

#205: APRIL 2015 A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

THE INDYPENDENT

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ROB LAQUINTA

A TALE OF TWO BRONXES

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BUT, WHO WILL BENEFIT? P6





READER'S VOICE



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TEACHERS UNDER ATTACK

What you write about in “The War on Teachers: Cuomo, Corporate Reformers Take Aim at Experienced Educators” (March *Indydependent*), is not only a New York City concern. Experienced teachers are under assault in urban school districts all across the nation. It’s tragic, it’s on purpose, and it’s hurting our children. Thank you for exposing the fallacy of education reform that does more harm than good.

— JESSE TURNER

I’m not surprised by this. Too bad the UFT and the state teachers’ unions are not more militant. Unless more of the public turns against Cuomo and the corporatists, public school education will die and be replaced by corporate-run private schools at taxpayers’ expense and without any taxpayer input. I sincerely hope I am proven wrong in this opinion.

— E. WENG

CUNY ADJUNCT’S LAMENT

Well, this is encouraging (“Putting CUNY Out of Reach: As Student Funding Increases, State Funding Falls Short,” March *Indydependent*). I’ll just go back to waiting for my first adjunct paycheck of the semester. I have been working for a month and still have not received it.

— ANONYMOUS

CALIFORNIA FRACKING CONTROVERSY

California is in the midst of a historic drought, a NASA scientist recently predicted that the entire state has a one-year supply of water left. Meanwhile, the areas of California where fracking occurs are pumping precious water laden with chemicals into the ground and are contaminating the aquifers in the process. It is not that California should ban fracking (“We Are Next: California Looks to Follow NY’s Fracking Ban, But Can They Win in Big Oil’s Backyard,” March *Indydependent*) — it’s sheer stupidity that it wasn’t done years ago. Then there’s compelling evidence of fracking contributing to earthquakes — but I won’t even go there.

— MICHAEL

Without “Big Oil” and the 6,000-plus primary products made from oil (plastics, fertilizers, pharmaceuticals, surf boards, tires, roads, etc.) the country would simply go dark. Transportation stops. Schools, hospitals and businesses close down. We are left to grow our own scrawny vegetables and slaughter our own meat. We will not even be able to text. Those protesters in California (do any of them work for a living?) drove cars, took buses and rode trains to go protest hydraulic fracturing. Ironically, they are probably not aware that the roads that got them there are paved with petroleum. If you use modern medicine or believe in a man’s right to economic progress, you can thank the men and women in the petroleum industry.

— STEPHEN HARRIS

OVERLOOKING IMMIGRANTS, AGAIN

The president needs to do a more forceful and

better job of fixing the immigration issue, as it seems the GOP loonies will play on the public fears of “others” who have been here and are coming to make better lives for themselves (“Immigrant Rights ‘Bump in the Road,’” March *Indydependent*). To offer a path to citizenship to only 4 million undocumented immigrants doesn’t cut it. Give it to all of the 11 million or so who are in this country.

— VICENTE WATSON

CHARLIE HEBDO DEBATE

“We must have the courage to admit ‘we are all Kouachis and Coulibalys’” is the most repulsive thing I’ve seen in *The Independent* in its 15 years of existence (“France After *Charlie Hebdo*: Seeking the Enemy Within,” February *Indydependent*). Seriously, we’re supposed to identify with people who murder left-wing cartoonists and Jewish food shoppers as if they were Eric Garner or Trayvon Martin?

The reactions of much of the American left to the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre disgusts me. They boil down to “we don’t condone rape, but the bitch was asking for it.”

Yes, the far right and the Western political establishment have been hammering us with the message of “Islamic terrorists,” but does that mean we have to differ by avoiding all but the most perfunctory criticism of the Muslim equivalent of the Christian fanatics who kill abortion doctors? Many of its reactions to the massacre have essentially been making “the West is bad too” excuses for a movement that’s been murderously misogynistic from Nigeria to Peshawar. Yes, Muslims are discriminated against in France, and many are poor. But the Kouachi brothers and Amedi Coulibaly didn’t attack bankers, brutal cops or the openly racist National Front. They attacked leftists and Jews.

As the saying generally attributed to the 19th-century German socialist August Bebel goes, “anti-Semitism is the socialism of fools.” There are a lot of apologists for fools in what passes for the left in America.

— STEVEN WISHNIA

To answer Steven Wishnia’s question, no, we’re not urging people to see the *Charlie Hebdo* killers in the same light as Eric Garner or Trayvon Martin. The line that he is misquoting was published in our February issue as, “If so many were ready to say ‘Je suis Charlie,’ we can also have the courage to say ‘Nous sommes tous Kouachis et Coulibalys.’” The article explored why some Muslim youths in France have become alienated from their society and are drawn to religious extremism. Trying to see the world from someone else’s perspective is not the same as justifying their actions.

— THE EDITORS

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**THE INDY
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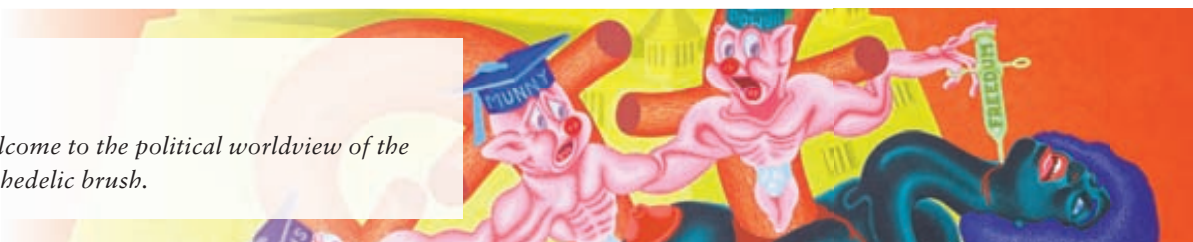


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**Erika Guevara Rosas
Americas Director
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30 July 2014**

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Joseph Gerson
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A RIGHT TO SPEAK TO THOSE WHO DON'T WANT TO LISTEN

BY JONATHAN WALLACE

Last year, the Supreme Court decided *McCullen v. Coakley*, in which it invalidated on First Amendment grounds a Massachusetts law creating a buffer of 35 feet from the front door of abortion clinics. The case turned on the right of the anti-abortion protesters to approach and argue with women who are seeking one of the most private and personal forms of medical intervention imaginable, and who may very much resent being approached.

In a unanimous 9-0 verdict, the justices reminded us that there is a right to utter unwelcome speech, up close, to people who don't want to listen: "It is no accident that public streets and sidewalks have developed as venues for the exchange of ideas," Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the court. "Even today," he added, "they remain one of the few places where a speaker can be confident that he is not simply preaching to the choir. With respect to other means of communication, an individual confronted with an uncomfortable message can always turn the page, change the channel, or leave the Web site. Not so on public streets and sidewalks. There, a listener often encounters speech he might otherwise tune out. In light of the First Amendment's purpose to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail, this aspect of traditional public fora is a virtue, not a vice."

In the early March trial of 10 protesters arrested at the "Flood Wall Street" climate change demonstration last September, the defense team led by attorney Martin Stolar with myself as "second chair" relied heavily, and successfully, on *McCullen*. We argued that the closure of the entire Wall Street area to the demonstrators was clearly illegal. Many of the clients testified at trial that their plan for the day had been to post themselves outside the Stock Exchange or elsewhere in the Wall Street area, and to talk to bankers, brokers and other employees of financial companies about the environmental harm committed by their employers. Rather than keeping the demonstrators merely 35 feet away from the target, the police had closed off an entire neighborhood.

Judge Robert Mandelbaum, without reaching the issue of the Wall Street closure, held that the order

given by the police to disperse was unlawful. The order, which an officer read repeatedly from a written note, included the words, "You must exit west on Rector Street." As opposed to a mere order to return to the sidewalk, the order to leave via Rector Street further limited the free speech rights of the demonstrators. Judge Mandelbaum therefore acquitted all of the defendants.

McCullen, and Judge Mandelbaum's ruling, are useful in a wide variety of protest-related cases. The NYPD regularly closes the entire Wall Street area when large protests are expected for May Day or September 17, the anniversary of the founding of Occupy Wall Street. Antiwar demonstrators are frequently arrested attempting to deliver petitions or even loaves of bread to the checkpoints of military bases. Neighborhood activists opposing gentrification are carted away by police at community board

McCULLEN AND JUDGE MANDELBAUM'S RULING ARE USEFUL IN A WIDE VARIETY OF PROTEST-RELATED CASES, INCLUDING THOSE ABOUT FREEDOM OF SPEECH ON WALL STREET, AT THE CHECKPOINTS OF MILITARY BASES AND AT COMMUNITY BOARD MEETINGS.

meetings. In each of these cases, the judges can usefully be reminded that the First Amendment does not only exist to protect the speech we want to hear, and that inconvenience or annoyance is not grounds for arrest and prosecution.

Jonathan Wallace is a member of the Mass Defense Committee of the New York City chapter of the National Lawyers Guild.



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BRONX AT THE CROSSROADS

DE BLASIO GIVES GENTRIFICATION A PROGRESSIVE SPIN

BY AARON MIGUEL CANTÚ

Starting in the shadow of Yankee Stadium, Jerome Avenue quickly becomes one of the Bronx's central arteries as it winds five and a half miles to the north. Originally laid out in the 1870s by Leonard Jerome, a Gilded Age financier and stock speculator who wanted to make it easier for horseracing fans to beat a path to his new racetrack, today Jerome Avenue is receiving increased interest from city planners and a new generation of speculators. However, they're placing their bets not on the horses but on the rezoning of a 73-square-block swath of real estate, which could usher in sweeping changes for the 345,000 largely immigrant and working-class residents who live within a half-mile radius of the area under study.

The Jerome Avenue corridor, as the Department of City Planning (DCP) calls the area it wants to rezone, begins at 167th Street — just south of where the 4 train starts to run overhead on elevated tracks — and continues north to 184th Street, encompassing adjacent side streets. This stretch of Jerome Avenue is lined with auto repair shops on both sides and has a total of more than 500 mostly small businesses that employ almost 4,000 workers, according to the Department of City Planning. Many of the shops have a worn look to them, but within the pockets of neighborhoods surrounding Jerome, you can hear the Spanish-accented sounds of community when subway cars are not rumbling above.

That could soon change, as the de Blasio administration looks to redevelop Jerome Avenue with the stated goals of creating affordable housing for “a range of incomes” as well as stimulating economic development in a community where the median income is barely \$25,000 per year. The idea is to build high-density residential buildings with as much as 70-80 percent of units renting at market rate, with the remainder set aside for “affordable housing” based on formulas that generally privilege people making \$50,000 to \$80,000 per year. The city's plan, buried in hundreds of pages detailing its vision for the Bronx, is to make over the neighborhood to be more enticing to middle- and upper-middle-class professionals who would utilize the 4 train to reach Grand Central Terminal within half an hour, and lower Manhattan within 45 minutes.

With gentrification and displacement the modus operandi across the five boroughs, there is, not surprisingly, a fair amount of skepticism among area residents about the city's intentions along Jerome Avenue.

“They [the city] haven't explained what the project is nor what will happen to us,” said Ramona Uribe, who owns a small business near the corner of 169th and Jerome. “If it's true that they want to build residential and business buildings for the magnates, for those who can afford it, then it won't be favorable to us, because we are the poor masses.”

PR OFFENSIVE

On March 14, I was one of the first attendees to arrive at a DCP-sponsored open house intended to provide a “casual opportunity for community members to participate, ask questions, and share.” On this Saturday morning, representatives from DCP, standing in crisp business-casual attire alongside giant, orange-accented informational placards, would simultaneously attempt to convince community members of the need for a development plan as well as solicit input on what that plan should look like.

Upon entering the room, I was immediately greeted by a young representative from DCP named Jessica Ortiz, who directed my attention to a giant map of the area targeted for development. She also handed me a couple of red and blue push pins, telling me to place the red dot where I lived, and the blue dot where I worked. When I asked Ortiz why DCP wanted to know these things, she answered vaguely that they wanted to know as much about the neighborhood as possible.

“If you live and work in the study area, we just want to see where you shop and retail,” Ortiz said, suggesting this information would help make a better plan. Most of the other placards repeated this innocuous sentiment, suggesting a completely blank slate on which any Bronx resident could scrawl their ideas for the community and be taken seriously. One sign bore a white-to-orange arrow signifying stages of the development plan: Listen and Learn, Vision, Generate Plan, Public Review, and finally, Implement. Another little arrow let us know we were at the first stage.

But the process isn't a blank slate, and the work-live pushpins served another reason: To gauge the viability of something called “transit-oriented development,” an integral part of Mayor de Blasio's affordable housing vision. TOD is premised on the idea of creating dense networks of “mixed-use, mixed-income centers linked by the region's extensive commuter rail network,” according to

a 2014 report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

By putting mass transit at the center of development, TOD offers residents the prospect of lower transportation costs, more personal convenience and easier access to job centers. However, TOD also has the potential to spur gentrification if land prices rise and enough affordable housing isn't being built.

METRO-NORTH

Such a scenario is easy to imagine when reading a 2014 DCP report titled “Sustainable Communities in the Bronx: Leveraging Regional Rail for Access, Growth and Opportunity.” It describes a vision of “mixed use” communities along the Metro-North rail line that runs parallel and just to the east of Jerome Avenue.

Starting at the Melrose Avenue station at 162nd Street near Yankee Stadium, the DCP would like to seed high-density residential buildings and corresponding new retail and amenities near other Metro-North stations in the Bronx, including University Heights, Morris Heights, Tremont, Williamsbridge and Fordham as well as at proposed sta-

VOX POP: JEROME AVE. BUSINESSES MULL UNCERTAIN FUTURE

INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOS BY REBECA IBARRA & ALEX ELLEFSON



JOSÉ SUAZU, 56.
MANAGER OF BIENVENIDOS PARKING LOT AT 1995 JEROME AVENUE.

“I don't agree [with the rezoning] in the least. I hear they want to knock all this down, all around here. The first thing is I'll be left without a job. One can at least make a living here. You get a tip here and there. We're set, you know? We work here.”



AMÍLCAR CAÑAS, 68.
OWNER OF CAÑAS BARBER SHOP AT 1318 JEROME AVENUE, WHICH HE HAS RENTED FOR 20 YEARS.

“I see this bringing in the future. If they build new buildings, I will always be here. If it's not in this space I'll get a new shop, but I will stay in the area. And I will do better because there will be more people, a bigger audience. That always makes business grow.”



RAMONA URIBE, 54.
OWNER OF YC&L MULTI-SERVICE AT 1277 JEROME AVENUE, A FAMILY-RUN COMPANY OF MORE THAN 30 YEARS

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“If they bring more people in, it will be good for me only if they leave my business alone. Because if they want to build then they will want to rent this space out to other kinds of people who will pay more, who will pay things beyond our reach.

My family depends on this business, and it would be affected in every sense of the word. It's impossible for it to ever be the same again because when you remove a business you lose the clients, and you don't know if they will follow you to a new place. I am 54 years old. Starting from zero is not easy.”



ARMANDO JUAREZ, 35.
OWNER OF NY TIRE EXPRESS AT 1240 JEROME AVENUE.

“I know there's a lot of people from different investment companies and banks going around and offering to buy properties from their owners. This property has been in my family for generations and I'm not giving it up. It's going to be hard to get all these tire shops, auto glass and muffler shops out of here.

There are a lot of groups that come around here trying to inform the community about what's going on. The way one guy explained it to me was: They're trying to do to this area what they did over there in Willets Point, Queens, by Citi Field, when they started pushing all of those mechanics out of their businesses.”



PHILLIP BLANIS, 29.
OWNER OF MT. EDEN FLORIST, EST. 1899, AT 2 EAST MT. EDEN AVENUE.

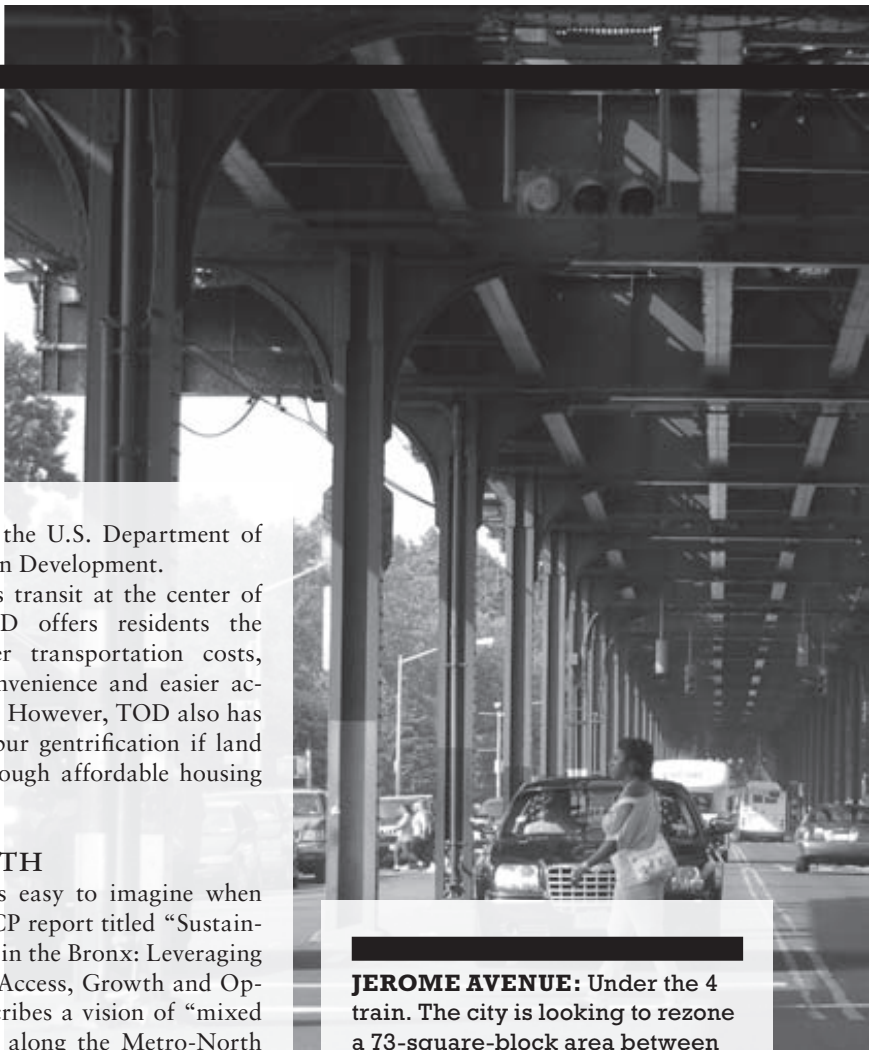
“They're going to make Jerome Avenue less industrial and more residential, which will be good for both the shopping end and the living end. The more people that live on Jerome Avenue, the shops will make more money. And the more apartments you got, I think it will make the rent cheaper.”



KENNETH IVEY, 35.
TICKET SELLER AT EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, LIVES IN MARBLE HILL, 225TH AND BROADWAY, BRONX.

“I spend a lot of time in this neighborhood on my commute to work. There's always shopping going on. There's money being generated. Why harm the people that's already here, that are already established?”

I used to live in Harlem before we had to relocate to the Bronx where it's more affordable. We got people moving to New York from all over the world so we have to make room and everybody has to share and get along. But things could have been done better as far as I'm concerned. You can't have all the money and all the power and just think that you're just going to push and shove your way through society.”



JEROME AVENUE: Under the 4 train. The city is looking to rezone a 73-square-block area between 167th and 184th Sts.



NATHANIEL C/FICKR

HOUSING CRISIS: When CASA member Althea Matthews attended a March 14 open house put on by the Department of City Planning, she was encouraged to sign up on the city's wait list for affordable housing.



ANNMARRY MATHEW

COMMUNITY ACTION: More than 250 people attended a March 5 meeting convened by the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision.



BRONX COALITION FOR A COMMUNITY VISION

► tions for Parkchester/Van Nest and Morris Park.

Central to the vision are new Bronx residents employed in high-paying industries such as finance or high tech who work in smaller regional hubs north and east of New York City, including Poughkeepsie, New York and Stamford, Connecticut. These hoped-for future residents could also just as easily commute into Manhattan's core via Metro-North's terminus at Grand Central.

Drawing on classic trickle-down economics, the study envisions that the presence of these high-wage workers in redeveloped Bronx neighborhoods would "generate a large demand for retail products and services, which in turn will generate employment opportunities — be it for doctors, nurses, architects, construction workers, baristas, waiters or retail clerks. This increased demand lifts the average wages of employees across all sectors in the local economy — even for employees without a college education."

Jerome Avenue's proximity to the Metro-North lines means that the neighborhoods surrounding it could be folded into DCP's wider plan to remake the Bronx to the liking of high-earning commuters. Right now, much of the Jerome Av-

enue corridor is zoned for light industrial or heavy commercial use, and the rest is zoned for medium and high-density residential areas. Under current zoning regulations for the area, it would not be possible to open restaurants, small-scale grocery stores and other boutique shops considered essential to making the area attractive to the hoped-for new residents.

IN THE BEGINNING

When the palatial new Yankee Stadium opened for business in the South Bronx in 2009, it had received \$1.2 billion in public subsidies and tax abatements from the city, state and federal governments. Just south of the stadium, the giant shopping mall at the site of the old Bronx Terminal Market opened in 2009 with subsidies and tax abatements totaling \$140 million.

Meanwhile, the faded storefronts of Jerome Avenue appear much as they have for decades. Several years ago, Bronx Community Board 4 — whose members are appointed by the borough president — asked the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg to rezone an area around Jerome Avenue to encourage new

Continued on page 20



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4/21 5:00 PM The Choice is Now! Gov. Cuomo has a critical decision to make between building fracked gas infrastructure on the coast of Long Island or a 100% renewable wind farm at the same site. Let's help him decide! - 633 3rd Avenue, Manhattan.

4/22 EarthDay The Future is Ours! Climate justice demands that workers, low income communities and communities of color who have disproportionately suffered under the old system be at the forefront of change. Join us as we rise together on Earth Day to celebrate & support resilient communities and real economic solutions.

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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MONEY

REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY DRIVES DE BLASIO'S HOUSING PLANS

BY TOM ANGOTTI

When Mayor Bill de Blasio announced his 10-year housing plan last year it was in fact two plans — one for new housing development and the other for keeping rents down and preserving neighborhoods. The two plans contradicted one another and it appeared that the development plan would be the priority. Unfortunately, events have proven that to be the case.

To be clear, the administration has taken some small but important steps to preserve existing affordable housing. De Blasio supports renewal of the rent laws, additional funds for public housing, permanent housing instead of homeless shelters and more legal support for tenants facing eviction. However, all of these measures are too little and too late. By the time they take effect, many more people could be displaced by the new development advocated by the mayor — following the pattern established during the 12-year rule of Michael Bloomberg.

De Blasio's housing plan promises to create 200,000 units of "affordable" housing and help preserve neighborhoods. Forty percent of these units would be in new construction and the rest would be to preserve existing housing. However, the mayor's \$7.2 billion 10-year capital plan for housing would be dwarfed by the \$30 billion that private developers are expected to spend, investments that will jack up the cost of land and existing housing, and displace residents and businesses. Almost half of the city's funds would be spent in the last six years of the program, after the next election, when a new mayor could easily change the whole game plan.

STOP THE REZONING!

The mayor's main vehicle for backing new development is zoning. Bloomberg proposed an unprecedented 140 zoning changes that opened the door to a building boom. While 160,000 units of "affordable" housing were created, many more affordable units were lost to the gentrification that followed. De Blasio is proposing 15 zoning changes, starting with East New York in Brooklyn, Jerome Avenue in the Bronx and Flushing in Queens.

Zoning is a regulatory scheme that controls how much can be built in any location. The Department of City Planning (DCP), a mayoral agency, typically proposes zoning changes in neighborhoods that real estate investors believe are "ripe" for development. Every zoning change starts with a study. As soon as the department announces that it's studying an area, investors get the signal that land values will be going up. If they haven't already done so, they move in, buy up land and buildings, evict tenants and make the neighborhood unaffordable to existing residents and businesses. By the time the study is done and the formal proposal is ready to start the seven-month-long public approval process, change is already under way. In the approval process community residents can testify at public hearings, but these are theater, not serious dialogues. The local community board, which has no planning staff or budget, has a vote but it's only "advisory." If any preservation strategies have been promised along the way, by the time the final vote is taken there's not much left to preserve.

SLOW DOWN THE PROCESS OR HALT IT?

Housing and community activists are publicly taking aim at the city's zoning strategies. On March 11, activists demonstrated at City Hall demanding that the mayor "slow it down" and first work with communities to plan for all their needs. The action included groups that had previously cheered de Blasio's rezoning schemes, like the Association of Neighborhood Housing Developers, a city-wide coalition composed of 98 nonprofit housing groups active in low- and moderate-income communities.

The first big test of the mayor's plan was in Astoria Cove, Queens, where rezoning gave a huge boost to a luxury condo developer while producing a minimum number of "affordable" housing units, dashing the expectations of de Blasio supporters. The next test was in East New York. When the city unveiled its preliminary zoning plan for this neighborhood in recent months, opposition was forceful and widespread. Activists there say that speculators have already moved into the neighborhood and moved people out. Next up after East New York is Jerome Avenue in the Bronx, a large Latino neighborhood where community organizers are preparing for a similar battle.

While many organizers want serious community planning before any zoning changes, others are questioning whether a planning process controlled by DCP will truly represent their needs and lead to anything but the zoning the city wants in the end. In Crown Heights, the Movement to Protect the People (MTOPP) got wind that their local community board was encouraging the city to do a rezoning study. Anticipating that it would follow the usual formula promoting development, MTOPP protested at the community board to stop the zoning study before it starts. MTOPP's goal is not just to slow down the rezoning but to stop it in its tracks.

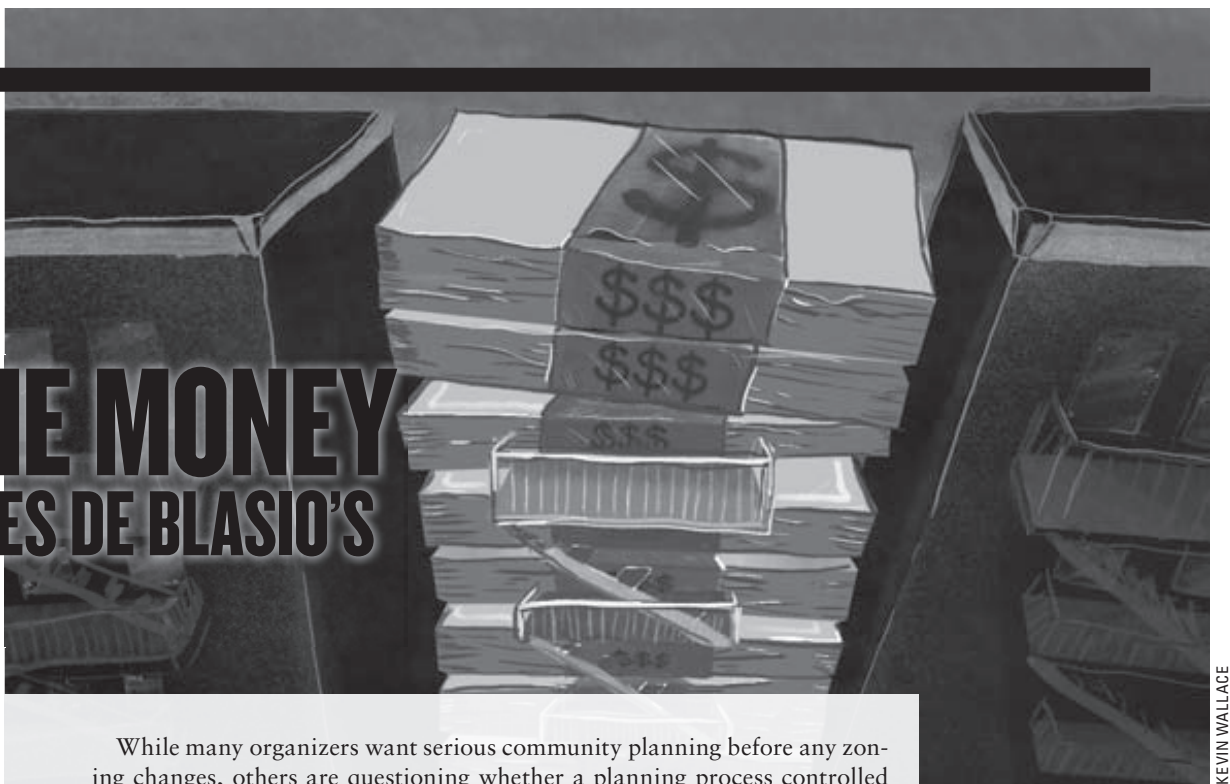
According to Alicia Boyd of MTOPP, "the track record shows that DCP studies will become law. They are known to have adverse effects on communities of color." MTOPP has started doing their own community plan "to ensure that the community's voice will be heard," says Boyd, "without the risk of people in our community being displaced and our homes destroyed."

A TALE OF TWO PARKING LOTS

While the neighborhood zoning and planning dramas play out, the mayor is shoring up his support from developers. His endorsement of higher densities has pleased his allies at the powerful Real Estate Board of New York, where density usually translates into higher profits. De Blasio is floating an ambitious proposal to build housing at the Sunnyside Yards in Queens, a huge undertaking that would require deep public subsidies and investors looking for top returns. De Blasio's planning director, Carl Weisbrod, whose career has been in real estate development, has been working overtime to cement a rezoning in East Midtown that will make some wealthy landowners there quite pleased.

If the evidence of DCP's gifts to developers and zoning attacks on neighborhoods are not enough to prove what the real priorities are, check out the agency's latest scheme to help maximize profits for developers. The proposal, "Zoning for Quality and Affordability," proposes to jiggle existing zoning requirements to increase the amount of usable space that can be built in areas that were supposed to be preserved under the zoning. Aside from the giveaways proposed, the report is all about the number of square feet and profit, without a hint about what might be good for the people who live in the buildings. For example, DCP proposes to reduce parking requirements for low-income and affordable housing, citing lower levels of car ownership among these populations. Yet it does nothing to restrict the generous parking permitted in luxury housing.

Tom Angotti is professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is the author of New York For Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate (MIT Press, 2008).



KEVIN WALLACE

BEFORE NEW HOUSING IS BUILT

BY FITZROY CHRISTIAN

Mayor de Blasio has announced — and launched — an ambitious housing plan in which his stated goal is to preserve and build 200,000 affordable apartments over the next 10 years. He has also targeted a number of areas in the city for rezoning and redevelopment, with housing being a critical component of the plan.

But history has taught us that rezoning is almost always a precursor to gentrification. And gentrification is nothing less than the displacement and replacement of one class of people by another, “higher” class, the destruction of the gentrified area’s previous character and history, and the severe financial and emotional disruption of the lives of people on the frontlines of this process. It is the perpetuation of the “tale of two cities” that Mayor de Blasio campaigned against so eloquently two years ago, when he was elected by a landslide.

Not surprisingly, the mayor and city administration have declared that there will be minimal displacement and that affordable housing will be built for people of all income levels, including those who already live in the areas being rezoned. They have also announced funding for legal recourse that will be available to people and businesses who may be vulnerable to targeted harassment and eviction.

But for any rezoning to take place with minimal disruption and avoidable dislocations, the city needs to do the following:

ANTI-HARASSMENT & ANTI-DISPLACEMENT POLICIES

Recognize that rezoning creates speculation and produces overnight increases in the value and price of the land in the area targeted for change. The city must then immediately put into place an effective, enforceable and adequately funded system with severe penalties to deter developers, landlords and others from harassing tenants or participating in any activity that would result in residents and/or small businesses being forced out.

PASS & FUND INTRO 214

In addition to the above measures, pass Intro 214, a piece of legislation currently wending its way through City Council, that would provide full legal counsel to all tenants in New York City whose incomes fall within 200 percent of the federal poverty level and who are litigants in eviction, ejection or other proceedings in Housing Court. While the funding the mayor recently announced focuses on this type of activity in the rezoning target areas, Intro 214 will be a permanent right that will continue to protect tenants well into the future.

PRESERVING CURRENT JOBS & CREATING CAREER-PATH JOBS

Construction in the areas being rezoned must be with union labor and must create good jobs for local residents; it is essential also to include preserving the variety of jobs already existing in communities. Most of the neighborhoods targeted are lower-income areas with high unemployment and underemployment. Rezoning should provide apprenticeship opportunities and other meaningful employment for residents, enabling them to afford the homes being built.

REAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION & VISIONING IN THE PROCESS

Community residents, business owners and other stakeholders must be an integral part of the entire process: visioning the rezoned com-

munity, developing the plan and implementing it along with city agencies and developers. The success during the 1990s of the Bronx community group *Nos Quedamos* in ensuring that the *Melrose Gardens* neighborhood was properly redeveloped is a testament to what can happen when community stakeholders, the city and developers collaborate in designing a community’s growth such that the current residents and businesses are the central focus.

HOUSING THAT IS TRULY AFFORDABLE TO RESIDENTS

The federal government has defined affordable housing as a unit in which no more than 30 percent of a household’s income is spent on rent. This means that in Community Board 4 and Community Board 5 in the Bronx, where the median annual income is \$25,000, monthly rent should not exceed \$624. However, too often, we have seen that where “affordable housing” is built, it is not affordable to most of the residents in the area being rezoned, and they are forced out of their homes and communities. Our communities need more housing and for current affordable housing stock to be preserved. This means warehouse buildings and apartments should be returned to the pool of affordable housing. We want neighborhood improvement and welcome others to join us and help enrich our already rich and diverse neighborhoods. However, we insist that “mixed income” development include us, not exclude us.

GENTRIFICATION IS THE PERPETUATION OF THE “TALE OF TWO CITIES” THAT MAYOR DE BLASIO CAMPAIGNED AGAINST SO ELOQUENTLY.

And finally, our communities want the city and Department of City Planning to slow the process down and extend it to allow adequate time and space for community stakeholders to develop a community-based vision that will form the basis for the redevelopment of the area. The decisions made today will affect our communities for decades to come and should include all the components that preserve current jobs while adding career-path, sustainable new jobs; green space — community gardens, refurbished parks and community social spots for seniors; permanent housing for seniors, veterans, fixed-income and other vulnerable low-income people; and investment in school buildings, after-school programs, improved access to health services, lighting and other resources the community deems a priority for its growth and development.

Fitzroy Christian is a member of the Leadership Team of New Settlement Apartments’ Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA) project and has been a resident of the southwest Bronx for 40 years.

FIGHTING A MODERN DAY PLAGUE

By Ann Toback



Passover is the ultimate story of oppression, collective action and redemption. Today in the United States we face a widespread modern-day plague: working poverty — workers who earn wages so low that they can’t afford to take care of their basic needs of life. Workers, frequently exploited by their employers, often find their job conditions hazardous to their health and welfare. In the United States right now, there are 10 million people who fall into this category of working poor.

The recent news was full of reports of an OSHA complaint filed against McDonald’s for their gross neglect of their workers on the job, specifically relating to the safety of hot grills. With four out of five fast-food workers reporting that they have been burned on the job, McDonald’s routinely fails to provide any burn protection to its employees, and to make matters worse, many of their restaurants don’t even have a properly equipped and accessible first-aid kit. The complaint states that frequently, McDonald’s management suggests that workers treat their burns with mustard or mayonnaise instead of getting them the medical attention they need.

More evidence of this modern plague can be found here in New York State, where, annually, over a million households are at risk of losing their electricity. Each year over a quarter million New York households have their utilities shut off for failure to make timely payments. Families are forced to choose between their lights and other essentials of life. Often these families pay their utilities by taking high interest loans, and make even harder choices the next month.

The good news today is that collectively we can effect change for these 10 million Americans. There are many problems in our world that we can’t change — but here is an opportunity for our activism to make a difference.

Workmen’s Circle activists are proud to connect with our historic union and community partners by joining one of the most important causes of our time: the Fight for \$15, a nationwide movement organized and led by workers fighting for a minimum wage of at least \$15 an hour. This is a fight we first waged over a hundred years ago, and it is a fight we can and must win today.

On Wednesday, April 15th the Fight for \$15 coalition is planning a national day of action to raise awareness of the plight of low-wage workers. At 5pm on that day we will meet at Columbus Circle and march together to Times Square in support of these workers.

Just days before the National Day of Action, Jews across America will celebrate Passover — the 3,000 year-old story of 600,000 Jews who rose up against their oppressors and began an exodus to their “Promised Land.” The United States is truly the 21st century “promised land,” but there are 10 million working poor who need our help to make that ideal into a reality. Today, we are all charged to work to make this a land of opportunity and equality for us all.

Ann Toback is the Executive Director of The Workmen’s Circle.

The Workmen’s Circle is a 100+ year old non-profit organization with headquarters in New York and communities across the U.S. Through social justice campaigns, festivals, holiday celebrations, educational programs and more, we connect Jewish adults, kids and families of all affiliations with their cultural heritage.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT WWW.CIRCLE.ORG OR CALL 212-889-6800 EXT. 808.



WHY SO MANY EXAMS?

The mania for high-stakes standardized testing should not be seen as a misguided policy but as something that the capitalist class benefits from in more ways than one.

By BERTELL OLLMAN

The psychologist Bill Livant has remarked, “When a liberal sees a beggar, he says the system isn’t working. When a Marxist does, he says it is.” The same insight could be applied today to the entire area of education. The learned journals as well as the popular media are full of studies documenting how little most students know and how fragile their basic skills are. The cry heard almost everywhere is, “The system isn’t working.” Responding to this common complaint, conservatives in both parties have pushed through packages of education reforms — “No Child Left Behind,” “Race to the Top” and “Common Core” — in which increased testing occupies the central place. The typical liberal and even radical response to this has been to demonstrate that such measures are not likely to have the “desired” effect. The assumption, of course, is that we all want more or less the same thing from a system of education, and that conservatives have simply made an error in the means they have chosen to attain our common end. But what if students are already receiving — more or less — the kind of education that conservatives favor? This would cast their proposals for “reform” in another light. What if, as Livant points out in the case of beggars, the system is working?

The 17th century French philosopher Blaise Pascal noted that if you make children get on their knees every day to pray, whatever their initial beliefs, they will end up believing in God. It seems that a practice repeated often enough, especially if it includes particular movements and emotions, can exercise an extraordinary effect on how and what we think. Didn’t Marshall McLuhan warn us in the early years of T.V. that “the medium is the message”? What applies to praying and to watching T.V. applies to taking exams. If you make students at any rung of the educational ladder take lots of exams, the process of doing so will have at least as much influence on what they become as the content of the tests. In short, exams, especially so many exams, teach us even more than they test us. To grasp what it is they teach us is to understand why our system of education already “works” and in what ways conservative proposals for reform would make it “work” still better.

TESTS AS TEACHERS

Complaining about exams may be most students’ first truly informed criticism about the society in which they live, informed because they are its victims and know from experience how exams work. Students know, for example, that exams don’t only involve reading questions and writing answers. They also involve forced isolation from other students, prohibitions on talking, walking around and going to the bathroom, writing a lot faster than usual, physical discomfort, worry, fear, anxiety (lots of that) and often guilt. Students are also aware that exams do a poor job of testing what they actually know. What student hasn’t griped about at least some of these things? But it is just here that most of their criticisms run into a brick wall, because most students don’t know enough about society to understand the role that exams — especially taking so many exams — plays in preparing them to take their place in it.

In reality, exams have less to do with testing us for what we are supposed to know than teaching us what the other aspects of instruction cannot get at (or get at as well). To understand what that is we must examine what the capitalist class, who control the main levers of power in our society, require from a system of education. Here, it is clear that capitalists need a system of education that provides young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for their businesses to function and prosper. But they also want schools to give youth the beliefs, attitudes, emotions and associated hab-

its of behavior that make it easy for capitalists to tap into this store of knowledge and skills. And they need all this not only to maximize their profits but also to help reproduce the social, economic and even political conditions and accompanying processes that allow them to extract any profits whatsoever. Without workers, consumers and citizens who are well versed in and accepting of their roles in these processes, the entire capitalist system would grind to a halt. It is here — particularly as regards the behavioral and attitudinal prerequisites of capitalist rule — that the culture of exams has become indispensable.

Well, what does sitting for so many exams, together with the long hours spent and anxiety involved in studying for them, and the shame felt for the imperfect grades obtained on them, “teach” students? Here’s the short list:

1) *The crush of tests gets students to believe that one gets what one works for and that the standards by which this is decided are objective and fair, and therefore that those who do well and those who do badly deserve what they get. Students then bring this attitude to what they find in the rest of society, including their own failures later in life, and it inclines them to “blame the victim” (themselves or others) and feel guilty for what is not their fault.*

2) *Exams are orders that are not open to question — “discuss this,” “outline that,” etc. — and taking so many exams conditions students to accept unthinkingly the orders that will come from their future employers. As with the army, following lots of orders, including many that don’t seem to make much sense, is ideal training for a life in which one will be expected to follow orders.*

3) *By fitting the infinite variety of possible answers on exams into the straitjacket of A, B, C and D, students get accustomed to the standardization of people as well as of things and the impersonal job categories that will constitute such an important part of their identity later on.*

4) *Because their teachers know all the right answers to the exams, students tend to assume that those who are above them in other hierarchies — at work and in politics — also know much more than they do.*

5) *Because most tests are taken individually, striving to do well on a test is treated as something that concerns students only as individuals. Cooperative solutions are equated with cheating, if considered at all. The model implies that this is how students should approach the problems they will confront later in life.*

6) *With the Damocles sword of a failing — or for some, a mediocre — grade hanging over their heads throughout their years in school, including university, the inhibiting fear of swift and dire punishment never leaves students. The very number of exams also tends to undermine students’ self-confidence and to raise their levels of anxiety, with the result that most young people remain unsure that they will ever know enough to criticize existing institutions, and feel*

physically uncomfortable at the thought of trying to put anything better in their place.

7) *Exams play the key role in determining course content, leaving little time for material that is not on the exam. Among the first things to be omitted in this “tightening” of the curriculum are students’ own reactions to the topics that come up, collective reflection on the urgent problems of the day, alternative points of view and other possibilities generally, explorations of topics triggered by individual curiosity and indeed anything that is likely to promote creative, cooperative or critical thinking. But then our capitalist ruling class is not particularly interested in dealing with workers, consumers and citizens who possess these qualities.*

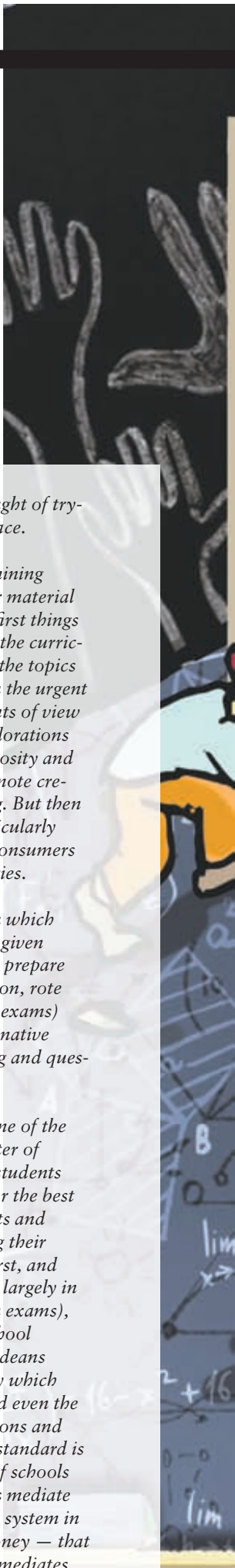
8) *Exams also determine the form in which most teaching goes on, since for any given exam there is generally a best way to prepare for it. Repetition, forced memorization, rote learning and frequent quizzes (more exams) leave little time for other more imaginative approaches to conveying, exchanging and questioning facts and ideas.*

9) *Finally, multiple exams become one of the main factors determining the character of the relation between students (with students viewing each other as competitors for the best grades), the relation between students and teachers (with most students viewing their teachers as examiners and graders first, and most teachers viewing their students largely in terms of how well they have done on exams), the relation between teachers and school administrators (since principals and deans now have an “objective” standard by which to measure teacher performance) and even the relation between school administrations and various state bodies (since the same standard is used by the state to judge the work of schools and school systems). In short, exams mediate all social relations in the educational system in a manner very similar to the way money — that other great mystifier and falsifier — mediates all relations between people in the larger society, and with the same dehumanizing results.*

Once we put all these pieces together, it is clear that the current craze for increasing the number of exams for students at all levels has less to do with “raising standards,” as the popular mantra would have it, than with developing more extensive control over the entire educational process. This control, which will allow the ruling class to streamline its necessary work of socialization, is the overriding aim of the government’s current passion for more exams, and it must be understood and criticized as such and not as a misguided effort to “raise standards” that is unlikely to work.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE CLASSROOM

The question that arises next is — why now? It is clear that while exams have been with us for a long time, it is only in recent years that the mania for exams and still more exams has begun to affect government policies. The short answer to the question is globalization, or whatever one chooses to call this new stage of capitalism. What, then, is there in globalization that calls for more and more standardized





GARY MARTIN

exams? The proponents of such educational “reform” point to the intensified competition between industries, and therefore between workers worldwide, and the increasingly rapid pace at which economic changes of all kinds are occurring. They say that surviving in this new order requires people who are not only efficient but have a variety of skills (or can quickly acquire them) and the flexibility to change tasks whenever called upon to do so. Thus, the only way to prepare our youth for the new economic life that awaits them is to raise standards of education, and that entails, among other things, more exams. On this view, exams are there to help students get and keep good jobs.

A more critical approach to globalization begins by emphasizing that the intensification of economic competition worldwide is driven by capitalists’ efforts to maximize their profits. It is this that puts all the other developments associated with globalization into motion. Thus, while capitalists in this new age of globalization certainly need workers with the right mix of skills and knowledge to operate their businesses, what they need every bit as much — and I believe

even more — is people, particularly in the working class, who will accept their worsening conditions and accompanying fears and anxieties without making waves. And with our current economic crisis giving no sign of ending any time soon, the growing inequalities that have captured most people’s attention are only the tip of the iceberg.

Naturally, if changes in education alone could produce the desired effect, the capitalists would be very pleased. But if — and where — they can’t, the capitalists and their government (as well as their media and their cultural, educational and social institutions) are quick to supplement them with other tactics. The current rage for more exams, therefore, needs to be viewed as part of a larger strategy that includes the obscene stoking of patriotic fires and the chipping away of traditional civil liberties (both rationalized by the so-called “war” on terrorism), the promotion of “family values,” restrictions on sexual freedom (but not, as we see, on sexual hypocrisy) and the push for more prisons and longer prison sentences for a whole range of

Continued on page 21



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BEACH TOWN VS. BIG ENERGY

LONG ISLAND SHORE IS OPPOSED TO LNG TERMINAL

BY ALEX ELLEFSON

Long Beach, New York, calls itself the City by the Sea. And indeed, the ocean is the main attraction in this coastal community of 33,000 people. Located 2.5 miles from Penn Station, Long Beach is on a narrow barrier island facing the Atlantic Ocean. This is a place where skateboarders and bicyclists whiz down the boardwalk, which was one of the first things the city rebuilt after Hurricane Sandy. Families throw Frisbees and footballs around on the beach. Dogs stir up flocks of seagulls while their owners stroll along the edge of the surf and lone hikers occasionally crouch down to collect seashells resting in the sand.

Luke Hamlet grew up here. In the 1960s, he and his brothers used to head out to the beach to surf. He later opened a surf shop on the city's main strip, just five blocks from the beach.

In his shop window, Hamlet has a bright blue banner that urges people to oppose a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility, the Port Ambrose terminal, proposed to be built 19 miles off the coast of Long Beach. The banner, which reads "Save the Mermaids," was made last November by local children and their parents and has hung in Hamlet's store ever since.

"I think the vast majority of people that live in town are against the project," Hamlet said, adding that his customers often ask him how to get involved or find out more information. "You grow up seeing the ocean and assuming that it's a natural environment and so any time you start putting crap in there, people are distrustful of it."

The \$600 million Port Ambrose project would involve dredging up almost 22 miles of the ocean floor to construct an underwater pipeline that would connect to New York's existing natural gas infrastructure. A buoy system set up at the end of the pipeline would rise to the surface to dock with LNG tankers, ships that are almost the length of the Empire State Building, where the fuel would be regasified and sent through the pipeline.

Liberty Natural Gas, the company behind Port Ambrose, insists that the imported fuel would reduce energy prices in Long Island, which relies on natural gas for 70 percent of its power.

In a statement emailed to *The Independent*, Liberty Natural Gas CEO Roger Whelan said, "Port Ambrose is needed, safe and will reduce energy costs for New York consumers. For the second winter in a row, New York consumers have been hit with exceedingly high energy bills as the result of harsh winter temperatures."

But residents in the area fear that building the pipeline might disrupt the local ecosystem, one of the most diverse in the world due to the warm and cold ocean currents that meet offshore in the New York Bight. The ocean is the engine of the economy in Long Beach, where businesses depend on visiting beachgoers and sport fishermen. They also have many safety concerns about building an LNG port, capable of bringing in 400 million cubic feet of gas a day, so close to their shore, especially in the event of another Sandy-size storm.

"We live in a beach community and there's so many hazards that we have to worry about: hurricanes, a possible tsunami. Why add more worry to us?" said Long Beach Fire Chief Richard Corbett. "And if there's a leak or some sort of accident out there, it could harm the fish. It could destroy our ecosystem."

Scores of environmental groups, as well as recreational organizations, community advocates and business associations have joined a growing coalition against Port Ambrose. In March, they received some welcome news. The U.S. Coast Guard and the Maritime Administration (MARAD), the two federal agencies tasked with evaluating Liberty Natural Gas's license application, announced that they would "stop the clock" on the process in order to evaluate the tens of thousands of public comments they received about Port Ambrose.

"I think it's a testament to the power of the people that there were so many comments that [MARAD and the Coast Guard] had to stop the clock in order to read them all," said Cindy Zipf, executive director of Clean Ocean Action, which submitted more than 60,000 comments from 125 organizations to the federal agencies.

However, Zipf said it was unlikely that the federal agencies would reject Port Ambrose and that the suspension of the application process merely gives organizers more time to put pressure on New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.

Although the site for Port Ambrose is located in federal waters, the governors of adjacent states have the power to veto the project. Christie used his veto power in 2011 to stop a similar terminal by Liberty Natural Gas, called Port Liberty. After the Coast Guard and MARAD finish evaluating the public comments and include them in a final environmental impact statement, the governors will have 45 days to issue a veto.

"One of the more frustrating aspects of this regulatory process is that if the governor does nothing, the project defaults to approval," said Patrick Robbins, communications coordinator for the environmental group Sane Energy Project. "Our goal is to make as much noise on this issue as possible. And those of us in New York State, we're making sure that noise is directed towards the governor."

When the initial draft environmental impact statement was released in December, activists protested the short 60-day period for community input. There were only two public hearings, one in New York and one in New Jersey. The agencies agreed to extend the period for public comments to 90 days, meaning that the final environmental impact statement would be released in mid-April. Had the application process not been delayed, organizers might have had less than five months from when the first draft was released to mobilize enough political pressure to get Cuomo or Christie to veto Port Ambrose.

Long Island resident and activist George Povall said that it has also been challenging to organize a campaign in Long Beach during the winter.

"One thing that's been a problem is that this [application process] has gone through in the wintertime. This is a beach town. A lot of these organizations kind of take off for the winter so it's been pretty difficult to get a lot of this done," Povall said.

Despite the limited time frame, Povall and other local activist groups have turned public opinion in the area against Port Ambrose and convinced their elected officials to come out against the project. State Assemblyman Todd Kaminsky, Congresswoman Kathleen Rice, Nassau County Legislator Denise Ford and the entire Long Beach City Council have called on Cuomo to veto Port Ambrose.

In January, shortly after a meeting with members of Sane

Energy Project, state Senate Republican Majority Leader Dean Skelos joined other elected officials in his district, which includes Long Beach, by writing a letter to Cuomo asking him to veto Port Ambrose.

Skelos, who did not respond to request for comment, has been an ardent supporter of fracking in New York's Southern Tier.

"I think that Senator Skelos has some very longstanding connections to the beach," speculated Povall, who was not present at the meeting with the Republican senator. "I know that his family summers down at the beach and I think that helped him put one and one together. I think that he thought about what it would mean."

Long Beach City Council President Len Torres said he was concerned about an accident at the deepwater port. Not only would an environmental disaster hurt local businesses that depend on the visitors the beach draws, it would also be another hardship for a community still recovering from the havoc brought by Hurricane Sandy.

"We think that it's a little too much to gamble," said Torres, adding that he supported greater investment and research into alternative energy sources.

THE ANSWER IS BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

The fight to stop Port Ambrose is part of a larger struggle to move away from fossil fuels in favor of renewable energy sources. The LNG terminal would be located on the same site as a proposed wind farm capable of generating 700 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 200,000 homes each year.

Advocates of the wind farm point to its many benefits over an LNG port. Besides providing green, renewable energy, the project would also support, rather than disrupt, the marine ecosystem and produce more permanent jobs than an LNG terminal.

Liberty projects that the Port Ambrose terminal will generate more than 800 construction jobs. However, once the project is built, the company says it will need only six workers to maintain it. By contrast, an offshore wind farm is expected to produce 4,700 jobs and \$330 million in annual wages during the three-year construction period. And the wind farm will also create 170 permanent jobs paying \$11 million annually, according to a study prepared for the New York Power Authority.

Some environmentalists also worry that the ocean floor may never recover from the construction of an underwater pipeline due to the perpetual motion caused by docking LNG tankers. Meanwhile, the bases of offshore wind farms have been shown to support local marine life by acting as artificial reefs that attract small fish and the animals that prey on them. One study conducted last year by researchers at the University of St. Andrews found that seals seemed to deliberately seek out wind farms to feed off the fish gathered there.

Dr. Deborah Russell, one of the researchers involved in the study, said in a press release: "The behaviour [of the seals] observed could have implications for both offshore wind farm developments and the decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure."

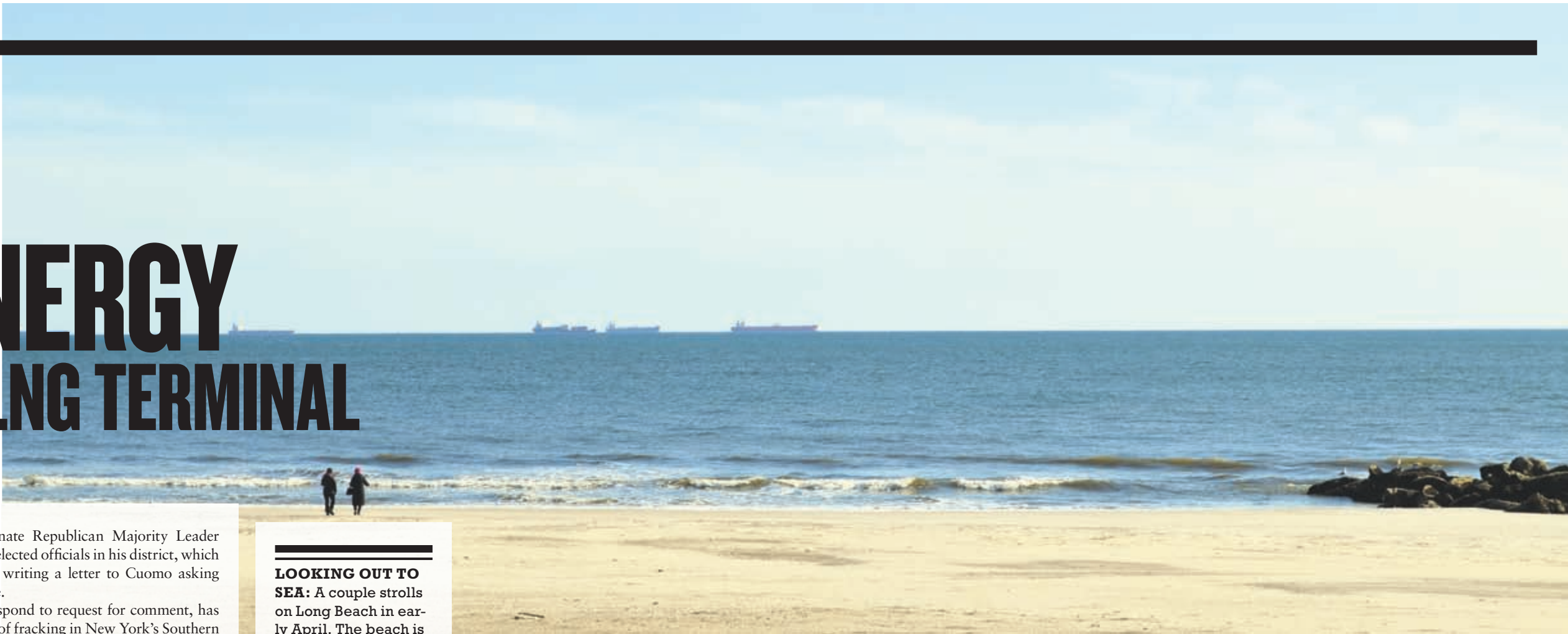
New York City Councilman Donovan Richards, who chairs the Committee on Environmental Protection, said choosing an LNG port over a wind farm takes New York in the wrong direction. The city has committed to reduc-

LOOKING OUT TO SEA:

A couple strolls on Long Beach in early April. The beach is a popular destination during the summer.

MAKING WAVES:

Long Island activist George Povall is the founder of All Our Energy, a renewable energy advocacy organization.



SOLANGE LUWIMANA



ing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent from 2005 levels by 2050.

A 2012 survey by Public Policy Polling, a private polling firm, found that 77 percent of New York City and Long Island residents strongly support the expanded use of renewable energy sources. And 63 percent of those surveyed strongly support offshore wind power if it's located more than 12 miles off the coast.

Richards has introduced a resolution, co-sponsored by 22 council members, calling on Cuomo to veto Port Ambrose. The resolution is expected to come up for a vote in May.

"We should be focusing on solar energy, geothermal and obviously wind. And this LNG port does not provide us with that," said Richards, whose district includes Far Rockaway, one of the communities in New York that was devastated by Hurricane Sandy. "We know that the earth is warming and sea levels are rising. It's incumbent upon us as a city government and as leaders to see when something is not working and move towards building the future. And part of that has to do with divorcing our love of fossil fuels."

GLOBAL MARKETS

Much of the opposition to Port Ambrose comes from concerns that the facility may be used to export natural gas to European markets, where gas prices are much higher. New York State has a strong anti-fracking movement that forced Cuomo to ban the controversial extraction method in December. Port Ambrose is the only LNG terminal in the United States applying only for an import license. There are many activists who argue that Liberty Natural Gas is using the import application as a smokescreen to deflect concerns that the facility will increase demand for fracked gas from Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale.

They point out that the Cayman Islands-based investment firm behind Port Ambrose is also supporting a similar LNG terminal across the Atlan-

tic in Britain.

"We know that the fracking companies have this stuff coming out of their ears and they have nowhere to send it," said Povall. "I don't know where [Liberty] will bring gas in cheaper. So it seems like it would be an export facility."

Povall is the founder of All Our Energy, a renewable energy advocacy organization. He would like to see more of Long Island's energy come from sources like solar and wind. There is a renewable energy park in his hometown of Point Lookout, located a few miles east of Long Beach, that Povall passes every day on his way to work. The park features several innovative demonstrations of green energy infrastructure, including geothermal technology, an electric vehicle recharging station and a shellfish aquaculture facility used to restock the bay that is powered by the wind turbine and solar panels located in the park.

"Every day, when I leave my house, I get to see that and I'm very happy to see it in my town," Povall said.

In March, 52 legislative Democrats sent a letter to Cuomo asking him to veto Port Ambrose. Povall wants to get even more support from elected officials before the window opens for the governor to issue a veto.

Povall is currently organizing a campaign to send 10,000 postcards, with notes handwritten by local residents, to lawmakers throughout New York State. He has already put more than 500 in the mail.

"The postcard campaign is about trying to get a little note in the door to other elected officials that we haven't been able to reach out to yet," said Povall. "Basically, they say: Hey, our politicians are on board. If you lived in our town, you'd be on board too. So how about helping us?"



ALEX ELLEFSON

NYC VOICES: Opponents of Port Ambrose rally outside City Hall on April 1 in support of a proposed City Council resolution that, if passed, will call on Gov. Andrew Cuomo to veto the construction of Port Ambrose.

BUSINESS OWNER: Luke Hamlet outside his surf shop just five blocks from Long Beach.

BOARDWALK: Long Beach's boardwalk was destroyed by Hurricane Sandy and then rebuilt.

A VOICE FROM PALESTINE

INTERVIEW BY ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA

For the last 10 years, the West Bank village of Bil'in has been the site of weekly protests against Israeli occupation. Home to some 1,900 Palestinians and, in recent years, a rotating cadre of international activists and visitors, the village has become known around the world for its nonviolent tactics and its persistence against the Israeli Defense Forces.

Palestinian activist Iyad Burnat, the coordinator of the Popular Committee of Bil'in, has been a leader of this resistance through the construction of the Israeli West Bank apartheid wall, three Gaza wars, changes in leadership on all sides, a faltering, if not altogether stagnant, peace process and, in March, the 2015 Israeli elections. These last saw Israelis reelect Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but not before he made an explosive retraction of his support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For some in the political establishment and the American Jewish community, Netanyahu's political maneuvering removed the last fig leaf from the moribund idea of a two-state solution, prompting major debate about the legitimacy of U.S. support for Israel. For Burnat, the possibility of a two-state solution died a long time ago. The Independent spoke with him in New York City just before he kicked off a month-long U.S. speaking tour.

ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA: *In the 10 years of these demonstrations, what are the biggest successes and losses you've experienced in Bil'in?*

IYAD BURNAT: The biggest success is that we got the Israelis to demolish a part of their wall and move it back 500 meters. They gave back the land to the farmers. In general, in Palestine, it's a small success. But in a small village like Bil'in, it's a big victory. It's the first time that's happened in Palestine.

The biggest loss is that we lost our friend Bassem Abu Rahmeh and his sister. Bassem didn't have a gun. He never threw a stone. It was the 17th of April, 2009, and we were having a demonstration for Palestinian Prisoners' Day. One of the Israeli soldiers shot him in the chest with a tear gas canister. These canisters are very heavy, very black, very fast. You are supposed to shoot them 500 meters in the sky, but they shot directly at Bassem from a distance of 20 meters. So it made a big hole when it touched him and he died right there in that spot.

What are your thoughts about the recent Israeli elections? Here in the United States, Netanyahu's campaign statements that there won't be a Palestinian state under his watch have set off an unprecedented debate.

You know, I never cared about the Israeli elections. It's the same war. We had the left-wing people in the government, the right-wing people in the government and it's the same. Who has killed more people? Netanyahu killed 2,000 in the last war in Gaza. But Sharon and Barak were the same way.

For us, maybe Netanyahu is better than the others. Because people outside can see more clearly what's going on. When Netanyahu said there wouldn't be two states, it helped people to understand that he doesn't want peace. He wants to claim the land from the Palestinians. The only way we can end this is one state.

How much would it help Palestinians for the U.S. government to re-evaluate its policy of support for Israel, as President Obama has recently indicated it's doing?

It's very good for the United States to start thinking about its support for the occupation. If the Americans stop the aid to Israel it would be the start of the end of it.

But also, we are a simple people. We want to see change on the ground. Not just talk here and in the United States and the United Nations about Israeli occupation. It's not enough for Obama to say that he wants to lessen the political support but that the \$3 billion in aid to Israel will continue. What does that mean? The \$3 billion goes to the army. On the ground the army comes to wake me up in the middle of the night. They shot my son. They shoot my people. I live with night raids and with tear gas in my home every day. So the talk doesn't help me.

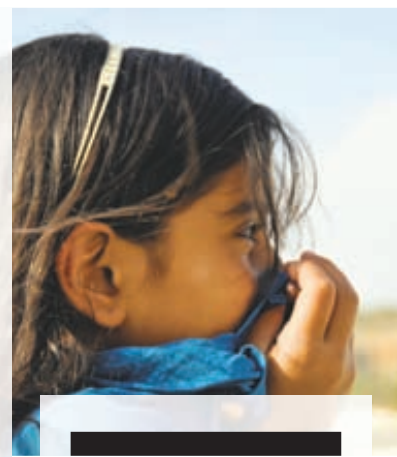
The resistance to the occupation in Bil'in is expressly nonviolent. What is the significance of that to you, and how does it relate to other nonviolent struggles?

We have a long history of nonviolent resistance here in Palestine. And we believe in the way of Mahatma Gandhi and the way of Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, all these people. Nonviolent resistance will

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA



ELLEN DAVIDSON

FATHER-DAUGHTER: Palestinian activist Iyad Burnat, currently visiting the United States, and his daughter Mayar shielding her face from Israeli tear gas in their home village of Bil'in.

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DON'T THANK ME FOR MY SERVICE

Editor's Note: Fifty years ago this spring, the U.S. military deployed combat units in South Vietnam for the first time. A massive escalation in the war followed — within three years the U.S. had more than 500,000 troops on the ground in Vietnam. When the war finally ended on April 30, 1975, with the fall of the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon to Communist forces, more than 4 million Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians and 58,000 Americans had died in the conflict.

For militarists here in the United States, the battle never really ended. They have sought ever since to reframe Vietnam as a “noble cause” betrayed by antiwar protesters who failed to appreciate the sacrifices of the troops and who then perpetuated the public’s aversion to prolonged military adventures in other countries for another generation before 9/11 opened the door on a new era of overseas wars. Now, the Pentagon is heading up a 13-year, \$65 million campaign to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the war that is slated to run from 2012 to 2025. The Vietnam War Commemoration Project will see its own massive escalation starting this year on Memorial Day, as the Pentagon looks to partner with 10,000 corporations and local groups “to thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War.”

But what does all this unsolicited gratitude mean to a veteran who has dedicated himself to waging peace in the 45 years since he came home from war?

BY DOUG RAWLINGS

A fellow Vietnam vet once quipped to me that there are two high holy days for him — Veterans Day and Memorial Day. We both laughed since he’s an avowed atheist, and I consider myself something of a secular humanist. But with all jokes that skirt around deeper truths, this one has its barbs attached. We lack religious fervor. We do not proselytize much. We are conflicted. We really don’t want to stand in any spotlight, but we are pissed off that the warmongers and the chickenhawks have claimed these days as their own personal property. We are thrust into a public arena, surrounded by many people who are either woefully uninformed about the true nature of war or dead-set on mythologizing it for their own warped ends. But, reluctant “clerics” that we are, we feel compelled to speak up. For our children’s sake.

Neither one of us is proud of our so-called “service” to the flailing dinosaur of an empire that calls itself the U.S. of A. Neither one of us wants to celebrate or commemorate those dark hours in our lives that found us tools of the “green machine.” But these days of so-called commemoration are foisted upon us by people who we think mean no harm; in fact, they probably think they are doing us a service. Trust me, they are not.

This past Veterans Day I ventured to Washington, D.C., to meet up with an old buddy from the Vietnam War. We visited the Arlington Cemetery and the Vietnam War Memorial, the twin slabs of stone that allow you to see your reflection as you read the names of the American war dead etched in black granite. I like this guy a lot and we have much in common, but he sported a “Vietnam Veteran” baseball cap, and I wore my Veterans For Peace (VFP) shirt with a quote emblazoned on the back from former General-turned-President Dwight Eisenhower about hating all wars.

An interesting dynamic played itself out as people approached my friend to thank him for his service and then looked at me a bit askance — even compelling my friend on occasion to say, “Hey, he’s a namvet too, you know.” This naturally set up that most awkward of exchanges for me — total strangers thanking ME for my service (usually they look into the sad eyes of a guy wearing a VFP logo espousing our admonition to abolish war and look away quickly). “Uh-oh. Here it comes,” I think. The decade ahead just winked at me.

We can usually gird ourselves to withstand the well-wishing gestures of folks who mistakenly think that, as Vietnam War veterans, we want them to perform some kind of public penance to make up

for not burying us in flowers and kisses throughout the sixties and seventies. Okay, whatever. But now that we enter this year, the 50th “anniversary” of the beginning of the real technological slaughter that caught fire in 1965, we have to prepare ourselves for 10 years of these “commemorations.”

But don’t pity me — I have some jiu-jitsu in mind. I am going to use this opportunity to fully disclose the true nature of that war. When thanked, I will remind people whenever I can that our little war took place in a country called Vietnam, that we were not just “losing our innocence” or “gaining our manhood” in some little sandbox. The Vietnamese people suffered greatly at our hands. Millions lost their lives, hundreds of thousands still suffer from the ravages of Agent Orange and unexploded ordnance just waiting to be touched and set off.

“What gives you the right to say anything?” You might ask. Fair enough. I certainly don’t pretend to speak for all Vietnam War veterans. I am only one person out of 3 million U.S. troops who were dispatched to Vietnam over the course of the war.

When I arrived in Vietnam in July 1969 for a 13-and-a-half-month tour of duty, I was a 22-year-old graduate school dropout from Rochester, New York, who was on a run of bad luck. I had been jilted by my fiancé and when I subsequently withdrew from the university, I was soon called up by my draft board. I knew from mandatory ROTC classes I had taken as an undergraduate that I would hate military life. However, I didn’t have the moral courage to resist the draft. And, there was a part of me that was secretly caught up in the romantic myth of going off to war and finding out if I could hack it.

I was assigned to a mobile artillery unit in the central highlands that supported the 173rd Airborne Division. I spent all of my time either on a landing zone or a firebase, with an occasional convoy to other firebases. I survived mortar attacks. I hovered in bunkers in anticipation of hordes of the “enemy” overrunning our position. I witnessed death. I witnessed brutality. I never really want to go “there” again. But as a member of Veterans For Peace, I have taken a pledge to not remain silent about the devastating moral injuries that beset all of us who become mired in war.

All these years later I am now a grandparent and a retired college instructor and administrator who lives in Maine. It deeply saddens me to see that our nation’s self-perpetuating war machine is cranked up and once again running in high gear. Here in 21st-century America, there is an insidious, self-serving faux adulation at play, one that has been fed on steroids, to turn every soldier automatically into a “hero,” so every poor soul coming back from her or his war (and, oh yes, we do own those wars) can’t even cuddle up with a loved one and speak the truths of his or her experience for fear of tarnishing the thread-worn mantle of hometown hero.

This is by design. Unscrupulous politicians use returning veterans as the emotional equivalent of human shields to deflect the public’s frustration with disastrous wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Heaven forbid if these new veterans would ever join us old namvets and stop the palaver about valor and heroics for a moment to acknowledge the grotesqueries of war. Think of how the munitions factories and war colleges would all have to shut their doors. And people would have to publicly thank teachers, nurses, doctors, maintenance workers, police officers for their service. Imagine that.

Doug Rawlings is the author of two books of poetry and a co-founder of Veterans For Peace, a nationwide organization of veterans and their allies dedicated to abolishing war as an instrument of national policy. For more, see veteransforpeace.org.

HISTORY LESSONS

Curious to learn more about the Vietnam War? For the government’s official version of history, see vietnamwar50th.com. For a comprehensive counter-history, see the Vietnam Full Disclosure website sponsored by Veterans For Peace at vietnamfulldisclosure.org.



INVASION FORCE: U.S. troops search for an elusive enemy in a war that the American public ultimately came to reject.



PSYCHEDELIC 'PICTURES WITH PROBLEMS'

Peter Saul: From Pop to Punk
VENUS OVER MANHATTAN
THROUGH APRIL 18

By Mike Newton

In August 1970, civil rights activist Angela Davis became the third woman ever to be placed on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list. Due to her alleged involvement in a deadly California courthouse takeover, Davis was hunted by police, smeared in the media and called a "dangerous terrorist" by Nixon before, finally, being acquitted at trial. The Los Angeles *Sentinel* referred to Davis's ordeal as a sort of "crucifixion." Painter Peter Saul, then, went a step further, making an image of a wooden cross with a distended, dark-skinned female body splayed and bleeding against a hot pink sky. Atop a stretched and sinuous throat is Angela Davis's agonized face and her famous Afro, and on top of that, a halo.

Crucifixion of Angela Davis (1973) is one of 21 works on view in "Peter Saul: From Pop to Punk," an exhibition of paintings and drawings from the 1960s and early 1970s. That title is a little misleading, though: Saul's work never quite feels "punk," fitting instead into the sort of churning, dark-edged post-pop of the Viet Nam era: an artistic territory that emerged as '60s utopianism started to erode.

Saul's cartoonish grotesques and rubbery, biomorphic figures recall — and in many cases, predate — works by Philip Guston, Jim Nutt, Lynn Foulkes and contemporary painters Sue Williams and Inka Essenhigh, but with a political ferocity not often found on gallery walls. Really, these works feel like nothing so much as political cartoons — cartoons from some acid-drenched Bay Area weekly of the psychedelic era.

Unlike most political cartoons, though, some of these paintings send hard-to-read messages: The politics here are "complex" or "multifaceted" if you're feeling generous, "muddled" or "incoherent" if you're not. *Crucifixion of Angela Davis* feels pretty direct, as does the similar *San Quentin #1 (Angela Davis at San Quentin)* (1971), in which Davis's body is, this time, being violated by a trio of white pigs — though here, the pigs are the ones pinned to crosses. *G.I. Christ* (1967) shows a crucified white American soldier — in case you hadn't guessed, Saul is into crucifixion imagery — with the massive cross rising high over a swanky California bachelor pad, the words "I died for you guys" etched into a tag on the soldier's wrist. Meanwhile, *The Government of California* (1969) includes a pink-hued Ronald Reagan slug-monster, a ruby-lipped Martin Luther King, Jr. with octopus-like tentacles, a giant heroin needle and the Golden Gate Bridge as a sort of oversized toilet-paper dispenser. This

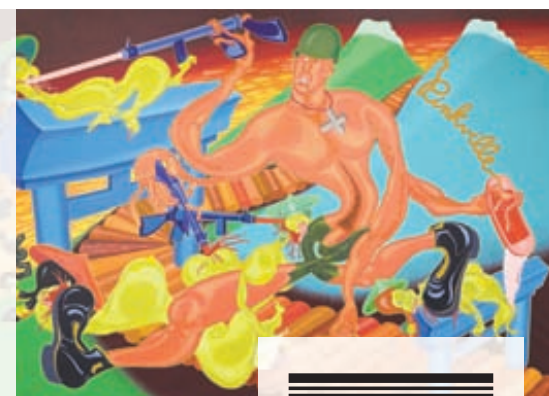
painting may or may not have felt pertinent to the goings-on of California 46 years ago; it feels pretty arbitrary now.

Saul's aesthetic — of sickly bright colors, violently contorted bodies and nasty power struggles — is most alive in his paintings of the war in Viet Nam. Based on this show, I'd say that Saul developed his distinctive style as a way to respond to the Viet Nam War; his work from before 1966 feels a bit sleepier. In the show's most arresting image, *Pinkville* (1970), another white American soldier — this time with a broad chest and insect-like

limbs — is shown sexually mutilating a quartet of caricatured, exoticized Vietnamese women; the cross, in this one, is around the soldier's neck.

Saul's work, naturally, presents a whole host of difficulties. Depictions of violence against the oppressed can risk reinforcing elements of oppressive ideologies, perpetuating the common understanding that Group X or Group Y is, simply, bound to suffer. Discussing the show with a friend who thinks a lot about issues of race, she mentioned that images like those in the Viet Nam paintings — of mangled, sexualized, over-ethnicized Asian women as imagined by a white, Western man — can't help but take on aspects of colonialism, no matter if the intentions are good. Looking at the paintings myself, I couldn't help noticing the apparent glee with which Saul depicted brutalized women; I kept thinking, "wow, this stuff would get torn apart on Twitter." But of course, there was no Twitter. The works in this exhibition come from a time before the Internet, when there were fewer ways to get the word out and fewer platforms to shout from. If Saul was speaking for those suffering and dying on the margins, he may have been under the impression that they had no real way to speak for themselves.

Of course, Saul was never aiming for political correctness; his paintings are difficult by design (he calls them "pictures with problems"). It's worth noting, though, that Saul's images don't feel nihilistic or dumb — they're not pushing buttons just for the sake of pushing. The daily conflagrations of Viet Nam, the demonizing of civil rights activists: to anyone reading the news at the time, these events surely must've wielded a sort of blunt, staggering horror. It's that moment of horror — some of it — that comes through in these paintings, peeling away some of the dead skin to reveal cultural wounds that, half a century on, still haven't quite healed.



San Quentin #1 (Angela Davis at San Quentin), 1969.

The Government of California, 1969.

Pinkville, 1970.

ROCKING IT: D.C. hardcore punk band The Faith performs in 1983.



JIM SAAH

STRAIGHT EDGE, REVOLUTION SUMMER & DOING IT YOURSELF

Salad Days: A Decade of Punk in Washington, D.C. (1980-90)

DIRECTED BY SCOTT CRAWFORD
NEW ROSE FILMS, 2014

By Devin McDougall

“Punk rock is ultimately a very challenging, even revolutionary kind of idea. And that is that people are not nearly so stupid, or pathetic, as society seems to believe that they are. That really we have the ability to run our own lives a whole lot more, to live our own lives a whole lot more than society gives us credit for,” said Mark Andersen, a longtime participant in the Washington, D.C., punk scene, in a 1991 interview. The ideas Andersen evokes are at the heart of *Salad Days*, a new documentary that explores the culture and politics of that scene in the 1980s, a time and place that helped redefine what punk could be.

The film incorporates extensive interviews with scene participants, archival footage and photographs, starting with the wave of bands that emerged in the late '70s and early '80s. The most prominent of those early bands was Minor Threat, formed in 1980 and fronted by Ian MacKaye. They played a minimalist style of hardcore punk that was technically simple, such that a group of relatively untrained musicians could play it without too much trouble. But it was also fierce and strangely beautiful, a style of music that people would get excited about listening to and playing. Several interviewees in the documentary cite this combination of accessibility and emotional punch as a source of empowerment, especially for youth that felt alienated and disempowered in other realms of their lives, like school or work. This “do it yourself,” or “DIY,” ethos became a theme in the D.C. scene, which saw an explosion of new bands and record labels in the 1980s.

“Straight edge” culture, which came to be one of D.C.’s major contributions to punk, emerged from one particular way in which MacKaye and his bandmates felt alienated — their decisions not to drink or do drugs while many of their peers did. These feelings led to the song “Straight Edge,” the title of which is a reference to being “straight,” a then-current slang term for not drinking, and a straight-edge razor. This stance would not have raised eyebrows in conservative social circles, but to suggest that it could be punk to not drink was a radical claim. In the early 1980s, punk was relatively new in the United States, and some of its most high-profile expositors, notably the London-based Sex Pistols, were apparently completely dedicated to nihilistic excess.

This synthesis of punk’s defiant energy with an express rejection of self-destruction indicated new possibilities for what punk could be. American punks responded with interest, and the phrase “straight edge” gained currency as a shorthand for not drinking or doing drugs. A subgenre of punk, “straight edge hardcore,” emerged in several American cities, although in the documentary MacKaye disclaims interest in leading or encouraging a movement. But the basic idea of constructive, generative rebellion became part of the “D.C. punk” brand, especially as later bands like Fugazi became well-known in the city and beyond for their ethical commitments.

The idea percolating around D.C. that punk could be a positive, not just destructive, force found institutional expression in the formation of a collective titled, appropriately enough, “Positive Force D.C.” As *Salad Days* narrates, in the summer of 1985, a malaise had settled into the D.C. punk scene, which many participants felt had lost its direction as it attained more visibility. Then

one enterprising young punker seeking to promote a show began pasting up fliers that announced a “Revolution Summer.” The slogan proved popular, and became the moniker for a series of punk benefit shows in support of a variety of causes, including AIDS awareness, countering apartheid and opposing Ronald Reagan.

The Positive Force collective emerged out of Revolution Summer’s ferment and dedicated itself to organizing benefit concerts and social service projects. As several of the interviewees in the documentary recount, Positive Force provided a constructive, and

deeply meaningful, outlet for feelings of discontent. Mark Andersen, one of the founders of Positive Force, tells us that he divides his life into the periods before and after Revolution Summer.

While *Salad Days* gives ample attention to the traditionally political aspects of the D.C. punk scene, it pays surprisingly little attention to the ways in which the personal is political. Interviewees note, for example, that the scene, especially in its earlier years, was a “boy’s club,” but the film doesn’t really explore why this was or what it means. Does the fact that the vast majority of the musicians in the scene were men have implications for the film’s discussion of seemingly universal themes of creativity and idealism? The film doesn’t ask or attempt an answer, unfortunately.

On issues of race, *Salad Days* is even more circumspect. It’s a serious omission, especially considering its setting in D.C., then a mostly African-American city. Some brief discussion of the Bad Brains, an innovative and influential African-American punk band from D.C., is included, but most of this time is taken up with white punk rockers discussing how much they liked the Bad Brains. The film also highlights the affinity that many in the punk rock scene had for go-go music, a style favored by the local African-American community. It notes that go-go fans didn’t seem to like punk as much as punk fans liked go-go, but doesn’t inquire why. What does it mean, again, that the creators heralded as embodying independence were almost all white men making music in a majority-African-American city? Asking this question of interviewees would have led to a more complex, deeper film.

Salad Days is named after a song from Minor Threat’s last EP, which was released in 1985, after the band had broken up. It’s a sarcastic song, tweaking the nostalgia that had begun to settle in even back then. The song concludes, “We call those the good old days / What a fucking lie — I call it a lie.” For all its dreams of revolution, the D.C. punk scene ultimately reflected many of the flaws and inequalities of broader American society. But the film’s affirmation of DIY culture as a positive force remains a relevant message, one that leaves open the hope that those to come, doing it themselves, might do it better.

Salad Days begins screening at the IFC Center on April 17. For more, see ifccenter.com.

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FRI APR 17 • 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED
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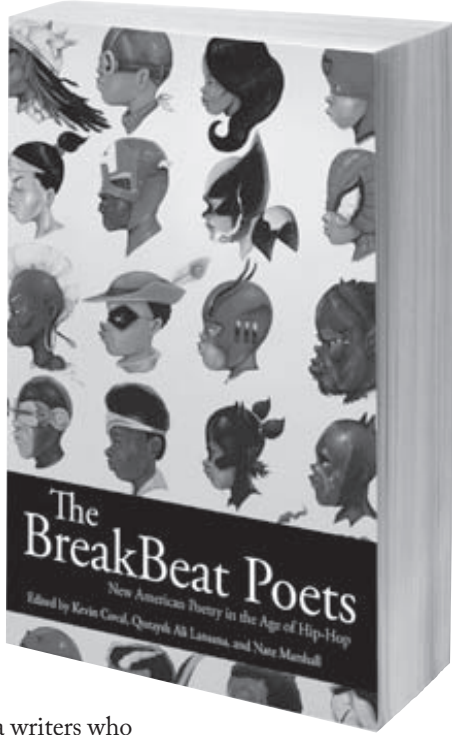
FRI APR 24 • 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED
BOOK READING: *THE RING OF FIRE ANTHOLOGY*, a zine collection on themes of disability justice, sex, race and gender, health care, trauma and healing. With author ET Russian.

WED APR 29 • 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED
BOOK LAUNCH: *CHANGERS BOOK 2: ORYON*, the second in a four-book young adult series that asks the question, “What if every year of high school you woke up as somebody else?” With authors T Cooper and Allison Glock-Cooper and special guests Kate Bornstein and Saeed Jones.

HISTORY
D STATES

New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop
Edited by Kevin Coval, Quraysh Ali Lansana, and Nate Marshall

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COURT-SANCTIONED CORRUPTION AND PLUTOCRACY IN AMERICA

Corruption in America: From Benjamin Franklin's Snuff Box to Citizens United
BY ZEPHYR TEACHOUT
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014

By Michael Hirsch

Sheldon Silver, the former long-serving speaker of the New York State Assembly and a statewide powerhouse lost his job, his law practice, his political life and possibly his freedom over corruption charges in January. His sins according to the federal prosecutor: using his position for personal gain by covertly receiving jumbo payments from a law firm that specialized in lobbying for cuts in New York City real-estate taxes. The firm was founded by his former Assembly counsel, and its client, in turn, was one of the state's single-largest political donors. Politics as usual? Not really. Silver's real crime was making it patently obvious he was engaging in a quid pro quo arrangement, which is how corruption in office is singularly judged today, thanks to a series of Supreme Court rulings dating back to 1974.

Scattered news reports say the dirt on the speaker came via a string of legislators ratting Silver out in return for reduced corruption charges against themselves. Others say the law firm partners themselves rolled over on Silver.

"Shelley," as he was known before his fall from grace, is just the most recent example of a public figure to resign or be ousted over allegations that he used his public office to help private friends and line his own pockets. If true, he fits the narrowest categories of corruption as understood by the contemporary U.S. Supreme Court: that a direct and palpable quid pro quo (literally: getting something for something) operates.

For Zephyr Teachout, the Fordham University law professor and Democratic candidate for governor in 2014 who on a shoestring budget took some 35 percent of the vote away from the state's neoliberal prince in the governor's mansion, that definition is too constricted. In *Corruption in America: From Benjamin Franklin's Snuff Box to Citizens United*, she demonstrates how that conceit short-circuits what the nation's founding fathers had in mind when they talked about public office and democratic involvement in governing. It's not just selling votes or a blatant one-hand-washes-the-other-or-a-favor-to-the-spouse's-ne'er-do-well-brother-in-law that are dangerous. It includes the unvoiced but no less operational understanding that big campaign contributions (it cost some \$2 million on average to be reelected to the U.S. House of Representatives; chump change compared to the Senate, where the average is \$10 million) in effect buy favorable attention for desired legislation as well as privileged access to elected officials through professional lobbyists, themselves often former public office holders.

That fit where money buys compliance, even if unvoiced but simply understood, is something ordinary citizens can't match. It means the demos — the people and their ability to self-govern or even believe they can self-govern is crippled and too easily gestates democracy into plutocracy. It's not unlike media critic A.J. Liebling's quip that, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one."

Corruption never had a clear and uniform legal definition, Teachout insists. With state courts ruling differently and the High Court itself imprecise if not contradictory, the vagueness ended when the right-wing-dominated U.S. Supreme Court, in three decisions beginning in 1975, recognized only blatant quid pro quo as a corrupt public practice. Paying a lobbyist \$5 million dollars to get an incumbent to vote a corporation's needs is okay if there's no demonstrable reciprocity.

Teachout's solution is not primarily better investigatory agencies but better hash marks (she calls them "lighted lines") that indicate what is criminal and act to control for abuses proactively. Examples include uniform federal laws again limiting campaign contributions so that electeds spend less time fundraising and more time with constituents and doing



LYNNE FOSTER

their jobs. More to the point, she favors a return to vigorous trust busting, the kind the GOP's Teddy Roosevelt once favored, so that corporations have neither the right to invest huge sums in politics nor the capacity to buy politicians through what Jimmy Carter as president once called "legal bribery."

With Teachout as a constitutional lawyer and Fordham law professor, she is well suited to tell this story. It runs from the propriety of Louis XVI giving Benjamin Franklin, the then-retiring U.S. ambassador, a gift of a jewel-encrusted snuff box to the 2014 case with which the Supreme Court completed its trifecta of limped anti-corruption decisions that she argues "have seriously constrained public power to pass anti-corruption statutes" and "definitively rejected the traditional concept of corruption."

The court's unravelling of how corruption works in practice comes from three court cases, starting in 1976. In *Buckley v. Valeo*, the court struck down federal spending limits by campaigns as an abridgement of First Amendment rights, but sustained rules limiting campaign contributions from individual sources, strict disclosure rules on where the money comes from and public funding of elections was *halal*. In 2010 an even more right-wing court majority found in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (FEC) not only that corporations were now to be considered as people with free speech rights, but that in the court's opinion ingratiation and privileged access to pols was no more than "donors trying to influence policy through campaign contributions, unless the donors were crass." It said favoritism and influence were the inevitable part of re-

sponsive government, hence of politics.

In 2014, in *McCutcheon v. FEC*, Chief Justice Roberts wrote that "Congress may target only a specific type of corruption — 'quid pro quo' corruption. ... Spending large sums of money in connection with elections, but not in connection with an effort to control the exercise of an officeholder's official duties, does not give rise to quid pro quo corruption."

Translation: when corporations use their wealth to squelch opposition, not only must corruption be the smoking gun, but a body with a bullet, in effect defining corruption in its most primitive form, as overt, conspicuous and quantifiable back-scratch deals

After a thorough and almost agonizingly detailed grand tour of dozens of often conflicting federal and state court decisions differing on the precise legal meaning of "corruption," Teachout ends up with a book that should become required reading in constitutional law classes. Caveat emptor: given the wealth of detail underscoring her critique, it's no beach reading. Her style happily is fine; in places ripping. Academics should take note.

There's a lot more that is sensible and definitive in Teachout's dissection of justice gone awry that it's worth asking, "Why is this woman *not* the governor of New York?"

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Continued from page 7

development. Bloomberg turned them down, but de Blasio has thrown his support behind the project.

However, as with any development plan that comes with the administration's backing, there is a caveat: new affordable housing will come to a neighborhood only if areas previously not designated for retail can be rezoned to accommodate new types of businesses. If communities do not consent to this, the city will not provide any capital for development or protections from market-driven displacement.

Historically, streets below overhead train frames such as Jerome Avenue have been impenetrable to gentrification, says Sam Stein, an urban theorist and instructor at John Jay College. However, he noted that DCP's fixation with Jerome Avenue — which it studied months before engaging the community about proposed changes — echoes its activity in Queens. There, the city is hoping to entice capital to the area near Roosevelt Avenue, which sits underneath the elevated 7 train, and East New York, near the 2-3 line above Broadway.

"Opportunities to gentrify have been exhausted," Stein said. "They're looking at places left behind."

DCP's Bronx director, Carol Samol, insists that city planners will not steamroll the community as routinely occurred during Bloomberg-era rezonings. She points to the new influence DCP has over the city's capital budget to coordinate public investments in schools, parks and streets in order to address the burden new development puts on existing resources. DCP, she says, is open to input from local elected officials.

"We're taking an active role by talking to City Council members about how to make the developments," Samol told *The Independent*.

Nonetheless, developers are still the prime movers in de Blasio's plan to build 80,000 units of "affordable housing" citywide in 10 years. The city, state and federal governments will disperse \$8 billion, mostly in tax breaks, over the next decade to spur the new construction while private-sector real estate developers are supposed to put up another \$32 billion toward making the mayor's "affordable housing" plan a reality. But as everyone knows, big real estate is only going to act if it can make a decent chunk of change, which means it will have an outsized influence on how projects like Jerome Avenue unfold.

In a taste of what may lie ahead, the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision (BCCV) reports that the owners of buildings that house small businesses are doubling rents and extending leases for one year instead of the usual 10, when they are willing to extend them at all. Increased land prices are also giving residential landlords incentive to drive out rent-stabilized tenants. There are 7,000 rent-stabilized apartments in the area directly under study for rezoning and a staggering 64,000 rent-stabilized apartments in the larger impact area.

"This thing is like a tornado that will pick up everything," said Carmen Vega-Rivera of the Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA) to *Tenant/Inquilino*. "If we don't do this right we will lose more housing than we can build."

COMMUNITY OPPOSITION

Local concerns came to the fore on March 5, when more than 250 area residents braved a howling snowstorm to pack the Latino Pastoral Action Center on West 170th Street. There, they chanted "Whose Bronx? Our Bronx!" as a group of construction workers banged on drums and plastic buckets. The meeting was convened by BCCV, which consists of social justice groups, community development centers, unions and clergy. Elected officials, including Public Advocate Letitia James, City Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson and Rep. José Serrano, were on hand. The sentiment of the crowd was mostly clearly expressed in several banners and signs that read "Nothing About Us Without Us Is For Us."

"Nothing can take place without community participation," emphasized Denise Felipe of New York Communities for Change. She called for more schools and senior facilities, to loud applause.

For Susanna Blankley, CASA's director of housing organizing, the problem with DCP's plan boils down to a lack of genuine interest in receiving and making use of community input. To her, the orange placards and the few dozen people streaming through an open house are mostly for show.

"At the end of the day, it's about what plan gets put forward," Blankley said.

After DCP certifies its plan, it goes into Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), a byzantine bureaucratic process that takes roughly seven months. It includes a public hearing and a non-binding vote from the community board, a public hearing and a vote by the borough president, a public hearing and a vote by the City Planning Commission (which works closely with DCP) and a public hearing and vote by the City Council, where the representatives from a local neighborhood can try to rally support but often find themselves under enormous pressure from the mayor's office and the Council speaker to fall in line.

The growing opposition to the Jerome Avenue rezoning may already be having an impact on the DCP's timetable, says Tom Angotti, a professor of urban affairs at Hunter College.

"I'm not sure how quickly they plan to proceed with Jerome Avenue since they are catching a lot of opposition now," he told *The Independent*. "They may try to co-opt or wear them out with more meetings."

For Blankley and other community activists, more meetings with city officials will not be enough.

"We want change, but we want change without displacement," she said. "The city doesn't know how to do that. Show me a neighborhood where there's positive change and progress that hasn't resulted in displacement."

PALESTINE

Continued from page 14

succeed better than any other way. When you are nonviolent, the Israelis cannot use planes, rockets, live bullets or something more violent against you. And you can have everyone with you in the demonstration, including children and women, and other people who want to support you, like Israeli and other international activists.

Israelis often condemn Palestinians for throwing rocks at their soldiers. How does that fit into the nonviolent resistance in Bil'in?

So many people are asking the question: Why throw rocks? It fits into nonviolent struggle. Throwing stones at criminals is not a crime. They just want a reason to attack us — we've never heard about any soldiers being killed or injured by stones. And you know, it's the same for the rockets in Gaza. When they say in the media that 500 rockets came to Israel in two days, people think that it's an equal war, two sides fighting each other with rockets and missiles. But you know, one Israeli rocket killed 125 people in Gaza. Five hundred Palestinian rockets didn't kill anyone in Israel.

They are talking about stones as violent, but they don't talk about their own violence, the weapons they are using against us that are illegal under international law. So why? Where is the justice? We cannot tell our children that they're wrong and shouldn't throw stones. Because we see that our children are injured by live bullets, our friends are shot and killed.

You've been injured many times during the demonstrations, by tear gas canisters, rubber bullets, more. Do you ever think that you want to stop?

For me? No. I will never stop before freedom. Maybe I won't be able to have freedom for myself, but I don't want my children to live my life. So I continue.

What does freedom mean to you?

I don't know. You'll have to tell me. I don't live in freedom but I think it's a good word.

Freedom is many things. It's a good life. For example, I cannot take my daughter to see the sea. And she's never been in the sea. Why? I've never been to Jerusalem, for example. I would like to take my kids to Jerusalem, to Jenin. To be without borders and checkpoints and danger everywhere. This is, I think, a part of freedom.

Resistance is also a way to be free. If your mind is free, you are free. But you know, I am very tired of the long life under the occupation. I want to rest. I want to have a peaceful life with my family. I want to live like you, a normal life. That's it.

For more about Iyad Burnat's U.S. speaking tour, see iyadburnat2015speakingtour.weebly.com.

EXAMS

Continued from page 11

minor crimes. Simply put, the “Man” is worried about loss of control at a key turning point in the development of capitalism when the growing disruption in people’s lives is going to require more control than ever before.

Is there also a connection between the explosion in the number of exams and the current drive toward the privatization of public education? They appear to be quite separate, but look again. With new investment opportunities failing to keep up with the rapidly escalating surpluses found in practically every sphere of production (a periodic problem for a system that never pays its workers enough to consume even most of what they produce), the public sector has become the latest “last” frontier for capitalist expansion. And given the size and profit making potential of public education as compared to state prisons, public utilities, public transportation and other public services — most of which are also undergoing some degree of privatization today — the biggest battle is being fought over public education. But how to convince the citizenry that companies whose only concern is with the bottom line can do a better job educating our young than public servants who are dedicated to the task? What seems impossible could be done if “education” were redefined to emphasize the qualities associated with business and its achievements. Then, of course, by definition business could do the “job” better than any public agency.

Enter exams, especially standardized exams, and especially so many of them, with easily quantifiable results and the willingness to reshape all intervening processes to obtain them. Businesses exist to make a profit, a sum of money that can be quantitatively measured at the end of the year, and all their activities are organized accordingly. Increasingly, the forces most responsible for the education system in our society have begun to impose this model on exams and the grades students receive on them.

How long does it take for what is still a model for how to deal with education to become a new definition of what education is (and can only be) about? When that happens, and to the extent it has already happened, putting education in

the hands of businessmen who know best how to dispense with “inessentials” becomes a perfectly rational thing to do. In this manner the introduction of more and more exams prepares the ground for the privatization of public education.

TAKING ACTION

What is to be done? Or, more to the point, what should students do about all this? Well, they shouldn’t refuse to take exams (unless most of the class gets involved), and they shouldn’t drop out of school. Given the relations of power inside education and throughout the rest of society, that would be suicidal, and suicide is never good politics. Rather, they should become critical students by learning more about the role of education — and of exams in particular — in capitalism, and then helping to raise the consciousness of their fellow students on such matters.

Nowhere does the contradiction between the selfish and manipulative interests of our ruling class and the educational and developmental interests of students stand out in such sharp relief as in the current debate over exams. In opposition to the “reformers,” there is a growing movement among students, teachers and parents against high-stakes testing across the country. These efforts should be watched closely, as they represent the growing public outrage with an education system that is more concerned with administering tests than recognizing the unique potential of each child and teaching to their needs accordingly.

Bertell Ollman is a professor of politics at New York University, the author of numerous works on Marxist theory and the creator of the Marxist board game Class Struggle. For more of his writings, see dialecticalmarxism.com.

NOT A TEST SCORE

More than 60,000 schoolchildren across New York State opted out of participating in last year’s state-mandated high-stakes exams. More are expected to boycott this year’s tests when they begin on April 14. Similar opposition is expected to occur in a number of other cities and states across the country. For more, see changethestakes.org and unitedoptout.com.

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MON APRIL 13

7pm • \$10
BOOK LAUNCH & DISCUSSION: BADDAWI. Author Leila Abdelrazaq discusses her graphic novel, *Baddawi*, which documents the life of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon amid constant struggle, political turmoil and civil war.
 Alwan for the Arts
 16 Beaver St, 4th Fl
 alwanforthearts.org • 646-732-3261

WED APRIL 15

6:30-8pm • Free
EVENT: ¿QUE ONDA?: BEARING WITNESS. This event will explore the role of journalists, artists and musicians as they expose corruption and intimidation in Mexico.
 RSVP to attend.
 El Museo del Barrio
 1230 Fifth Avenue
 elmuseo.org • 212-831-7272

FRI APRIL 17 & SAT APRIL 18

7:30pm • \$10
SCREENING: GROUNDSWELL RISING, PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN'S AIR AND WATER. Through provocative stories, this documentary exposes the health ailments and property damage residents suffer as a result of proximity to fracking. Each showing will be followed by panel discussions with the director, Renard Cohen, and local activists.
 Maysles Documentary Center
 343 Lenox Ave/Malcolm X Blvd
 maysles.org • 212-537-6843

FRI APRIL 17-SUN APRIL 19

Various times • Free
EVENT: 9TH ANNUAL NYC ANARCHIST BOOK FAIR, ARTS AND FILM FESTIVALS. This two-day exposition of books, zines and other anarchist materials will offer panels, workshops and skill shares for participants. This year's gathering also includes art, films and a Sunday brunch conference. Associated events will be held at the New School, the Base and Bluestockings.
 Judson Memorial Church
 55 Washington Sq S
 anarchistbookfair.net

FRI APRIL 17-SUN MAY 17

Fridays & Saturdays 7:30pm, Sundays 2pm, last Sunday 4pm • \$35 general / \$15 students / \$10 seniors
THEATER: EMMETT, DOWN IN MY HEART. A play about 14-year-old African-American Emmett Till, his brutal lynching, the ensuing trial that acquitted the murderers and the chord struck in the national consciousness as both Blacks and

whites faced the legacy of racism.
 Castillo Theatre
 543 W 42nd St
 castillo.org • 212-941-1234

SAT APRIL 18

8pm • \$18 suggested donation
MUSIC: ROY KORONA BAND NIGHT. The Roy Korona Band and special guests will gather to celebrate the life of the band's namesake and his songs of peace, love, dignity and empowerment. Performers will include Ellen Davidson, Jay Mankita, Mercy Van Vlack, Adele Rolider, the NYC Raging Granies and others.
 Peoples' Voice Café at the Community Church of New York Unitarian Universalist
 40 East 35th St
 peoplesvoicecafe.org • 212-787-3903

SUN APRIL 19

TBA • Free
10TH ANNUAL GHOST BIKE MEMORIAL RIDE. Hundreds will ride from all five boroughs and converge on City Hall to remember the 20 cyclists killed in NYC in 2014. For more information on start points and meet-up opportunities, see ghostbikes.org. Bring your bike and flowers.
ghostbikes.org

SUN APRIL 19

1pm • Free
CONVERSATION: FEMINIST DISCUSSION OF MASCULINITY. The Forum for Feminist Discussion of Masculinity is a safe space to discuss the gendered expectations placed on men and boys in a patriarchal society, and how these have affected, and continue to affect, all of us. The forum is open to all, inclusive of gender and level of knowledge of the subject matter. This month's theme is 'positive masculinity.'
 Bluestockings Bookstore and Café
bluestockings.org • 212-777-6028

SAT APRIL 25

12-2pm • Free
WORKSHOP: COMPOSTING IN THE CITY. Interested in composting? This workshop will cover the how-tos of New Yorkers' options, including at home, at a community garden or with a local composting initiative. This is a hands-on workshop, registration required.
 NYC Composting Project
 Elizabeth Street Garden
lesecologycenter.org • 212-477-402

SUN APRIL 26

11am-6pm • Free

MOBILIZATION: FOR A NUCLEAR-FREE WORLD. This event will include a rally and march for a just, sustainable nuke-free world — with great speakers — and will conclude with a peace festival outside the U.N. Multiple locations, see website for more info.
peaceandplanet.org

WED APRIL 29

7:30pm • Sliding scale \$6/\$10/\$15
BOOK RELEASE: WHAT FANON SAID: A PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO HIS LIFE AND WORK. Author Lewis Gordon explores the controversial debates on the thought and life of the revolutionary psychiatrist and philosopher Franz Fanon, author of *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*.
 Brooklyn Commons
 388 Atlantic Ave, Bklyn
marxedproject.org

THU APRIL 30

7pm • Free
SALON: BEST SEX WRITING 2015. Authors from the Best Sex Writing of the Year anthology will read from their essays, provoking, incisive works confronting the controversies surrounding our most deeply held assumptions about sexuality. From an argument for celibacy to documentation of sexual fetishes, the collection presents the true face of contemporary sexuality, one that is edgy, honest, and always changing. There will also be an informal question and answer session.
 Bluestockings Bookstore and Café
bluestockings.org • 212-777-6028

FRI MAY 1

2pm • Free
RALLY: MAY DAY RALLY FOR WORKER AND IMMIGRANT RIGHTS. NYC's annual celebration of International Workers Day kicks off at the south end of Union Square, at 14th St and Broadway.
 New York May 1 Coalition
may1.info

5:30PM • FREE

MARCH: MAY DAY CONVERGENCE. Labor, immigrant, student and community groups from across the city will rally at the south end of Union Square and then march downtown to 26 Federal Plaza.

10PM • FREE

BIKE RIDE: CENTRAL PARK BY MOONLIGHT. A fun, relaxing, car-free ride through Central Park highlighting its beautiful ponds, waterways, vistas and structures.
MEET AT SW CORNER OF CEN-

TRAL PARK NEAR COLUMBUS CIRCLE
 TIME'S UP
 212-802-8222 · TIMES-UP.org

FRI MAY 1-SAT MAY 2

Fri 11am-2pm, Sat 12-4pm • Free
FREE UNIVERSITY: HOW TO SURVIVE IN NYC. There will be free outdoor classes around the city on an array of social justice topics affecting local communities, including police oppression, gentrification and the housing crisis, economic survival and much more.
 Union Sq & Washington Sq Park
freeuniversitynyc.org

MON MAY 4 & MAY 11

7:30-9:30 pm • Sliding scale \$6/\$10/\$15
BOOK DISCUSSION: NEW FORMS OF WORKER ORGANIZATION. Join Manny Ness, Erik Forman and others for two nights of reports, analysis and discussion on new forms of working class organization from around the world.
 Brooklyn Commons
 388 Atlantic Ave., Bklyn
marxedproject.org

WED MAY 6

5:30-7:30pm • Free
BOOK TALK: GHETTO BROTHER. Author Julian Voloj will read from his graphic novel, *Ghetto Brother*, about Bronx legend and Ghetto Brothers gang founder Benji Melendez. Joining the author will be the protagonist and a former Black Panther activist.
 The Bronx Museum
 1040 Grand Concourse, Bx
bronxmuseum.org • 718-681-6000

SAT MAY 9

11am-2pm • Suggested donation \$20-\$80
WALKING TOUR & BENEFIT: A STROLL BETWEEN THE TOWERS OF FINANCE CAPITAL. Artist/activist Jim Costanzo and his co-conspirator Lisa Maya Knauer will lead a walking tour that covers 400 years of New York City history, from the first encounters between Native Americans and Dutch settlers to Occupy Wall Street, highlighting unmarked sites and untold narratives, and offering alternative readings of official histories. All proceeds will benefit the Marxist Education Project.
 Begins in front of Federal Hall, corner of Wall & Broad Sts
marxedproject.org

MAY DAY!: Immigrant women will be among those marching again this year on May Day.

SHARED LEARNING: Free University NYC will be holding classes on May 1-2.

7th Annual
BROOKLYN
FOLK FESTIVAL



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157 Montague St. Btwn Clinton and Henry

APRIL 17TH-19TH, 2015

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MNN



MNN: Manhattan's Community Media

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

MNN programs are created by you and reach Manhattan's over **620,000 cable subscribers**. We also stream all of our programs live online.

Visit mnn.org to learn more and for upcoming Midtown orientation dates!

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The MNN El Barrio Firehouse Community Media Center

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

Email firehouse@mnn.org for more information and follow the Firehouse on facebook.com/elbarriocommunitycenter.