and live performances. This year’s event will take place at Crotona Park, Bronx.

THE WHITNEY’S QUEER HISTORY WALKING TOUR
Meet in front of the Whitney Museum of American Art on Sunday, Aug 27 at 3 p.m. for a free walking tour about the vibrant queer history of the neighborhood. This informative walk will visit sites that were important to the queer community, from gay clubs to the Hudson River Piers.

BLACK WOMEN RADICALS SUMMIT
SAT AUG 19 • 10–11AM • FREE
The National Alliance of Black Feminists is hosting a two-day summit in celebration of the 50th anniversary of National Black Feminist Organization. A watershed moment in history of Black feminist politics, the NBFO gave rise to other formidable and pioneering Black left feminist organizations such as the Cambridge River Collective and the National Alliance of Black Feminists.

THE WHITNEY JAZZ SERIES: MELODY TONIGHT
THU AUG 24 • 6:30–8PM • $6
This free outdoor concert is part of the Whitney Jazz Series, featuring a talented ensemble of performers who will be playing music from the 1950s and 1960s, including classic jazz standards and newer artists, including legendary saxophonist Charles McPherson!

THE ANNUAL CHARLIE PARKER JAZZ FESTIVAL
AUG 25 7–9PM & AUG 26–27 7–9PM • FREE
As a part of the annual 2023 Charlie Parker Jazz Festival, concerts will be held in Marcus Garvey Park and Tompkins Square Park all weekend Aug 25-27. The 2023 lineup includes veteran players and newer artists, including legendary saxophonist Charles McPherson! Go to https://cityparksfoundation.org/charliepark/ for more.


ADOPT A PUP AT THE SHELTER
SAT AUG 26 • 11AM–3PM • FREE
Volunteers from the Greenpoint Animal Rescue will be hosting an adoption event from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Greenpoint Animal Rescue, located at 303 Greenpoint Avenue in Brooklyn.

QUEENS MUSEUM EXHIBITION: TRACING BLACKNESS
SAT AUG 19 • 3–5PM • FREE
Queens Museum is offering a tour of two of their exhibitions “Tracey Rose: Shooting the Light Reaches” and A Angélica Neumann: Queridas, Lindo y Queer?” The tour is offered in English and in Spanish.

THE STRAND BOOKSTORE COMEDY SERIES
THE QUEER COMEDY HOUR
FRI AUG 4 • 7–8PM • $10
Queerotica Comedy is a hilarious show by exclusively GBTQIA+ comics. The show producers say that “Sex is history and gay sex is neglected. This show celebrates the life of queer sex from the first African American Queen to surefire homosexual Mike Pence.” Each show highlights an antifat of queer sex and a lineup of comedians talking about queer sex!” Go to https://stranfordny.com for tickets.

THINGS TO DO IN BROOKLYN
- The Greenpoint Animal Rescue is hosting an adoption event from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at their location at 303 Greenpoint Avenue in Brooklyn.
- Queens Museum is offering a tour of two of their exhibitions on August 19th from 3 to 5pm, in English and Spanish.
- The Strand Bookstore is hosting a Queer Comedy Hour on August 4th from 7 to 8 pm.
- The Whitney Museum is hosting a walking tour about queer history on August 27th.
- The Charlie Parker Jazz Festival will be held in Marcus Garvey Park and Tompkins Square Park on August 25-27.

ADVERTISE IN THE INDY
- Great rates
- Unique audience
- Personal attention from us
- High-quality design at no extra charge
917-426-4856 • ads@indypendent.org

THE INDYPENDENT, INC.
388 Atlantic Avenue, 2nd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
917-426-4856
www.indypendent.org
Twitter: @TheIndypendent
Instagram: theindypendent

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

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
John Tarleton

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Amha Guerguerian

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Ellen Davidson, Alina Mogilyskaia, Nicholas Powers, Steven Wishnia

ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR
Frank Reyonso

DESIGN DIRECTOR
Mikael “Road Warrior” Tarkela

INTERNS
Elise Carson-Holt, Owen Schacht, Lydia Wei

GENERAL INQUIRIES:
contact@indypendent.org

SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:
submissions@indypendent.org

ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:
ads@indypendent.org

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS
Linda Martin Alcroft, Eleanor J. Bader, Bennett Baumer, Nina Berman, Laura Jane Brett, Sue Brisk, Peter Carelmini, Lane Dibb, Olga Fedorova, Renée Felz, Lynne Foster, Esteban Guerra, Theodore Hamm, Nancy Hoch, David Hollohen, Manvi Jalan, Milo Keough, Christine Larsen, Derek Ludovici, Ben Mankoff, Ash Marinaccio, Gary Martin, Reverend Billy, Dylan Rice, Hank Dombrowski, Erik Anders-Nilsson, Eric Breiford, Hank Dombrowski, Joseph Esposito, Lew Friedman, Priscilla Grum, Michael Korn, Christine Miller, Saul Nieves, Tom O’Keete, Caroline Rath, Norm Scott, and Amanda Vender.
IN THIS ISSUE

PROTESTER PAYDAY, P4
Under a court settlement, more than 1,300 BLM protesters are eligible for payouts of up to $10K.

CAN DO, P5
Hard-working canners talk about their haul and what keeps them going.

RANK-AND-FILE STRATEGY, P6
How the Teamsters went up against UPS and won a historic new contract.

HOLLYWOOD HISTORY, P8
Hollywood is a union town, but the history is complicated.

HOLLYWOOD ON STRIKE, P9
Actors and screenwriters’ stand against AI is a fight for us all.

LABOR BRIEFS, P9
Grindr Workers unite, Amazon Labor Union fractures, Brooklyn pizzeria workers on fire.

HOW DOES THIS HELP?, P10
The new City budget axes all funding for outside education programs on Rikers Island.

‘IT’S HOME’, P12
NYCHA residents in Chelsea resist demolition plan that could displace them.

MASS TRANSIT SOLUTION, P14
The best way to move working-class New Yorkers is by investing more in our neglected bus system.

SUMMER BLISS, P15
Enjoy this 69-mile bike route all in one day, or do it in sections.

AFTER AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, P17
There are other ways to achieve affirmative action’s goals than the ones the Supreme Court recently struck down.

MUTUAL SUPPORT, P18
A new book by Mariame Kaba is a how-to guide for avoiding activist burnout.

REVEREND BILLY’S REVELATIONS, P19
Feeling hopeless about climate change? Reverend Billy would like a word with you.
BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTERS RECEIVE RECORD SETTLEMENT
THEY PROTESTED POLICE VIOLENCE AND THEN WERE VICTIMS OF IT

By John Tableton

Three years ago this summer, tens of thousands of New Yorkers took to the streets on a near-daily basis to protest police violence and the killing of George Floyd. They in turn were greeted with violence by the NYPD. On July 19, the city settled a class-action lawsuit for about $13.7 million that will go to protesters who endured unlawful police tactics, the largest financial settlement of its kind in U.S. history. The settlement comes on the heels of two related lawsuits involving police abuses during the George Floyd protests that the City settled for millions of dollars in damages.

The Independent spoke with Savitri Durkee, longtime New York City activist and plaintiff to the lawsuit, about the significance of the settlement and the NYPD’s history of violence toward protest movements. Durkee was present at a June 4, 2020 protest in Mott Haven, Bronx in which the police surrounded, attacked and arrested roughly 400 protesters, many of them young people who appeared to her to be participating in their first protest movement.

“The NYPD came there with a battle plan, and they enacted that plan,” she recalled. “I saw police pulling people’s glasses off their face and crushing them to the ground. I saw the police beating people with batons. I saw the police arresting medics who were trying to come to people’s aid. It was incredibly violent.”

THE INDEPENDENT: What do you think this settlement accomplishes?

SAVITRI DURKEE: For a lot of protesters who were out there, this financial settlement could be life-changing. You can get a car. You can go to CUNY for a couple of semesters or move out of your friend’s basement. For other recipients, it will take the pressure off covering monthly bills, or allow them to take a little rest.

It’s disappointing we didn’t get a real commitment from the NYPD to change their behavior, or an apology, or even an acknowledgement of wrongdoing. These moments are complicated. It’s not a victory, but it’s something to hold onto. The settlement doesn’t address the injustice, but it does address our right to protest the injustice. Our First Amendment rights may not be valued, but at least they are still recognized.

You worked closely with the legal team. Tell us about what went on behind the scenes that ultimately led to this settlement.

Every one of the plaintiffs was deposed by a lawyer working for the City. I spent three hours answering questions from the lawyer about what happened to me. It was rigorous and intense. They asked, “What happened? Where were you standing? What were you doing? Then what happened? Who touched you? How were you arrested? Who was your arresting officer?” Endless questions of that nature.

We had an amazing team of lawyers, many of whom have been around in New York City and working on First Amendment and civil-rights issues for decades. They deposed arresting officers and people who were involved in suppressing the protests up to a very high level in the NYPD.

There was a lot of talk about injunctive relief, which would involve training, and procedures, and things the NYPD would or wouldn’t do. Attorney General Letitia James and others are still in conversation with the NYPD about that.

But, we pulled out of that conversation when it seemed clear we would not achieve our goals with the NYPD.

Talk about how technology was used by the plaintiffs to identify the abuses that the police committed.

There was a group called SITU that analyzed a ton of video and photographs. During the month or more of the George Floyd uprising, there were often multiple protests happening on the same day at the same time. One march might intersect with another march. They were able to use geolocation and mapping to synthesize all that information and then determine the times and places where really egregious violations were made. They grouped those violations into four main categories: baton strikes, pepper spray, excessive force and improper arrest.

When the final settlement was announced, a lawyer for the City insisted that there was no historical pattern of police abuse of mass protests in New York.

This just makes me laugh. We saw similar misconduct during Occupy Wall Street when 700 protesters were arrested and arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge, or during the protests against the 2004 Republican National Convention when they illegally arrested hundreds of people and detained them for up to 72 hours in toxic holding pens at a West Side bus depot. They paid our $10 million in settlements for that. During the big Iraq War protests, they charged into terrified crowds on their horses. During the Critical Mass bike rides of the mid-2000s, I myself was run off the road by police officers in SUVs. Police attacks on First Amendment-protected protests have been a problem throughout my 25 years as an activist here in New York, and probably for longer than that.

How many people will be eligible to receive money under this settlement?

We think there are at least 1,300 people who will qualify for this settlement. They are people who were arrested in certain places within certain windows of time and experienced some of this misconduct from the NYPD. It’s an interesting moment to try and reach 1,300 people who were arrested during the George Floyd uprising, find them and say, “Hey, this is your money. Go get it. This will not end danger you. You don’t have to give a Social Security number or interact with the police to do this.” There’s a lot of work to be done reaching out to those folks and trying to find people who have moved, or who didn’t have an address at the time, or who might be afraid but really need that $10,000.

What’s the path forward?

We should look to the same people, we’ve always looked to who really understand these issues: Black and Brown organizers who’ve been doing this work for hundreds of years, who understand resilience, who understand how smart you have to be to outwit this system, who understand care is justice and justice is care.
‘WE’RE CLEANING THE STREETS’
HARD-WORKING CANNERS TALK ABOUT THEIR HAUL AND WHAT KEEPS THEM GOING

By Lydia Wei

n a hot summer day, the sound of clanging aluminum soda cans and Don Omar’s 2009 reggaeton hit “Salíó El Sol” fills the swirling air at Sure We Can, a non-profit outdoor redemption center in Williamsburg. Two-story tall edifices of boxed and bagged cans and bottles stretch toward the blue skies, towering over the people that sort. Large faces graffitied on the sides of industrial shipping containers peer out over endless stacks of cans that will soon be sent off for recycling. The cannners themselves work in the shade of an overhead shelter. Though most of them are older immigrants, their hands move with an impressive dexterity as they sift through huge piles of cans, tossing them into bags divided by company and bottle type.

An estimated 10,000 cannners — roughly the equivalent of the city’s Department of Sanitation workforce — make a living every day in the streets. Canning work takes on a variety of methods, and most people stick to a certain route. Cannners interact with each other in many ways, from turf battles to building long-term friendships over the many hours spent sorting together. Some have cars and homes, while others rely on shopping carts to store and transport their collections.

In the outer boroughs, there are state-licensed redemption centers that buy cans and resell them to beverage companies. In Manhattan, for-profit pick-up trucks buy directly from cannners on the street. Others exchange their cans through vending machines outside supermarkets, though these impose a $12-per-day limit and are often jammed.

In 1983, the New York State Returnable Container Act placed a five-cent deposit on cans for specific beverages, including carbonated soft drinks, water and beer. Since then, the deposit value hasn’t risen. In 2021, a bill was introduced in the state legislature that would raise the deposit value to 10 cents and increase the categories of containers covered, but it remains stalled.

Sure We Can is the only non-profit redemption center in Bushwick, Brooklyn. It was founded by cannners Ana Martinez de Luco, a radical street nun, and Eugene Gadson in 2007. It serves 1,200 individuals a year, distributing about $800,000 into the community annually, reports Sure We Can. A constant flow of cannners visit the center to sort and deposit cans and bottles. We spoke with people there (excluding Linda) to get a sense of what it means to be New York City canner.

Interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

REÑÉ
7 years canning; manager at Sure We Can

I was struggling with depression and an alcohol addiction, so I couldn’t work regularly anymore. There arrived a day when I didn’t have any work and didn’t have any money, and one of the only ways I could live was by canning.

I would sell everything on 33rd St. between 11th and 12th. We were next to a big parking lot; it was a very empty area. A pickup truck would come from Brooklyn. We were all there: some people were homeless, some people had homes, but all of us were cannners — all different people with different problems. There would be 40 to 50 of us at once. People had psychological problems, there were lots of fights, and in came the police, in came the ambulances. So the pickup spot no longer exists; now it’s NYPD parking.

My route was between Times Square and 49th St., 52nd, 48th, 60th, 42nd and 1st Ave., where there were lots of restaurants. Radio City had the most, you could get $200 or $300 in one night. You could find a six-wheeled USPS cart, and you fix it up, and 80 boxes full of cans could fit on one of those push-carts. I was sometimes pushing three or four carts at the same time. It was really heavy, but you’re happy because it’s money.

When I stopped drinking, I started saving for an apartment. All the money I had been spending on alcohol started going to rent.

Sure We Can was born with me. Ana Martinez de Luco and I knew each other from the canning world. I was always a mechanic in my official jobs. Ana was initially working in Manhattan, and whenever she had a problem with a forklift or any mechanical problems, she would call me. Our alliance became stronger. Now I work as a manager here, and I deal with the transfer of cans to the companies that buy them.

FÉLITE
15 years canning; retired

People shouldn’t look at us with a bad eye, like we’re walking around begging — like what? We’re recycling! They look at us like we’re miserable. Those of us who you see in the street, we’re cleaning the streets!

I do it for my exercise. I walk around and make a little money. I worked in a supermarket and a meat shop, but I’ve been retired for about two years. In the afternoon, after getting out of work, I used to go out into the streets [to can], I would go back home first, eat something, go out to the street around 3 p.m. and come back home by 7 p.m. But Saturday and Sunday, I spent almost completely in the street.

Now I’m old; I do it when I can.

GUILLERMA
7 years canning; retired

What we’re doing is good for the environment. It helps us to be able to buy necessities. I don’t work anymore. I get my little check each month but it’s not much, and it’s not enough.

The supers give me bottles. I have three supers. I was around here and a guy said to me, “Hey, morena, do you collect bottles?” and I said, “Yes!” He said, “Go to this place on 86th, we’ll save bottles for you there,” and then I found two more supers, because they saw that I was working already at the one building, and the three buildings are right next to each other.

I don’t like the glass bottles. They’re very heavy. When I have ten boxes of glass bottles on this cart, I can’t. And you don’t make any more on them. Still five cents. They don’t want to raise the value. But I’m working more and making less.

It’s very heavy; it’s really bad for your body. But I don’t have anything else, [and] I’m not just gonna sit around. I have to do it. I have two sons. The money I gain with this is for the family. And I also send money to children with cancer, to help them. I sell these [cans, bottles] and I’ll send $30, $20 to the kids.

I worked through the whole pandemic. People told me, morena, morena. Don’t go into the street, but I went out and I never got sick.

Continued on page 18
HOW THE TEAMSTERS PREVAIL OVER UPS
THE RETURN OF MILITANT UNION DEMOCRACY POWER A HISTORIC CONTRACT CAMPAIGN

By Amba Gueguernian with John Tarleton

Early on in the morning of July 14, more than 300 UPS workers and their supporters had gathered outside the company’s sprawling fulfillment center in Canarsie, Brooklyn for a rally and practice picket. At around 8 o’clock, a line of brown-uniformed employees walked directly from the line into work, dropping their signs reading “Just Practicing” right outside the facility’s entrance.

Sean O’Brien, president of the Teamsters, which represents 340,000 UPS workers nationwide, was on hand to drive home the point that the union was fully ready to launch the largest private sector strike in decades when its contract with UPS expired on August 1. He had entered the building earlier that morning, dapping up workers and asking them, “We ready?” Meanwhile, managers in suits nervously filmed the strike preparation activities from the shade of the building’s entrance.

“Maybe they feel pressure,” said one worker as he observed a company official watching them.

“If they’re doing that, it’s because of something. Usually they don’t care [when we practice picket],” said his friend.

“They’re scared,” concluded the worker.

“They’re worried,” affirmed his friend.

And with good reason. UPS Teamster practice pickets were held outside scores of UPS facilities across the country throughout July. It was a flex that made visible the union’s ability to mobilize its own members as well as a broader network of support. It also demonstrated how far the union had come since the members had voted out a management-friendly leadership in 2021. And more broadly it reflected the growing boldness of workers and Starbucks baristas and other essential actors and screenwriters to Amazon warehouse workers.

On hand to drive home the point that the union represents 340,000 UPS workers nationwide, was the first to blink when it requested resumption of bargaining with the Teamsters on July 19, two weeks after the union had walked away from contract talks. Within hours of meeting on July 25, the two sides concluded a tentative contract agreement that left the union declaring it had won a historic victory. Among the gains were significant increases in starting wages for part-time preloaders, the end of a two-tier wage system for drivers, the end to forced six-day work weeks, a commitment to install air conditioning in all new UPS vans starting in January and the removal of driver-facing surveillance cameras in the vans. The union projected the value of the settlement at $30 billion.

“I know for sure that if we could take $30 billion from a corporation, we kicked their ass,” said Antonio Rosario, a UPS driver of 29 years and a Teamster organizer with Local 804 in New York City. “That’s how we beat capital.”

The UPS Teamsters will vote on the contract from August 3rd to 22nd.

The origins of the Teamsters’ 2021 contract victory can be traced back over almost a half century — a history that includes exhilarating victories, crushing defeats and years of patiently organizing to reset the union on a democratic path that fully leverages the power of its rank-and-file membership to be able to force concessions from one of America’s largest and most profitable corporations.

Under legendary Teamsters President Jimmy Hoffa Jr., who led the union from 1957 to 1971, the union achieved unprecedented gains for members that at that time predominantly worked in the trucking industry. However, Hoffa also made unsavory alliances with the mafia while purging the left from the union. By the 1970s the Teamsters were riddled with mob corruption. Hoffa spent four years in federal prison during his presidency.

After his release, he was again defeated in 1975 in what is widely believed to have been a mafia hit.

In this milieu, rank-and-file caucus Teamsters for a Democratic Union was founded in Cleveland in 1976 following a wave of wildcat strikes that shook the freight industry. It was an alliance of socialists who had taken Teamster jobs and militant truck drivers who had been organizing against contract concessions.

TDU emphasized building union power from the bottom up. They did so by identifying and supporting worker-organizers and bringing them into struggles around workplace issues that most affected them.

In 1991, militant reformer Ron Carey won an upset victory two years after the Department of Justice required the union to give members the right to vote for their top officers. Carey — who was a hand-picked successor of Hoffa but was not part of it — was the head of Local 804 in New York City, which today is one of the most militant Teamster locals. Carey was known for bolstering rank-and-file activism and leading wildcat strikes in New York.

In 1997, a year before he was ousted from power, 160,000 Teamsters went on a 15-day strike under his leadership, winning substantial pay increases and the conversion of 10,000 part-time positions to full-time. In an era where large strikes were rare and usually ended in defeat, the 1997 Teamster strike stood out as a beacon of hope for a moribund union movement.

Facing a fully-mobilized union, UPS was the first to blink when it requested resumption of bargaining with the Teamsters on July 19, two weeks after the union had walked away from contract talks. Within hours of meeting on July 25, the two sides concluded a tentative contract agreement that left the union declaring it had won a historic victory. Among the gains were significant increases in starting wages for part-time preloaders, the end of a two-tier wage system for drivers, the end to forced six-day work weeks, a commitment to install air conditioning in all new UPS vans starting in January and the removal of driver-facing surveillance cameras in the vans. The union projected the value of the settlement at $30 billion.

“I know for sure that if we could take $30 billion from a corporation, we kicked their ass,” said Antonio Rosario, a UPS driver of 29 years and a Teamster organizer with Local 804 in New York City. “That’s how we beat capital.”

The UPS Teamsters will vote on the contract from August 3rd to 22nd.

The Teamsters’ old guard returned to power in 1998 when Jimmy Hoffa Jr. became president, and the union’s leadership soon reverted to negotiating management-friendly contracts behind closed doors. Facing a challenge from union dissidents, Hoffa narrowly won re-election in 2016. In 2018, he triggered a full-scale revolt within the union when he invoked an arcane union rule to impose a contract on the UPS Teamsters that the workers had voted down.

The blowback from the 2018 contract fiasco arrived three years later when Hoffa Jr. retired and his hand-picked successors lost by a nearly 2-1 margin to the Teamsters United reform slate led by Sean O’Brien. A longtime Boston Teamsters leader and a former Hoffa ally, O’Brien had previously clashed with TDU. Vowing there would be no more concessions to UPS, he ran in coalition with TDU and embraced their rank-and-file strategy to revitalize the union.
The new leadership formed organizing committees to unionize Amazon workers and to prepare UPS members for contract negotiations and the potential of a strike. The timing could not have been better. The previous years had seen the first rumblings of a labor upsurge. In 2018 red state worker unions in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona launched strikes over poor pay and working conditions that received broad public support, showing the power of collective action and solidarity even in seemingly inhospitable environments. During the pandemic, millions of workers quit their jobs in the “Great Resignation” while others responded to the callousness of their bosses by organizing unions including at workplaces like Amazon, Starbucks and Trader Joe’s — long thought to be impossible to unionize.

At UPS workers received no hazard pay during the pandemic, even as the company’s operating profits soared from $6.5 billion in 2019 to $13.1 billion in 2022, and investors were rewarded with billions of dollars in stock buybacks.

“We were getting all this information about how long the virus would sit on a package. We were like, ‘Well, what happens if someone just touched it an hour ago, and they had COVID and I’m handling package now?’”

Local 804 organizer Antoine Andrews told The Indy: “We were in the storm. Many of us lost loved ones. My mother passed away,” Andrews said.

The contract campaign officially launched last August amid a flurry of activities organized by organizing committees. At union events, workers were given drafts of potential demands and invited to rank them. They were also invited to sign pledges that they would fight for a fair contract. New shop floor organizers were recruited and trained. Single-issue campaigns were launched around demands such as the installation of air conditioning inside UPS vans and making Martin Luther King Day a paid holiday. In July, practice pickets were held outside UPS workplaces across the country to put the company on notice while building support for a strike.

Local 804 worker-organizer and TDU member Elliot Lewis shared one of the organizing goals he set for himself with The Indy: “I’m trying to help develop other members of my center and see if they’ll step up to the plate. We could have, ideally, one contract-action-team member per 20 members or so.”

“I think that sort of structure-intensive organizing is what we’ve been building up nationally through the contract campaign, and what TDU has been building up for a long time,” Lewis added.

Another centerpiece of this movement’s success was the high-glossing of part-timers. The current starting pay for part-timers, which make up 60% of the UPS workforce, is $15.50, just above minimum wage in many places across the country. At a practice picket in Canarsie, Brooklyn, burly Teamsters chanted “Who got the power? What kind of power?” while loudspeakers blasted “We’re Not Gonna Take It” and “Under Pressure” as other workers drove by, honking in solidarity.

“This is just a little snippet of what can happen if UPS doesn’t come to their senses and do the right thing by our members,” Teamsters President Sean O’Brien told The Indy outside the July 7 practice picket in Canarsie, Brooklyn.

With the prospects of a strike rising, union militants and their external supporters looked forward to August 1 with growing anticipation. It was going to be the Super Bowl of struggles between capital and labor, and for once the workers appeared to hold the upper hand. The Teamsters had filed UPS to its knees in its 15-day strike in 1997. This time, the union was better organized, had cultivated far more external allies, and would be taking action at a time when public support for unions is at its highest point since the mid-1960s. The company also knew a prolonged strike could send customers fleeing to rivals such as FedEx and Amazon, and that they might not come back.

While the tentative contract agreement contains many gains for the Teamsters, such as a scheduled opportunity for a strike, a quarter of all ground shipments in the United States and an estimated five to six percent of the U.S. gross domestic product annually. A strike would have paralyzed UPS while creating cascading disruptions throughout the economy. On July 20, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce urged the Biden Administration to intervene in case of a strike and force workers to return to jobs under a provision in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act that allows the president to do so “in instances in which a strike might endanger the public’s health or safety.”

Taft-Hartley was last invoked by a president to thwart work stoppages in 2002 and 1971 — in both cases against the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which represents West Coast dock workers. President Biden expressed support for the Teamsters right to strike in his public statements. However, his December decision not to invoke the 1947 Railway Labor Act to break a potential railroad workers strike and impose a management-friendly settlement on 12 railroad workers’ unions loomed in the background.

THE ORIGINS OF THE TEAMSTERS’ CONTRACT VICTORY CAN BE TRACED BACK OVER ALMOST A HALF CENTURY

Continued on page /one.onum/six.onum

REVVED UP: Teamster Local 804 members hold a practice picket outside a UPS fulfillment center in Canarsie, Brooklyn.

CORPORATE PIGS: UPS Teamsters brought a mascot to their practice pickets. The company’s annual profits increased from $6.5 billion in 2019 to $11.3 billion in 2022.

WAIT & SEE: The prospect of 340,000 Teamsters going on strike nationwide loomed large for much of July.

After contract talks between UPS and the Teamsters stalled on July 5 over a disagreement about pay increases for part-timers, the union hummed the company in the media while practice pickets grew in size and numbers across the country.

At a practice picket in Canarsie, Brooklyn, burly Teamsters chanted “Who got the power? What kind of power?” while loudspeakers blasted “We’re Not Gonna Take It” and “Under Pressure” as other workers drove by, honking in solidarity.

“At a practice picket in Canarsie, Brooklyn, burly Teamsters chanted “Who got the power? What kind of power?” while loudspeakers blasted “We’re Not Gonna Take It” and “Under Pressure” as other workers drove by, honking in solidarity.

“This is just a little snippet of what can happen if UPS doesn’t come to their senses and do the right thing by our members,” Teamsters President Sean O’Brien told The Indy outside the July 7 practice picket in Canarsie, Brooklyn.

With the prospects of a strike rising, union militants and their external supporters looked forward to August 1 with growing anticipation. It was going to be the Super Bowl of struggles between capital and labor, and for once the workers appeared to hold the upper hand. The Teamsters had brought UPS to its knees in its 15-day strike in 1997. This time, the union was better organized, had cultivated far more external allies, and would be taking action at a time when public support for unions is at its highest point since the mid-1960s. The company also knew a prolonged strike could send customers fleeing to rivals such as FedEx and Amazon, and that they might not come back.

While the tentative contract agreement contains many gains for the Teamsters, for some a sense of a missed opportunity lingers. A strike, after all, might have yielded even bigger gains for UPS workers. And a nationwide slowdown with UPS offered a rare opportunity in the annals of American labor.

“UPS workers know what they’ve won as a result of their threat. But how many Amazon workers are aware of this?” asked David Levin of TDU. “Had there been a strike, it would have been a national teach-in about the reality of worker power and union power.”

Speaking at a July 31 Strike Power Town Hall organized by NYC-DSA, Elliot Lewis reflected the mixed emotions many of the 150 attendees felt about the contract campaign’s outcome.

“It is disappointing after organizing for a strike for years to not strike when I think we could have won more? Yeah, it’s disappointing,” Lewis said. “But it is also rewarding to see that we’ve overturned decades of concessions!”

For Antonio Rosario, the outcome was good enough.

“This will probably be the first time that I ever vote yes on a contract, because we won so much,” he said at the same town hall. “We have to realize that the reason we’re here is because it took hundreds of thousands of workers mobilizing,” he said. “If we do what we should ever really be satisfied with what we get? No! This is just the beginning. This is where we start.”

For labor historian Toni Gilpin, winning a strong contract without having to go on strike is a sign of strength.

“You want unions that are strong enough to compel management to give up the goods without actually having to go through the hardship of the strike,” she told The Indy.

Continued on page 16

The Indy
HOLLYWOOD IS A UNION TOWN
BUT THE HISTORY OF TODAY’S STRIKING UNIONS IS COMPLICATED

By Steven Wishnia

The American movie industry has been one of the most consistently unionized sectors of the economy since the 1930s — but to achieve that, workers had to overcome “the iron fist of the moguls” and organized crime, says historian Gerald Horne, author of Class Struggle in Hollywood 1930-1950.

Craft workers — painters, plumbers, carpenters — were the first to organize, joining the International Association of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE), founded in New York in 1893. Five hundred of them went on strike in 1918. The Screen Writers Guild, ancestor of the Writers Guild of America, was founded at a meeting of 10 writers in February 1933, and the Screen Actors Guild, a few months later. (SAG merged with the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists to form SAG-AFTRA in 2012.) Teamsters Local 399, which now represents drivers, casting directors and more, emerged in the early 1930s.

Hollywood’s moguls and the Depression’s brutal economy gave workers a motive to organize: In March 1933, the main movie studios announced a 50% pay cut. The unions also benefited from a core of leftist militants, such as John Howard Lawson, the Screen Writers Guild’s first president and a Communist Party member who Horne calls “the spark.”

The Guild was elected bargaining agent for screenwriters in 1938, under the protections established by the new National Labor Relations Act. It did not win a full contract with the studios until 1941, though.

SAG’s impetus was money and safety. Their salaries had already been slashed in 1931, and Franklinstein star Boris Karloff complained about having to do a 25-hour shoot. By the end of the year, it had attracted stars like James Cagney and Groucho Marx, and membership reached 3,000 in 1935. It won its first contract in 1937. The American Federation of Radio Artists, SAG’s predecessor, formed that year and won its first contract in 1938.

IATSE already had a foothold in the film industry, with 9,000 members by 1933. But in 1934, it was taken over by organized crime, which installed George E. Browne as president. Browne and his partner, gangster Willie Bioff, worked out low-wage deals with the studio owners in exchange for bribes. They made several unsuccessful attempts to take over SAG, took a 2% kickback on paychecks and sent goons to break up a 1937 strike protesting such, and split up a local that rebelled against mob control.

The arrangement continued after Bioff and Browne were imprisoned on federal racketeering charges in 1941, with Roy Brewer heading the Hollywood locals.

A rival federation, the Conference of Studio Unions, attracted craft workers trying to get out from under that mob domination. Affiliated with the national Carpenters union, it also included painters and cartoonists and was headed by Herb Sorrell, a veteran of the failed 1937 strike.

The CSU’s numerous jurisdictional disputes with IATSE over who had the right to do which jobs came to a head in March 1945. Set decorators who had broken away from IATSE affiliated with CSU Local 1421. The studios refused to bargain with them, leading to a strike by more than 10,000 CSU members.

The strike slowed but didn’t halt film production. Thousands of IATSE members refused to cross the picket lines, according to Local 725’s website. But SAG members did, including a rising union official named Ronald Reagan.

Frustrated, CSU decided to try to stop production at the Warner Brothers lot in Burbank with mass picketing. On Oct. 5, several hundred picketers assembled outside the lot — they were assaulted by strikebreakers and mob goons on one side, and by Los Angeles County police with tear-gas bombs on the other.

The strike settled later that month, but the studios blacklisted IATSE members who had refused to cross picket lines, and permanently locked out the CSU the next year.

By then, the mogul-Mob alliance had a powerful new weapon against the unions: Anti-Communist hysteria was spreading rapidly across the country, and anyone with a leftist history was a target. Reagan, then beginning his devolution from a liberal to a far-right icon and soon to become SAG president, accused the CSU of being part of a “Soviet effort to gain control of Hollywood.” In reality, the Communist Party had opposed the 1945 strike.

In October 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee held hearings on “Communist infiltration” of Hollywood, featuring “friendly witnesses” like Reagan and Ayn Rand. The committee vituperatively grilled the ten “unfriendly witnesses” about their political associations. Two of them, John Howard Lawson and Lester Cole, both among Writers’ Guild’s 10 founders, were imprisoned for contempt of Congress after they refused to answer questions. They and a third Guild cofounder, John Bright, were among the hundreds of people blacklisted from working in the industry until the 1960s.

The federal Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 required union officials to swear that they were not Communists, and most unions quickly went along. SAG in 1953 voted almost unanimously to impose a similar loyalty oath on new members.

Union density in Hollywood stayed near-universal; however, Most American employers in the 1950s didn’t have a problem with unions that had tamed themselves by purging the left. Density was around 90% in 1979, according to the Strikewave newsletter, but plummeted to less than half in the Reagan 1980s.

Meanwhile, the industry’s economics were upended in 1948 by the Supreme Court’s decision in United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc., which prohibited studios from owning movie theaters. That led to the end of the studio system, in which most workers were hired as employees under long-term contracts, and effectively made them freelancers.

It coincided with the rise of television, making residuals — payments for reuse of their work, such as movies broadcast on TV or TV show reruns — an important source of income.

“Every industry-wide strike since 1950 has been about residuals,” Below the Stars author Kate Fortmueller wrote in the L.A. Review of Books in May.

The unions finally won residuals in 1960, after overlapping strikes by the Writers’ Guild and SAG. The Writers’ Guild has gone on strike eight times since 1950, including a four-month walkout in 1973 that won residuals for video sales and cable TV. SAG-AFTRA’s longest was an 11-month strike by video-game actors in 2016. The abysmal residuals for streaming are a main issue in the current strike.

Hollywood unions today, Horne says, “don’t have to face the tidal wave of red-baiting that they did in 1945 and 1946.” He hasn’t seen current SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher accused of being a closet Communist, he notes. On the other hand, he adds, “they could use the kind of selflessness and energy that the Communists injected.”
By John Tarleton

Shortly before television and movie actors went on strike on July 14, SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher spoke at a press conference about why her union was headed for better pay and working conditions but for the possibility that workers in all fields affected by will be able to exert any control over how artificial intelligence (AI) is deployed and to whose benefit.

Drescher called on her union’s 160,000 members to make the collective sacrifices necessary to win a prolonged strike against some of this nation’s wealthiest corporations — Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Disney, Paramount, etc. She also appealed for the support of the broader labor movement and the public at large to support the union. In this strike, the workers are not only fighting for better pay and working conditions but for the possibility that workers in all fields affected by will be able to exert any control over how artificial intelligence (AI) is deployed and to whose benefit.

Drescher’s short soliloquy went viral and received millions of views. You can watch it here.

Drescher’s speech came on the heels of a story from Deadline about corporate CEOs from the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers’ (AMPTP) plan to crush strikes by the actors and the screenwriters (who have been on the picket line since May 2) by starving them out until they start losing their homes and apartments. The stark nature of Hollywood’s class war couldn’t have been made clearer.

Most of SAG-AFTRA’s members are not rich and famous. But some of them are, and they have millions of fans who they can communicate directly with through social media as they fight for the future of their craft. Unfortunately for the studio bosses, who know more about manipulating spreadsheets than how to command a stage, they are up against a union whose members, by definition, are some of the world’s most talented communicators. We’ll see how this plays out in the months ahead.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE:
SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher on the picket line in Los Angeles.

‘If we don’t stand tall right now, we are all going to be in trouble.’

“What happens here is important because what’s happening to us is happening across all fields of labor, by means of when employers make Wall Street and greed their priority and they forget about the essential contributors that make that machine run. We are the victims here. We are being victimized by a very greedy entity. I am shocked by the way the people we have been in business with are treating us. I cannot believe it, quite frankly, how far apart we are on so many things. How they plead poverty. That they’re losing money left and right when giving hundreds of millions of dollars to their CEOs. The entire business model has been changed by streaming, digital, AI. This is a moment of history, that is a moment of truth. If we don’t stand tall right now, we are all going to be in trouble. We are all going to be in jeopardy, being replaced by machines. You cannot change the business model as much as it has changed and not expect the contract to change too. We’re not going to keep doing incremental changes on a contract that no longer honors what is happening right now with this business model that was foisted upon us. What are we doing? Moving around furniture on the Titanic? It’s crazy. So the jig is up. AMPTP, we stand tall. You have to wake up and smell the coffee. We are labor and we stand tall and we demand respect and to be honored for our contribution. You share the wealth because you cannot exist without us. Thank you.” — FRAN DRESCHER

PRESIDENT OF SAG-AFTRA

Labors Briefs

GRINDR WORKERS SWIPE FOR UNION

Workers at the LGBTQ+ dating app Grindr announced July 20 that they want a long-term relationship with the Communications Workers of America union. Union supporters say they’ve signed up a large majority of about 100 employees in tech, design, marketing and quality assurance. “We want a company built for queer people, not one built to extract wealth from queer people,” they said in a letter to management. “And we want to build it together, united.” The union also noted the roughly 300 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced in Congress and state legislatures this year. “Grindr employees believe it is crucial to stand united & push back against these assaults on equality & inclusivity by joining together to exercise their power at work,” it said on Twitter July 20. The 14-year-old app, which lets users click on the profiles of other users in their vicinity, has about 13 million active users a month.

AMAZON UNION DISSIDENTS SUE FOR ELECTION

A dissident group of 86 workers at Amazon’s JFK8 warehouse on Staten Island sued the Amazon Labor Union in federal court in Brooklyn July 10, demanding that it hold elections for union leadership. The ALU leadership changed the union’s constitution last December to postpone elections for new officers until after it wins a contract. Amazon has refused to recognize or negotiate with the union for more than a year. ALU Democratic Reform Caucus member David-Desreye Sherwood told Labor Notes that union leader Chris Smalls had presented the revised constitution at a meeting without allowing a vote by members, telling them, “If you don’t like it, there’s the door.” ALU co-founder Gerald Bryson dismissed the reform caucus as an attempted “coup” by “seven white people.” Meanwhile in Pontiac, Michigan, 60 warehouse workers at Amazon’s delivery station interrupted the Prime Day sales rush July 11-12 with a three-hour walkout. “We are demanding a safe work environment where we are not strainig, pulling muscles from lifting heavy packages, or tripping over boxes falling off the conveyor belt,” said striker Alicia Ozier.

LABOR BRIEFS

By Indepndent Staff

Amazon union dissidents sue for election

A House appropriations subcommittee voted July 14 to approve massive cuts to labor-law enforcement contained in the Republicans’ budget proposal for the 2024 fiscal year. It would slash funding for the Wage and Hour Division by $75 million, a 29% cut from this year; slice $95 million from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a 15% cut; and amputate one-third of the National Labor Relations Board’s budget — bringing it down to $200 million, the lowest since 1998. President Biden had sought $376.4 million for the NLRB, which oversees labor-management relations and hundreds of Unfair Labor Practice charges filed against Starbucks alone. “We are not even close to replacing the 50% of field staff that have left the agency since 2002,” the NLRB Union said July 14.

House GOP seeks to slash labor-law enforcement

A House appropriations subcommittee voted July 14 to approve massive cuts to labor-law enforcement contained in the Republicans’ budget proposal for the 2024 fiscal year. It would slash funding for the Wage and Hour Division by $75 million, a 29% cut from this year; slice $95 million from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a 15% cut; and amputate one-third of the National Labor Relations Board’s budget — bringing it down to $200 million, the lowest since 1998. President Biden had sought $376.4 million for the NLRB, which oversees labor-management relations and hundreds of Unfair Labor Practice charges filed against Starbucks alone. “We are not even close to replacing the 50% of field staff that have left the agency since 2002,” the NLRB Union said July 14.

Barboncino becomes city’s first unionized pizzeria

Workers at the Barboncino pizzeria in Crown Heights voted unanimously to join Barboncino Workers United on July 26, making it the first unionized pizzeria in New York City. The union, affiliated with Workers United SEIU, will represent about 40 line cooks, bartenders, bussers and servers. The staff, the union said, wanted better wages, more control over scheduling, clear disciplinary procedures, and a “no tolerance” sexual-harassment policy. They had asked management to recognize the union voluntarily last November, but it didn’t, so they petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to schedule the vote. “I’m proud to be part of the fight to bring order and justice to the nation’s fastest-growing, least-pro- tected industry,” bartender Mike Kemmet said in a statement.

ALU Rift: Amazon Labor Union President Chris Smalls (third from left) speaks at a 2022 Labor Day rally. A reform caucus within ALU is demanding the union hold democratic elections for its leadership.

ALU RIFT: Amazon Labor Union President Chris Smalls (third from left) speaks at a 2022 Labor Day rally. A reform caucus within ALU is demanding the union hold democratic elections for its leadership.

Creative Class on Strike

against dystopia

How to speak simultaneously to multiple public figures are often content to

The Stark nature of Hollywood’s class war couldn’t have been made clearer.

Most of SAG-AFTRA’s members are not rich and famous. But some of them are, and they have millions of fans who they can communicate directly with through social media as they fight for the future of their craft. Unfortunately for the studio bosses, who know more about manipulating spreadsheets than how to command a stage, they are up against a union whose members, by definition, are some of the world’s most talented communicators. We’ll see how this plays out in the months ahead.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE:
SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher on the picket line in Los Angeles.
**INMATES RE-ENTER SOCIETY**

The inmates, who were released from Rikers Island in 2023, were part of a program that aimed to prepare them for re-entry into society. The program included various services such as education, job training, and mental health support. The inmates received certificates upon completion of the program, which they could use to enhance their chances of finding employment.

**THE FORTUNE SOCIETY'S PROGRAMS**

The Fortune Society is one of the non-profit organizations that were contracted by the Department of Correction (DOC) to provide daily programming at Rikers Island. The program was designed to help inmates prepare for life after release and reduce recidivism. The inmates were provided with classes in life skills, entrepreneurship, and addiction programs, among others.

**OUTSIDE GROUPS BANISHED FROM CITY JAIL AFTER 30 YEARS OF HELPING INMATES RE-ENTER SOCIETY**

For decades, various groups have provided services to inmates at the city jail, helping them prepare for life after release. The Fortune Society, along with other organizations, provided classes in life skills, entrepreneurship, and addiction programs, among others.

**THE FORTUNE SOCIETY'S PROGRAMS WERE BASED AT THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**

The Fortune Society, which has been providing services to inmates for 30 years, was contractually cut from the DOC's programs. The DOC announced the decision to remove the group from the program in June.

**THE DOC COULD ALSO SAVE MONEY BY WORKING TO DIMINISH VIOLENCE**

The DOC is considering ways to reduce violence in the jail system and increase the use of restorative justice practices. The goal is to reduce the number of inmates who require mental health services and to provide them with the tools they need to succeed in society.

**THE FORTUNE SOCIETY'S LONG ISLAND CITY CENTER**

The Fortune Society's Long Island City center serves about 1,000 people daily. The center provides various services, including education, job training, and mental health support. The center is located in the Long Island City neighborhood of Queens, which has a high concentration of affordable housing and job opportunities.
PUBLIC HOUSING

‘IT’S HOME’
NYCHA RESIDENTS IN CHELSEA RESIST DEMOLITION PLAN THAT COULD DISPLACE THEM

BY ELLE CARSON-HOLT

Jackie Lara describes coming to the Fulton Houses as “her best Christmas present.” She and her children moved out of a shelter into Fulton Houses, a public-housing development in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood, just after New Year’s Eve in 2002.

“My application [for public housing] came in after a year and a half of being in the shelter,” Lara says. “And I remember when they called me to come and see this apartment. I planted my seed here. This is my home.”

Celines Mirandas is of the same mind. Her family has lived in the Chelsea-Elliott complex, about half a mile away, since 1975. “My mother is at an age where she gets disoriented a lot. And she doesn’t know which direction to go … but when she’s in her neighborhood, she knows where she’s at. She knows it’s our home.”

Lara and Mirandas, along with the about 4,500 other tenants who live in the Fulton and Chelsea-Elliott Houses, have witnessed the rapid gentrification of their neighborhood over the past two decades. The tenants are now experiencing an even larger change: the recent announcement by New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) that their buildings will be demolished and rebuilt by The Related Companies and Essence Realty.

In 2019, NYCHA initiated plans to privatize and demolish the Fulton Houses. The de Blasio administration began working with private developers to raze and rebuild two of the smallest buildings at Fulton Houses, using the program Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), which leases NYCHA land to private developers who would make 70% of the new apartments market rate, and 30% affordable housing. The money would allegedly then be used to finance repairs for the rest of Fulton Houses.

That plan, however, was opposed by tenants, who rejected the proposal to tear down two buildings, and instead chose private managers to oversee the renovation. Lara was in the working group of 15 tenants that in 2019 decided against the demolition plan, and has been fighting to stop the demolition ever since. She explained that “as soon as I found out about the demolition [in 2019], I started just looking for people that would help me protest. … And we stopped the demolition for 2019. We went to Community Board 4. We protested.”

As she walks through Chelsea, Mirandas points out the different buildings bordering the NYCHA developments owned by The Related Companies, one of the biggest developers in New York City. Related was also the driving force behind the nearby Hudson Yards luxury development, which opened in 2019 and has received nearly $6 billion in tax breaks and government assistance. The Hudson Yards buildings still sit half-empty.

In early 2023, Related and Essence announced their demolition plans. In a survey distributed in the spring, NYCHA offered residents three options for the future of their homes: new construction with rezoning, new construction without rezoning, or rehabilitation of existing units. The survey did not mention demolition, only new construction, and did not mention the construction of market-rate units on NYCHA land. It also omitted information about temporary relocation. It has been criticized by the Legal Aid Society and Community Services Society, who oppose the demolition on the grounds that it may cause displacement and disagree with the claims that the process has been resident-led.

“We’ve spoken to residents who never saw the survey. The presentation that the survey was based on was misleading.” Alex MaxDougall, a lawyer for Legal Aid Society told The Indypendent. “It didn’t say anything about demolition, didn’t say anything about temporary relocation. It didn’t say anything about the development of 2,500 market-rate apartments.”

MaxDougall also pointed out that “Related could never have this land without a public-housing deal. And they’ve been circling this area for a long time.”

According to the anti-demolition group Save Section 9, only 30% of households voted at all in the survey. Among the 30%, 60% voted for “new construction with rezoning for taller buildings in less time.”

When The Indypendent asked Fulton Houses Tenant Association President Miguel Acevedos about the low turnout, he responded that “the voter turnout on the last mayoral election was 29%. The voter turnout in the last primary that took place in June was 4%. So voting is a problem nationwide.”

A SWIFTLY CHANGING NEIGHBORHOOD

Starting with an influx of Irish immigrants in the mid-19th century, the west end of Chelsea became an industrial zone, with piers jutting into the

ORIGINS OF A PLAN

In 2019, NYCHA initiated plans to privatize and demolish the Fulton Houses. The de Blasio administration began working with private developers to raze and rebuild two of the smallest buildings at Fulton Houses, using the program Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), which leases NYCHA land to private developers who would make 70% of the new apartments market rate, and 30% affordable housing. The money would allegedly then be used to finance repairs for the rest of Fulton Houses.

That plan, however, was opposed by tenants, who rejected the proposal to tear down two buildings, and instead chose private managers to oversee the renovation. Lara was in the working group of 15 tenants that in 2019 decided against the demolition plan, and has been fighting to stop the demolition ever since. She explained that “as soon as I found out about the demolition [in 2019], I started just looking for people that would help me protest. … And we stopped the demolition for 2019. We went to Community Board 4. We protested.”

As she walks through Chelsea, Mirandas points out the different buildings bordering the NYCHA developments owned by The Related Companies, one of the biggest developers in New York City. Related was also the driving force behind the nearby Hudson Yards luxury development, which opened in 2019 and has received nearly $6 billion in tax breaks and government assistance. The Hudson Yards buildings still sit half-empty.

In early 2023, Related and Essence announced their demolition plans. In a survey distributed in the spring, NYCHA offered residents three options for the future of their homes: new construction with rezoning, new construction without rezoning, or rehabilitation of existing units. The survey did not mention demolition, only new construction, and did not mention the construction of market-rate units on NYCHA land. It also omitted information about temporary relocation. It has been criticized by the Legal Aid Society and Community Services Society, who oppose the demolition on the grounds that it may cause displacement and disagree with the claims that the process has been resident-led.

“We’ve spoken to residents who never saw the survey. The presentation that the survey was based on was misleading.” Alex MaxDougall, a lawyer for Legal Aid Society told The Indypendent. “It didn’t say anything about demolition, didn’t say anything about temporary relocation. It didn’t say anything about the development of 2,500 market-rate apartments.”

MaxDougall also pointed out that “Related could never have this land without a public-housing deal. And they’ve been circling this area for a long time.”

According to the anti-demolition group Save Section 9, only 30% of households voted at all in the survey. Among the 30%, 60% voted for “new construction with rezoning for taller buildings in less time.”

When The Indypendent asked Fulton Houses Tenant Association President Miguel Acevedos about the low turnout, he responded that “the voter turnout on the last mayoral election was 29%. The voter turnout in the last primary that took place in June was 4%. So voting is a problem nationwide.”

A SWIFTLY CHANGING NEIGHBORHOOD

Starting with an influx of Irish immigrants in the mid-19th century, the west end of Chelsea became an industrial zone, with piers jutting into the
Hudson River, warehouses and factories, as well as lumberyards, breweries and tenements to house the workers. The east end of Chelsea became a center of American theater. It was also home to the early motion picture industry and to Tin Pan Alley, where much of the popular music of the 1910s and 1920s was produced. It was a far cry from the expensive retail stores, upscale restaurants and tourist draws like the Highline and Chelsea Market that the area is known for now.

George Weaver, who has lived in Fulton House since 1983, has seen Chelsea’s transformation first hand. “We used to have a lot of mom-and-pop stores in the neighborhood,” he said. “They’re no longer in existence.”

He feels as if he is “absolutely being priced out” of Chelsea, something Lara agrees with. “Chelsea has made it clear they absolutely don’t want us here,” she said.

Weaver, who has a degree in business administration and is pursuing a second degree in public administration, feels like the NYCHA houses are mischaracterized. “A misnomer is that tenants here are not upwardly mobile. A lot of them are college educated. ... Some of them are teachers. Some of them are social workers. They live here. And they’ve grown up here. And so why should they have to go anywhere else?”

The Fulton and Chelsea-Elliott demolition would only be the third public housing teardown in NYCHA history. Every anti-demolition tenant and housing advocate The Indy spoke to cited fear of displacement as their primary concern regarding the Chelsea-Elliott and Fulton tear downs. Their fears are not unfounded.

When NYCHA tore down Prospect Plaza, a public-housing project in Brooklyn in the early 2000s, more than 1,000 families were displaced. The same is true for Cabrini Green in Chicago, where more than 80% of public-housing residents never returned after its demolition. In New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the City moved to demolish its remaining public housing. Many residents were forced out of the city, into the suburbs and beyond.

NYCHA, Related and Essence insist that mass displacement will not occur. They say that residents will retain leases and pay a maximum of 30% of their income toward rent in their new buildings. They estimate that about 6% of tenants, roughly 500 households, will have to move during the rebuilding process. Still, residents are wary. George Weaver said that his biggest fear if demolition goes through are “homelessness and displacement. I mean, people will die.”

THE DILEMMA

Most residents want repairs. And after decades of disinvestment in public housing by the federal government, some do want demolition.

“I’m disabled and elderly, and I am for the demolition. I want a new apartment,” says Susan Kenney, a resident of Chelsea-Elliott Housing. She cites various repairs NYCHA has failed to keep up with and is confident that she will not be displaced. “The elevators break down. There’s homelessness less in the building. The door is broken, no intercom system. And we got a lot of drugs in the building.”

“The last thing anybody wants to do is demolition,” says Acevedos. “But the reason for demolition is to create new buildings that won’t deteriorate in the next 10 years.”

Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine also supports the demolition plan. When The Indy asked him if he felt confident that the project would not lead to displacement, he hedged.

“We need to ask more questions about it,” said Levine. “The way it’s been explained so far — and again, we got to ask tough questions — is that they would first build new homes before any building would be demolished. And so that’s a much better model, because you’re not displaced all over New York City.”

When asked about the Legal Aid Society and Community Service Society’s criticism of the plan as not being resident-led, the borough president said he has been in touch with the leadership of Legal Aid Society, and praised them for asking “great questions” about the proposal.

“Would people be allowed to remain on the NYCHA campus during the construction process? Would they be able to keep apartments big enough for their current family size? What will the income targets be for newly built affordable housing? These were more “great questions,” Levine said. “We need to get answers,” he added.

DETERMINED TO STAY

Both Lara and Miranda say they will miss their homes and the feeling of community if the demolition goes through. “It won’t be home,” said Miranda. “My biggest fear is my mother and how many elderly like her are going to be lost within their own community.”

“I want to stay with the residents in my building, Lara added. “We know each other. ... They’ve seen my kids grow up.”

Alex MacDougal says advocates of the demolition and reconstruction view the plan as “exciting” for the future of affordable housing for New York City, something that “should raise every alarm bell itpossibly can.”

“We want to elevate the concerns that residents have shared with us: the displacement of elderly people, the gentrification of their communities, the 2,500 market rate units filled with people paying $8,000 a month for a two bedroom ... [and] what will that mean for the community,” MacDougall told The Indy.

“I think what they want is to make New York a city of the rich and get rid of the poor and working class,” Weaver said.

Lara and Miranda have created petitions, worked with organizers, and planned protests and rallies. They say they won’t give up.

“We have to fight back. Listen, I will fight till I bleed,” Lara said.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: The Chelsea-Elliott Houses were built after World War II. They are located between W. 25th and W. 27th Streets from 9th to 10th Ave and house more than 2,400 NYCHA residents.

UNCERTAIN FUTURE: Jackie Acevedos said she is confident that she will not be displaced. And so that’s a much better model, because you’re not displaced all over New York City.”

H. Res. 77 is a House Resolution that calls on the United States to embrace the goals and provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and to adopt the Back from the Brink campaign’s comprehensive policy prescriptions for preventing nuclear war.

Learn more & take action: preventnuclearwar.org/hres77
**ABANDONED IN THE OUTER BOROUGHS**

**ERIC ADAMS’ VOW TO BE A ‘BUS MAYOR’ REMAINS UNFULFILLED**

By Owen Schacht

Standing on Fordham Road waiting for the Bx12-Select bus, I saw some faint red letters on the pavement. As I wondered whether walking would be faster than taking the bus, I realized I was gazing upon the remnants of a bus lane — one crowded by parked SUVs and cruising sedans.

The Bx12, which runs from Inwood in upper Manhattan to Co-op City, is the city’s second-busiest bus route. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority estimates that on a typical day, Fordham Road, the central Bronx’s main commercial corridor, hosts 85,000 bus riders. In 2008, it became the city’s first street to feature the Select Bus Service, with reserved lanes and riders paying their fare before they get on. The Bx12’s average speed improved to just over nine miles per hour, 20% faster than it had been the previous year.

Today, according to the MTA, it inches along at less than four miles per hour when traveling westbound between roughly Webster Avenue and Grand Concourse, in the heart of a bustling commercial district.

“That is absolutely unacceptable for a city and a community that is so deeply dependent on transit like our own,” said Derrick Holmes, digital strategist at the Riders Alliance, during a rally on July 11 to urge the construction of a Fordham Road busway.

Five days later, the DOT presented a revised proposal with three plans. The department is opting for Alternative A, which would create one lane in each direction reserved for buses. Busway supporters are urging Alternative C, a two-way busway from Jerome Avenue in the west to Webster Avenue in the east.

According to a DOT street survey from July 2019, 86% of visitors to businesses on Fordham Road arrive by bus, train or walking.

“Buses are the transportation backbone of our city,” Mayor Eric Adams said in August 2022 at a Better Buses for Brooklyn rally. Improving the city’s creaking bus system was a key part of his agenda during his 2021 mayoral campaign.

Adams promised to build 150 miles of new bus lanes and busways during his first term, but just 6.8 miles have been completed. The Streets Plan, which was signed into law by then-Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2019, mandated the construction of 20 miles of camera-protected bus lanes in 2022 and 30 more miles in each of the next four years, for a total of 140 miles by 2026.

Buses provide crucial access to areas of the city that subways cannot reach, especially outside Manhattan. They are the only direct way to make east-west trips along Fordham Road, to get to Brooklyn College from Brownsville or Borough Park, or to travel from Flushing to Jamaica, Queens. Buses are also the only way to go crosstown in much of Manhattan.

They are invaluable for New Yorkers, particularly working-class New Yorkers. According to a survey conducted by the office of former Comptroller Scott Stringer in 2019, the median income of bus riders across the city was $30,000, with 62% female and 77% people of color.

While buses are controlled by the MTA, a state-operated authority, the mayor has some power to improve them.

“New York City government has control of city streets and thus where to install bus lanes and what kind,” Gotham Gazette reporter Nicholas Liu noted in June. But improvements to the bus system have been slow and overshadowed by flasby subway extensions, such as the $2.42 billion spent on extending the 7 train one stop to Hudson Yards. A study published in Transportation Research Record in 2012 found that the inauguration of the Bx12-SBS resulted in “a 20% reduction in travel time along the corridor and an 11.5% increase in ridership.” The project cost $10 million and gave rise to 98% satisfaction with the new bus service, the study says.

Busways have proven effective in other parts of the city. In June 2022, the 14th Street busway was made permanent. The DOT website explains that “the project, which serves approximately 28,000 daily M14 riders, combines blocks of exclusive access and standard bus lanes to provide bus priority from 9th Avenue to 1st Avenue.” Bus speeds increased by 24% and ridership by 30% on what had been one of Manhattan’s most congested streets. In Queens, the Main Street busway in Flushing, a car-free 0.3-mile stretch of road between Northern Boulevard and Sanford Avenue that serves 155,000 daily riders, was implemented in 2021. Increased bus ridership also lowers the number of cars on the road, which reduces the amount of exhaust-spewed pollutants such as ozone and fine particulate matter — particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter that are particularly harmful to children, the elderly and people with cardiovascular conditions.

Eric Adams campaigned on being “the Bus Mayor,” Derrick Holmes tells The Indypendent, “but the mayor is failing to stand up to his own words, and is failing to do right by the riders that he promised he would speed up buses for.”

---

**ALL ABOARD!**

New Yorkers will enjoy free bus service on five MTA bus routes starting Sep. 1. The free bus routes, which will serve low-income communities, are:

- Bx18 (Morris Heights to Highbridge)
- Bx16 (West Side to East Harlem)
- M116 (West Side to East Harlem)
- Q4 (Cambria Heights to Jamaica)
- S46/96 (St. George to West Side Plaza)

More than 40 U.S. cities provide free bus service, including Kansas City: Albuquerque; Akron, Ohio; Bozeman, Montana and Corvallis, Oregon. The Staten Island ferry, which serves 22 million passengers per year, has been free since 1997.

New York City’s free bus routes are a pilot project to gauge the impact of fare-free service on ridership. To date, other cities have found that ridership increases when there is no fare, while crimes on buses go down because there are more people present.

“We’ve shown the will, and now we’re going to expand it in the years to come,” said Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist from Queens who fought to get the pilot project funded in this year’s state budget.

---

**WHOSE STREETS?:** Derrick Holmes, a Riders Alliance organizer, speaks at a July 11 rally urging the construction of a Fordham Road busway.

---

**INDYPENDENT STAFF**
MY FAVORITE BROOKLYN-QUEENS BIKE ROUTE
ENJOY THIS 69-MILE BIKE RIDE ALL IN ONE DAY, OR DO IT IN SECTIONS

By Derek Ludovici

One of my favorite activities in the summer and fall is taking long bike rides around the outer boroughs. It’s a great way to get to summer fun like the Rockaways, or to meet up with friends at a park. With a transit system designed to carry people to and from Manhattan, biking is a great alternative to explore all that the outer boroughs have to offer. My go-to loop takes you along much of the perimeter of Queens and Brooklyn in just under 69 miles. If this already sounds intimidating, don’t worry; each section can be done as a much shorter loop.

For this ride, I would bring spare tubes, enough snacks for two stops and plenty of water. A smartphone will be useful, as some parts of this ride are a little complicated. I try to give precise directions at the most convoluted parts, but it’s useful to look at the map ahead of time, and if you are in an area that’s new to you, at the start of each section heading below.

I’ve written directions that sketch out the way I normally take the route, but you can start anywhere. If you will be on the Bay Parkway, Belt Parkway, or Cross Island Parkway sections of this route after dusk or dark, I suggest riding the route in the opposite direction of what I wrote, or you will have headlights in your face, and it will be dangerous and unpleasant.

See below the highlights of each section of the route. To see the full, detailed instructions, visit https://indypendent.org/2023/08/bikeroute/.

NORTHERN QUEENS
On this part of the route, you’ll visit Astoria Park, pass by Laguardia Airport and traverse the Flushing Bay Promenade, where you can stop and watch the planes land as egrets fish in the tall grasses of the bay. For a short ride, you can turn off at Citi Field and enter Flushing Meadows Park. Or, continue on to Utopia Parkway, eventually reaching Little Bay Park/Fort Totten. Take in the view of the Whitestone Bridge, and explore the preserved buildings of the fort. This is a good time to hydrate and refill your water.

EASTERN & CENTRAL QUEENS
From Fort Totten, take the Cross Island Greenway, a nice pedestrian path squeezed between the expressway and Little Neck Bay. After a few turns, you’ll find a bike path that takes you around Alley Pond Park and some of the hillier riding of this trip. The ghost of Robert Moses joins you as you navigate around expressways. Then, you’ll cycle over to Forest Park, where you can enjoy the serenity and cooler temperatures that Queens’ only forest can provide. After that, you’ll have another opportunity to turn home.

SOUTHERN QUEENS TO SOUTH BROOKLYN
If you are continuing on your 69-mile journey, you’ll exit Forest Park, and after a few turns, you’ll end up on the beautiful Belt Parkway Greenway with views of Jamaica Bay.

BELT PARKWAY SECTION
Alternatively, you can take bike paths through Broad Channel over to the Rockaways. Bike all the way to Jacob Riis Park and over the bridge to meet back up with the Belt Parkway. If traversing the Rockaways, check out Tacoway Beach taqueria on Beach 87th Street to refuel. The boardwalk also offers plenty of options along your way. Alternatively pack a lunch and eat at Shirley Chisholm Park along the Belt Parkway. For shorter rides, take the belt and exit at Fountain Avenue, Pennslyvania Avenue, Canarsie Pier or Flatbush Avenue.

SOUTH BROOKLYN & THE WATERFRONT
The Belt Parkway will take you all the way to Plumb Beach Recreation Area, dropping you on Emmons Avenue. From Emmons you can either wind down to Coney Island, or follow a bike path all the way to the Shore Parkway Bike Path. Once you cross Bay Parkway, the path as it becomes an enjoyable promenade that runs along the Hudson River, under the Verrazano Bridge, all the way to Owls Head Park. Then, you can head to Downtown Brooklyn, or, as I prefer, cut into Red Hook via the Ninth Street Bridge, and ride outside the piers until Brooklyn Bridge Park. I always make a stop at Four and 20 Blackbird (Third Avenue and 8th Street) for a slice of pie before the final push. For a shorter route, take Bedford Avenue to McCarren Park in Greenpoint.

NORTH BROOKLYN TO ASTORIA
Go through Dumbo, take the path around the Navy Yard, and then over to the Pulaski Bridge. After a few turns, you’ll coast downhill to Astoria Park. Stretch out while enjoying its grassy meadows and the view of the river as trains pass on the Hell Gate Bridge.

SUMMER BLISS: While biking along the Belt Parkway, stop and enjoy the Plumb Beach Recreational Area by Jamaica Bay.
THE INDYPENDENT
August /two.onum/zero.onum/two.onum/three.onum

TEAMSTERS
Continued from page 7

If the UPS contract campaign didn’t end with the dramatic confrontation some hoped for, it still has left a powerful impression on workers who were following it.

“I’m getting calls from other people in trade unions — electrical workers, plumbers, pipefitters — I got texts all in my phone, ‘Congratulations, you guys got a big contract,’” Rosario said.

The same optimism permeated the DSA town hall as actors, nurses, pizzeria workers and Starbucks baristas spoke about their strikes, their organizing campaigns and their belief that the labor movement was only gaining strength as more and more workers refused to accept the indignities of America’s second gilded age. Most of the participants were in their twenties and thirties.

As for the Teamsters, they pursued their aggressive contract campaign against UPS with Amazon as their ultimate target. The union has a vested interest in performing this colossal task: Just as the Teamsters raised the industry standards for everyone in logistics, Amazon’s egregious working conditions have lowered the standards.

“I’m getting [calls from workers at] Amazon like crazy; people just saying, ‘You guys did great.’ You know, ‘We’re looking forward to talking with you guys and working with you guys,” said Rosario who vowed that “We are going to laser focus on Amazon once we get this contract done.”

In fact, some early skirmishes in that battle are already being fought.

In April, the Teamsters successfully organized and won a contract for a group of 84 Amazon-contracted drivers in Southern California, who joined Teamsters Local 396. Amazon promptly cut ties with its sub-contractor and the drivers lost their jobs. The Teamsters have filed Unfair Labor Practice grievances with the NLRB claiming that Amazon illegally fired the drivers for unionizing because it does in fact act as their boss — the drivers wear Amazon uniforms, they answer to company management, which has the right to fire them.

The Amazon drivers and dispatchers began their unfair labor practice strike in Palmdale, California on June 24. Fighting to get their jobs back, they have picketed 10 Amazon warehouses around the country in the past month — in California, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan and Georgia — with “Teamsters locals and other unions and organizations showing support everywhere they go,” says Rosario.

TUESDAYS 5–6PM
WBAI-99.5 FM
WBAI.ORG

TUNE IN & TURN ON
NEWS, INTERVIEWS & MORE!
WITH JOHN TARLETON & AMBA GUERGUERIAN

THE INDYPENDENT NEWS HOUR
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION’S LEGACY AND WHAT COMES NEXT

By Linda Martín Alcoff

Affirmative action was never a perfect solution. On the day I got my first real academic position, I ran into an acquaintance who asked how my job search was going. When I shared the news of my success, it took only a split second before he replied, with a funny look on his face, “They must have been so happy to get a good woman.” (Philosophy in those days was a male-dominated profession, almost all white, more like the hard sciences than the humanities.)

My short-lived elation just as immediately took a dive. I could see what I was in for, from colleagues, students, and those both unfamiliar and familiar with my work. One can never prove their worthiness against imaginary competition. The sense I had that day has been confirmed throughout my career — as recently as this summer, when an award I was given was castigated on Twitter as only explainable by affirmative action.

This issue of stigma has figured prominently in Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas’s arguments for eradicating affirmative action. In his partial dissent against the Grutter v. Bollinger ruling in 2003, he wrote that, because of affirmative action, all Black people “are tarred as undeserving,” as it raises the question of whether their advancement was based on merit. Thomas argued that “asking the question itself unfairly marks those blacks who would succeed without discrimination.”

With his help, the Supreme Court harassed the last nail in the coffin of affirmative action in a pair of rulings it issued on June 30. Its demise began back in 1978 with the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke decision, which forbade “racial quotas” but allowed universities to consider race as one possible factor in admitting students. That decision was affirmed in the Grutter case, in which the University of Michigan’s admissions policies were allowed by distinguishing a “race-conscious” from “race quotas.”

The most significant driver of these arguments was, ostensibly, the protection of individual rights. No applicant, white or non-white, should be reduced to their race. The latest ruling allows a new loophole, but one that is also based on the ideal of individualism: Race can be taken into account only if applicants themselves discuss their race in their admissions materials.

In a Pew Poll taken earlier this year, 50% of respondents opposed colleges considering race or ethnicity in admissions. This was not just among whites: 29% of Black people disapproved, as did 39% of Latinx people, 52% of English-speaking Asian Americans, and 57% of whites. In a CBS News poll in June, 70% said colleges should not be allowed to consider race — but 53% said affirmative-action programs should be continued.

It sounds like common sense that no policy should reduce anyone to their race, ethnicity or gender, presumptively assuming it to be the explanation of all their successes and all their failures. For Thomas, the stigma inflicted on recipients of affirmative action of being reduced to one’s race undermines its power to help undo racist prejudices. (Strangely enough, affirmative-action critics like Thomas never talk about the stigma experienced by the children of the super-rich who are the beneficiaries of legacy admissions, a pay-to-play practice common at many prestigious private universities.)

Thus, we can read opposition to affirmative action as not simply based on racism, but sometimes on the desire to uphold a certain amount of individualism, to recognize that race is not always determinant in the same way for everyone. The Supreme Court ruling may look nicely aligned with these latter sentiments, because by disallowing quotas and only permitting considerations of race alluded to by applicants themselves, it limits outsiders’ ability to decide how significant race is in our lives.

How can we address structural forms of injustice while upholding individualism? Stigmatization of the recipients of affirmative action is not produced out of thin air, but in a climate clogged with all sorts of racism and sexism. Racial remedies come in two broad categories: Backward-looking remedies seek to repair past injustice, while forward-looking ones focus on changing the future. Affirmative action was initially put forward in the 1960s as a way to repair the crimes of Jim Crow, but it has come to be defended more often in the courts and among policy analysts as a forward-looking project. In this light, the discomfort experienced by the first generation of female airline pilots, Black judges, Asian-American English professors andLatinx professionals is supposed to be a service rendered to create progress about how people think about who can succeed.

The hope is that the next generation won’t experience as much stigma. However, this assumes that the abilities of the first “non-traditional” hires will shine through the stigma, allay the skepticism, and shrivel the old ideas with the force of our simple but obvious functionality. Alas, if it were only so.

Despite the persistence of racism, forward-looking justifications for affirmative action still stand as a means to an end. There is no question that seeing a diverse pool of people in every field has given millions of people experiences that contest old ideologies. Plus, it has improved many lives.

I think there are two critical lessons we should take from the current ruling.

The first is that institutions need to step up. There are many legal policies we can use to redress the structural injustices of both race and class. One is what the California State University system does with “educational equity” provisions that seek to neutralize the effect of zip codes on admissions. Another is the program in my home state of Florida (believe it or not) in which high-school students with B averages or above can go to state colleges and universities tuition-free.

The second lesson is especially pertinent to the most recent Court ruling, which used some Asian-American plaintiffs to argue that affirmative action discriminated against them. They claimed that basing admissions on standardized tests would make racism a thing of the past, since admissions would then be based on pure merit. Some universities used quotas to set a maximum number of Asian-American and, in the past, Jewish acceptances, to ensure that, despite their high test scores, they would not ‘replace’ too many Gentile whites.

Lots of empirical evidence now shows the problem of relying on standardized tests. Their power to predict students’ success is negligible beyond the first year of college. While relying on them would eliminate the racism of maximum-number quotas, it would firm up the fences that exclude Black and Brown applicants, who test poorly by comparison to others regardless of their social class.

Here is the lesson: Since racism does not take unified forms, its solutions cannot be generic. Only a rich knowledge of the specific and variable forms racism uses to clog our thinking will lead to effective pathways forward. Let’s start planning the trip.

Linda Martín Alcoff is a professor of philosophy at the CUNY Graduate Center and Hunter College. She is the author of The Future of Whiteness and Visible Identities: Race, Gender and Self.
HOW TO FIGHT FOR RADICAL CHANGE & NEVER BURN OUT

Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care
By Kelly Hayes & Mariame Kaba
Haymarket Books, 256 pages, May 2023

By Eleanor J. Bader

A nyone who has done community organizing knows that there are no formulas for successful resistance. At the same time abundant lessons exist, and it is possible to avoid predictable pitfalls, learn valuable skills and utilize insights from past struggles to plan today’s campaigns for social justice. What’s more, whether the struggle is for prison abolition or for funding for a community play space, how we formulate demands and mobilize support can have long-lasting reverberations. Needless to say, thoughtful consideration of tactics and strategies are required.

Let This Radicalize You by Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba dives into this terrain; it is both a how-to guide for community activists and a deeply-felt assessment of how we can better support one another to sustain lifelong involvement in progressive efforts. Throughout, the book combines practical advice with the belief that a better and more equitable world can be fought for and won.

And, since both authors are seasoned writers, educators and organizers, their personal experiences — and those of colleagues in a wide swath of social justice movements whose insights are included — give the text heft and gravitas. The end result? Let This Radicalize You is a well-wrought antidote to the pervasive despair of living in Trumpian times.

Among its most salient lessons is the need to mix horror with hope. “It’s easy to assume that if others knew how bad things were, they too would take action,” the authors write. “This assumption can sometimes lead activists to become walking, talking encyclopedias of doom.”

But experience has taught the pair that the recitation of ills seldom works: Rather than energizing communities, it enervates. Rather than appreciating that organizing is slow work, that momentum typically builds over time and can’t be rushed. These are wise words, and while the book will likely be most impactful for newbie organizers, veteran activists will find value in its pages. By taking the long view of change, the book is boldy optimistic and calls on each of us to do our part to repair the world.

Kaba is known for reminding those in her orbit to see crises as opportunities for radical action rather than hopelessness. Let This Radicalize You urges us forward, prodding us to bring the world we want into existence with creativity, persistence and sass. But “organizing isn’t matchmaking. … We have to be able to organize outside of our comfort zones.”

While I wish the book had delved deeper and provided examples of how we can productively engage with people who have retrograde ideas about race, class, gender and gender identity, the text’s emphasis on listening is important. “Listening is a practice,” write the authors, “and at times it’s a strategic one” that takes to heart the organizing maxim that it can be a fatal error to impose an agenda on a community that does not want it. “It is difficult to meet someone where they’re at when you do not know where they are. Until you have heard someone out, you do not know where they are, so how could you hope to meet them there?” they ask.

Hayes and Kaba further suggest that humor can be an essential tool to defuse tensions and break logjams. That said, the book reminds those of us who tend toward impatience that organizing is slow work, that momentum typically builds over time and can’t be rushed. This is a wise word, and while the book will likely be most impactful for newbie organizers, veteran activists will find value in its pages. By taking the long view of change, the book is boldy optimistic and calls on each of us to do our part to repair the world.

Kaba is known for reminding those in her orbit to see crises as opportunities for radical action rather than hopelessness. Let This Radicalize You urges us forward, prodding us to bring the world we want into existence with creativity, persistence and sass.

But “organizing isn’t matchmaking. … We have to be able to organize outside of our comfort zones.”

While I wish the book had delved deeper and provided examples of how we can productively engage with people who have retrograde ideas about race, class, gender and gender identity, the text’s emphasis on listening is important. “Listening is a practice,” write the authors, “and at times it’s a strategic one” that takes to heart the organizing maxim that it can be a fatal error to impose an agenda on a community that does not want it. “It is difficult to meet someone where they’re at when you do not know where they are. Until you have heard someone out, you do not know where they are, so how could you hope to meet them there?” they ask.

Hayes and Kaba further suggest that humor can be an essential tool to defuse tensions and break logjams. That said, the book reminds those of us who tend toward impatience that organizing is slow work, that momentum typically builds over time and can’t be rushed. These are wise words, and while the book will likely be most impactful for newbie organizers, veteran activists will find value in its pages. By taking the long view of change, the book is boldly optimistic and calls on each of us to do our part to repair the world.

Kaba is known for reminding those in her orbit to see crises as opportunities for radical action rather than hopelessness. Let This Radicalize You urges us forward, prodding us to bring the world we want into existence with creativity, persistence and sass.

It’s easy to assume that if others knew how bad things were, they too would take action,” the authors write. “This assumption can sometimes lead activists to become walking, talking encyclopedias of doom.”

CANNERS
Continued from page 5

KENNY
6 months canning
Some people might have an issue with you going through their bags. It makes sense; it can feel a bit invasive, and you’re complete strangers. I’ll try to explain that I’m not doing anything bad. Other times, you let them talk and you do what you gotta do. People think you won’t go through the trouble of trips, things up, they think you just come and make a mess. But I try not to.

If I had a choice, it’s probably not the number one thing I would want to do. But everything happens for a reason and currently, this is what I have to deal with. Canning has some potential, but it’s not what I see myself doing in the long run. I got a few exams I want to pass, like the [Cisco Certified Network Associate]. I want to learn Spanish and get certification for that. I got other things I want to do, some personal projects. Once I get where I’m planning to go, will I stop [canning]? I don’t know.

LINDA
13 years canning; retired; started “Cans for Comic Relief,”a charity for children that has raised over $25,000.

I was on a night shift at the airport, so my shift would be ending around the time that TSA closed. So I put on the gloves and I started digging. It got to a point where I was leaving every night with these two big plastic bags. There was an all-night Key Food on Flatbush, and I would clear out [at the bottle-exchange machine] at 3 A.M.

One time, I was at the machine there, and all of a sudden, something hits my head, and I see a plastic bottle. I turn around, and some guy’s laughing. He assumed I was homeless and because of that, he could treat me with contempt.
Dear Reverend Billy,

I'm a big fan of yours and appreciate all that you do. As far as climate change goes, do you think we've missed our chance to stop it over the past 20-30 years with all the dithering and inaction by our leaders? At this point, it seems like it's easier to go numb and try to ignore what's happening as best as one can.

— DOUG

Dear Doug,

The middle class of the USA is locked up in passivity, locked up in a prison of “isms.” Religious fundamentalism, capitalism, racism, sexism, consumerism — we got isms to the wall. There is only one force that can free us from this bondage: The Earth, the planet Earth.

In autocracy, it’s simple to keep control. The dictator has one party, lots of guns and a controlled media, and a lot of fear. In a commercial democracy, the ruler is the investor class, and they need to keep those isms growing around us like dazzling walls that simulate life.

The Ism Prison...

What the Earth is doing right now, especially in the last month of extreme heat and a world of natural disasters is pulling us from that virtual reality. We have noticed in our work, a basic change in the usual passivity. Many of us no longer consider the climate cataclysm merely a three-minute news item, in other words…. consumable information. A critical mass has been reached, and it’s a shock.

It is well known that JPMorgan Chase is the dirtiest bank because of all the funding it provides to fossil fuel projects around the world. The Earth Church invades the Rockefeller Center JPMorgan Chase a lot, 15 times in the last two years. We do this at lunch-time so that the singers who have jobs can use their lunch break for our “Radical Lunch.” The managers inside the bank often grimace when they see us parade through the door with anthems about the Earth. (In the last days, researchers from Stand.earth and indigenous groups revealed that Chase has been financing Amazon rainforest killing projects in Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Ecuador.) JPMorgan Chase tops the list of forest killers, withCitibank in second. This of course is featured in our chanting and preaching, and the managers sit there in their plush chairs, our audience until the police arrive. But last week they didn’t call the police. Our reception seems changed. We sense a new thoughtfulness in some of them. The heatwaves on three continents might be impacting them. Of course there is the laughter and moaning and swearing, but in our action last week we found some of them sitting there like they had heatwaves in their air-conditioning, stuck in their moral quandary.

We urged them to hack into that computerized money flow. Detour the millions meant for the TransCanada pipeline. Route the money away from the Wet’suwet’en and Mohawk lands. Protect the Amazon. Starve out the ranchers and miners and dams. Hack, strike, practice hidden labor slow-downs. Be a whistleblower in the dirtiest fossil bank. Radical whispers at the water cooler. Work undercover for the Earth.

Doug, I’m using this as an example. All of us need to turn against this fossil economy. This is what each of us needs to do in our own lives. Our work for the Earth will be scary, and probably illegal if it is to have any impact at all. We will help each other break out of our “Ism Prison”.

EARTHALUJAH!

REVEREND BILLY TALEN IS THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND? EMAIL REVBILLY@REVBILLY.COM AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.