

THE

= HOUSING JUSTICE SPECIAL EDITION =

INDYPENDENT

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ON ALBANY
P6**

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**WILL THIS BE THE YEAR THAT TENANTS WIN
SWEEPING RENT LAW REFORMS?
COVERAGE STARTS ON P6**



ROB LAQUINTA

THE **RADICAL SPRING BALL**

MAY 18.
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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

MONEY IS YOUR GOD



KWAME BRATHWAITE/PHILIP MARTIN GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

MAY

THRU MAY 26

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

MAY 1–JUNE 7

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

MAY 8–JAN 3

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

THU MAY 9

5PM–8PM • FREE
ART OPENING: ON
GENTRIFICATION:
MI CASA ES SU
CASA

Set in a historic and archi-
tectural landmark, this group ex-
hibition investigates notions of
home (metaphorical and literal),
belonging, displacement, street
life, urban renewal, gentrifica-
tion and activism. On view May
9 to June 6, by appointment
only: 646-541-5357.
REVIVAL ROMANESQUE ROW
HOUSE GALLERY
413 E. 140th St., Bronx

THU MAY 9

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

FRI MAY 10

7PM–11PM • \$31
PARTY: ¡VIVA FRIDA KAHLO!
Bid farewell to Brooklyn Muse-
um's "Frida Kahlo: Appearances
Can Be Deceiving" exhibition
with a night of dancing, musical
tributes and performance. Ac-
tivities include art-making with
feminist Latinx art collective
Cósmica and DJ sets by Chulita
Vinyl Club.
BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Pkwy, Bklyn

TUE MAY 14

6:30PM–9PM • FREE
BOOK LAUNCH: *KWAME*

**BRATHWAITE: BLACK IS BEAU-
TIFUL**

This monograph tells the story
of a key but under-recognized
figure of the second Harlem Re-
naissance and a popularizer of
the phrase "black is beautiful."
SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RE-
SEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE
515 Malcolm X Blvd., Mnhtn

THU MAY 16

7PM–1AM • \$12
MUSIC: HIRS COLLECTIVE,
COHERENCE, CHOKED UP,
MATERIAL SUPPORT
Straight up anti-racist, queer-
positive punk rock.
EL CORTEZ
17 Inghram St., Bklyn

MAY 16–MAY 26

TUE–SUN, 11AM–8PM • FREE
EXHIBITION: EROTIC FEMI-
NISM IN THE #METOO ERA
Through photography, oil paint-
ings, skateboard art and fashion
design, 10 artists from around
the world signify what eroticism
means to them in the context of
the #MeToo rebellion.
THE ARTIST OUTPOST
501 E. 118th St., Mnhtn

MAY 17–MAY 19

7PM–11PM • \$20–\$40
MUSIC: SLACKFEST
Three nights with Brooklyn ska
legends the Slackers and their
friends. Fans can vote on the
band's playlists: theslackers.
com/polls.
THE KINGSLAND
269 Norman Ave., Bklyn

SAT MAY 18

11AM–6PM • FREE
MARKET: BROOKLYN FLEA
RECORD FAIR
Record hunt from dozens of
vinyl vender stands while djs
spin live.
SMORGASBURG
East River State Park, Bklyn

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THE INDYPENDENT



JOAN CORNELLA, COURTESY OF GR GALLERY

MAY 18–MAY 19
 SAT & SUN 11AM–5PM • FREE
KIDS: CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL: TAÍNO, TAÍNO, TAÍNO
 Enjoy the Museum of the American Indian's annual Children's Festival and explore the Taíno culture of the Caribbean. Arts and crafts, music, dancing and storytelling.
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
 1 Bowling Green, Mnhtn

MAY 18–MAY 19
 SAT & SUN 12PM–7PM • \$23–\$199
FESTIVAL: THE WORLD'S FARE
 Over 100 vendors come together in New York City's most diverse borough and unite through authentic food, drink and music curated by the city's leading culinary advocates.
CITI FIELD
 120-01 Roosevelt Ave., Queens

SUN MAY 19
 12PM–6PM • FREE
FESTIVAL: GREEK JEWISH FESTIVAL
 Featuring authentic kosher Greek foods and homemade Greek pastries, traditional Greek dancing, an outdoor marketplace full of vendors and educational activities for kids.
KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA
 280 Broome St., Mnhtn

TUE MAY 21
 6:30PM • FREE
PANEL: CRISIS FOR MEXICAN JOURNALISTS
 Mexico is one of the most dangerous places in the world for reporters. What can be done to stop the killings? Award-winning Mexican journalist Marcela Turati, Alexandra Ellerbeck of the Committee to Protect Journalists (Mexico) and Reporters Without Borders' Daphne Pellegrino tackle the issue.
HUNTER COLLEGE–LANG RECITAL HALL, 4TH FL.
 695 Park Ave., Mnhtn

SUN MAY 26
 12PM–5PM • FREE
FESTIVAL: LOISAIDA FESTIVAL
 Celebrating the Puerto Rican and Latinx heritage of the Lower East Side with a community parade and pageant, theatre labs, music, food, dancing and more.
LOISAIDA AVENUE
 E. 9th St. & Avenue C, Mnhtn

SAT JUNE 1
 3PM–5:30PM • FREE
TALK: BLACK QUEER AND TRANS LIVES MATTER: THE FUTURE OF ANTI-POLICE BRUTAL-

MODERN PROBLEMS: Catch Joan Cornella's disturbing and hilarious cartoons at GR Gallery this month.

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL: Celebrate the photography of Kwame Brathwaite's in Harlem this month.

ITY MOVEMENTS
 Join leading queer and trans black radical organizers Kiara St. James, David Johns and Kei Williams in a discussion about the evolution of Black Lives Matter movements against police harassment and police violence.
GEORGE BRUCE LIBRARY
 518 W. 125 St., Mnhtn

SAT JUNE 2
 10AM–6PM • \$0–\$55
FESTIVAL: BUSHWICK COLLECTIVE BLOCK PARTY
 Live music and street art. Rick Ross, Statik Selektah and DJ Evil Dee headline.
THE BUSHWICK COLLECTIVE
 Troutman St. & Scott Ave., Bklyn



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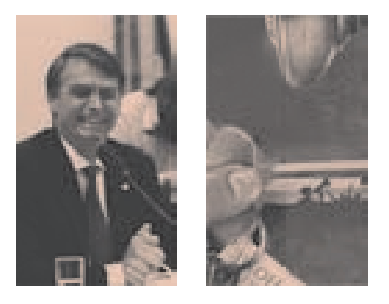
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PETER RUGH

BUTCHERS WITH A BEEF

THEIR BOSSES SAY IT'S TIME TO TRIM THE FAT. BUT THESE MEAT WORKERS WON'T BACK DOWN.

BY PETER RUGH

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

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

"We need our jobs back," Franky Mendez, a 50-year-old father of three, told *The Independent* on April 25. "They're showing us no mercy."

Mendez is one of 38 UFCW members who were locked out by their bosses at Pick Quick Foods Inc., operators of seven Key Food supermarkets in Brooklyn and Long Island, following a one-day strike on April 6. Since then, Mendez and his three colleagues at this Pick Quick location have arrived each morning to alert customers to their plight, and to demand their jobs back with a contract that provides healthcare and retirement benefits. They're asking supporters not to shop at Pick Quick-owned supermarkets and to call the company (at 718-296-9100) and tell it they will keep up the boycott until it rehires its meat workers.

The butchers have labored without a contract for five years. Now Pick Quick wants to make them pay for their health coverage and to trim their retirement funds. Mendez, who has worked for Pick Quick for 11 years, makes \$18 an hour because of his seniority, but some of his coworkers make minimum wage. The company is refusing to give the butchers a raise.

A company spokesperson tells *The Indy* that Pick Quick "has been a proud union employer" throughout its 82 years in business. "This is the first time something like this has ever happened," he said, blaming Local 342 for sowing discord with its workforce. As

LEAN TIMES: Franky Mendez (far right) and fellow Local 342 members.

for the givebacks Pick Quick is demanding, he said they are due to the fact that the company has to compete with non-union shops.

Since locking its butchers out, Pick Quick has brought in scabs to run its meat department. Some customers are complaining.

"The meat is no good," said Maria D Sousa, a regular at Pick Quick's Sunset Park Key Food. "They leave it out too long."

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the meantime, Mendez is living on unemployment benefits and \$200 a week in strike pay from the union. He says he's in for the long haul: "I've been here 20 days. I'll be here 20 more if I have to."

HEALING A SCAR

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

With the Trump administration not bothering to keep track of where it sent the thousands of children it took away from their parents at the Mexican border, two New York State legislators have introduced a bill to keep tabs on those sent to child-welfare agencies here.

The Separation of Children Accountability Response Act, sponsored by Assemblymember Harvey Epstein and state Sen. Brian Benjamin (both D-Manhattan), would require agencies hired by the federal government to take care of "unaccompanied alien children" to report to the state every month how many are in their care. They would have to give the Office of Children and Family Services details about how many were taken away from their parents, how many were returned to their parents, how many were put in foster care, and what languages they speak.

"We were all outraged about the children being separated at the border," says Epstein. "This is something New York can do." As the state has the right to regulate its own foster-care system, he explains, it can mandate that agencies "report who comes into their facilities."

The Trump administration, which has put the children it took away into group homes, foster care, and tents in the desert near the border, "has not provided information" on how many of them are in New York, but Epstein believes it's "hundreds," mostly in foster care.

"I don't think there's anything more despicable than that," he says. "Kids have died in detention."

The bill has been cosponsored by 35 senators, more than the 32 needed to pass in the upper house, and more than 50 Assemblymembers, a majority of the Democrats. However, Epstein's not sure how much attention it will be able to command in the last six weeks of the legislative session, which will be devoted largely to debating legislation that would strengthen rent regulations, legalize marijuana, and allow undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses.

"We'll do the best we can," he says.



GARY MARTIN

PAROLE BOARD MIA

AGING PRISONERS LEFT IN LIMBO

BY RENÉE FELTZ

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

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

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

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

Saldana was 66-years-old when a three-member review board granted him parole 16 months ago. Like Clark, he had spent 38 years in prison, and his three-member

review panel included one of six commissioners Cuomo added to the board in 2016. These newer commissioners have more diversified professional backgrounds than past members, who tended to come law enforcement.

“She questioned me for 40 minutes as opposed to the usual eight minutes, not about my crime in 1979, but about what I’ve been doing through-

out those decades since,” Saldana recalled. “After that long interview she determined I no longer posed a risk to public safety and they released me. That is the difference it makes to have commissioners who can measure whether the person is a threat to public safety or isn’t.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

More: RAPPcampaign.com

A Daily Independent
Global News Hour
with Amy Goodman
and Juan González

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STEVEN WISHNIA

'IT'S DO OR DIE'

TENANT MOVEMENT LOOKS TO SEIZE ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Campaigning for more than simply strengthening rent stabiliza-

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS: New Yorkers rally in Harlem for rent reform.

tion represents a change in strategy for the tenant movement. It faces a situation similar to that of labor unions, who have to protect their members' pay, job security and health and pension benefits, but with membership

shrinking, need to organize new members and speak out for unorganized workers to avoid becoming a weak minority.

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

"What's different this year is you have tenants all over the state organizing. It's a reflection of how much worse the situation has become," says TenantsPAC treasurer Michael McKee, a longtime tenant activist and political fundraiser.

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

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

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

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

"Is there anyone here who believes and trusts Governor Cuomo?" Public Advocate Jumaane Williams asked the Harlem rally. "No!" the crowd shouted back.

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

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

"It stops now," Delsenia Glover said.

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

RENT CONTROL HISTORY

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

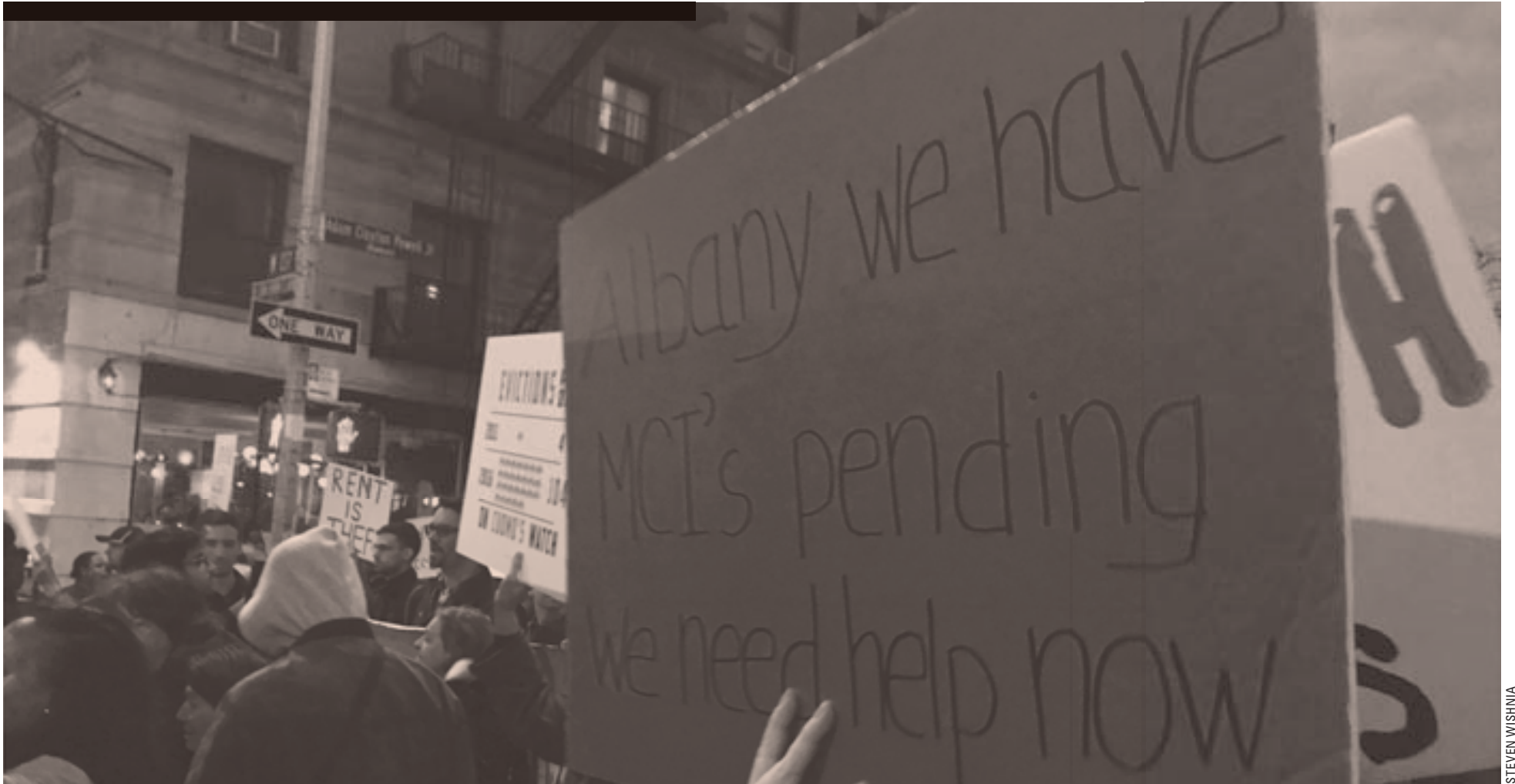
In 1971, the state mandated that all rent-controlled apartments be deregulated if the current tenant moved out. This proved disastrous: It drove up rents, gave landlords an obvious incentive to harass tenants and failed to stem the epidemic of building abandonment. It also prohibited the city from enacting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

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

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

The idea was sold as a measure that would affect only a handful of rich people in Manhattan. But over the past 25 years, gentrification, weak state enforcement against illegal overcharges and a widespread business model of pushing rent-stabilized tenants out to take advantage of the increases allowed for vacant apartments have pushed rents up throughout the city. Estimates of the number of rent-stabilized units lost range from 150,000 to 450,000 — and apartments renting for \$2,800 or more can be found in Brownsville and Hunts Point.

— STEVEN WISHNIA



STEVEN WISHNIA

NINE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

HOW MANY ITEMS WILL TENANTS BE ABLE TO CHECK OFF THEIR LIST?

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

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

1 TENANT PROTECTIONS EVERYWHERE (S5040/A7046)

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

2 GOOD CAUSE EVICTION (S2892/A5030)

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

3 NO MORE "VACANCY DECONTROL" (S2591/A1198)

This bill would repeal the 1997 amendment to the ETPA that lets landlords deregulate vacant rent-

stabilized apartments if their rent is \$2,733 or more a month — which enables them to raise rents as high as they want and to refuse to renew leases without cause. This vacancy decontrol has led to hundreds of thousands of units going market rate, and if it is not eliminated, it will lead to the eventual deregulation of all rent-stabilized housing stock.

4 ENDING "PREFERENTIAL RENT" HIKES (S2845A/A4349)

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

5 GOODBYE EVICTION BONUS (S185/A2351)

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

6 & 7 THE LANDLORD PAYS FOR REPAIRS (S3693/A6322; S3770/A6465)

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

8 EXPANDING THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON CHEATING LANDLORDS (S4169/A5251)

Even with all the loopholes granted to landlords, illegal rent hikes are common and often go unnoticed by tenants. This bill expands the time tenants have to complain and hold landlords accountable to at least six years. The current limit, also enacted in 1997, is four years, after which whatever dubious rent hikes the landlord has enacted become permanent.

9 LOWER RENT-CONTROL INCREASES (S299A/A167)

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

+ PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS (S2375/A1620)

A tenth bill, "home stability support" legislation, would offer homeless people or those on the verge of homelessness financial assistance. Due to the statewide housing affordability crisis, there are currently 89,000 homeless people in New York, including 22,700 children living in the New York City shelter system. Under this measure, the state would provide up to 85 percent of local "fair market rent" costs as determined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Local governments would have the option of paying the remaining 15 percent. HUD's 2019 fair-market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,831 a month in New York City, \$1,907 in Suffolk County, \$1,115 in Albany and \$838 in Buffalo.

CAPITAL CRIMES:

Ending "major capital improvement" rent hikes is just one of the measures up for a vote in Albany this year.



BRIDGING THE GAP

UPSTATE & DOWNSTATE JOIN FORCES

BY PETER RUGH

When Doreen and her husband split up five years ago, the pair reached an agreement. Doreen and the couple's 7-year-old daughter could continue to live at her husband's parents' old place off Delaware Avenue in Albany. In exchange, Doreen would pay him \$500 in rent out of the \$700 she receives each month from Social Security — her sole source of income.

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

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

She was given 30 days to vacate.

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

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

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

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

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

AT THE LANDLORD'S MERCY

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

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

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

According to one recent study compiled using data from Kingston Landlord Support, which helps landlords identify ten-

DIVIDE

ants with a history of evictions, renters in Ulster County are paying 55.8 percent more than they were in 2002. Wage growth has not kept pace. More than half of county residents are “rent-burdened,” meaning they pay more than 30 percent of their income in rent. One exodus has led to another, and many longtime King-

says the Housing Alliance is “making this issue hit home for them” by bringing residents of their districts to their doorstep.

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

“It’s been so great to grow these partnerships and to become more organized,” says Felts. “What we’re opposing has so much capital behind it that for them to be organized, it is easy. They have so many resources. We’re all coming from under-resourced communities, under-resourced organizations, but this campaign is bringing us together.”

The Housing Alliance is pushing for the legislature to approve a package of nine bills (see page 7) that it describes as “universal rent control.” Chief among the reforms is the expansion of the Emergency Tenant Protection Act (ETPA) of 1974, which allows municipalities statewide to opt in to rent stabilization if they have a rental-vacancy rate of 5 percent or less. The ETPA currently prohibits communities outside the New York City area from passing rent-stabilization ordinances of their own — including Kingston, where the vacancy rate is 4 percent.

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

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

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

The Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance has volunteers going door-to-door in Heastie’s Bronx district and has not given up on persuading lawmakers to seize the moment and ensure New York is a state affordable for all. They have until June 15, when the rent-stabilization laws expire, just before the legislative session is scheduled to close.

stonians find themselves forced to move farther from the city’s center in a region where public transportation is in short supply.

New York City dwellers are familiar with this dynamic, as rent hikes in Manhattan have for decades driven renters to the city’s outer boroughs. First come lower- and middle-income apartment hunters, then their more well-heeled counterparts. Gentrification begins to take root. But in New York City and its inner suburbs — Nassau, Westchester and Rockland counties — rent stabilization safeguards can slow the tide of displacement. Not so in the Catskills, where a *New York Times* article recently asked, to the horror of housing activist Rashida Tyler, a lifelong Kingston resident, “Is the Hudson Valley Turning Into the Hamptons?”

“New York City for the longest time has been ahead of the game in rent-protection laws,” says Tyler, though hearing of New Yorkers who pay \$3,000 a month for one-bedroom apartments still makes her eyes roll. “Things are not perfect down there. I know that. But upstate has been neglected. There’s been a disconnect between rent laws here and in the city, even though we’re starting to feel the forces of people moving up north.”

UNIVERSAL RENT CONTROL

With rent regulations and tenant protections subpar in the city that never sleeps and virtually nonexistent beyond its bedroom communities, tenant advocates across New York have teamed up and formed the Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance to push the state Legislature to step in. It’s an opportune time. The state’s rent-stabilization laws, which protect some 2 million tenants in New York City and its inner suburbs, are up for renewal in June. In the past, the landlord lobby gave heavily to upstate Republicans, who controlled the state Senate and were invulnerable to the wrath of the downstate constituents their Democratic colleagues serve. This has regularly led to the weakening of New York City’s tenant protections when they came up for renewal.

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

“There’s been a history of tenants and the tenant movement being on the defensive,” Ava Farkas, head of the New York City-based Metropolitan Council on Housing, told *Indy Radio* in April. “Landlords, the landlord lobby — REBNY [Real Estate Board of New York], the Rent Stabilization Association — they have poured tons of money into upstate elected officials’ coffers.” Those politicians generally haven’t seen tenant rights as an issue affecting their constituents, but Farkas

HOW TO FORM A TENANT UNION

Teaming up with fellow tenants is the most important step you can take to prevent skyrocketing rents, ensure your landlord treats you fairly and to fight gentrification. A tenants association or tenants union is a group of residents of a building who meet regularly to discuss the problems they face and to work collectively toward addressing them. This could entail pressuring your landlord to turn on the heat and hot water or to make necessary repairs.

To form a tenants union, you’ll want to start talking to your neighbors, if you haven’t been already. Knock on doors and introduce yourself or greet the people you meet in your building’s common areas. Explain that you are forming an organization that will help build community among residents and improve living conditions. This is a good opportunity to gauge interest and to recruit others to help you schedule and plan your first meeting.

Before your first meeting research your landlord. It helps to know your enemy.

- *The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (nyc.gov/hpd) provides a list of 311 complaints at your building and any code violations that have occurred.*
- *The Department of Finance (nyc.gov/acris) offers financial information.*
- *The Rent Guidelines Board (nyc.gov/rgb) will tell you if your building is rent stabilized.*
- *At the Department of Buildings website (nyc.gov/dob) you can learn whether your landlord has filed for permits to make alterations.*

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

demands and elect an organizing committee responsible for day-to-day operations that reflects the diversity of your building.

There are a number of tactics at your disposal once you have organized a tenants union: group call-in days to 311 or management, exposing housing violations on social media and in the press, taking your landlord to housing court, launching a rent strike. You might also want to link up with other tenants of the same landlord in separate buildings. They might be experiencing the same troubles as you. Help them form a tenants union if they haven’t already.

The rights of tenants to organize is protected under New York State law. The Democratic Socialists of America’s NYC chapter offers a free and thorough manual on how to form a tenants union. It can be found at socialists.nyc/resources.

— INDY STAFF

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VOLUME 2



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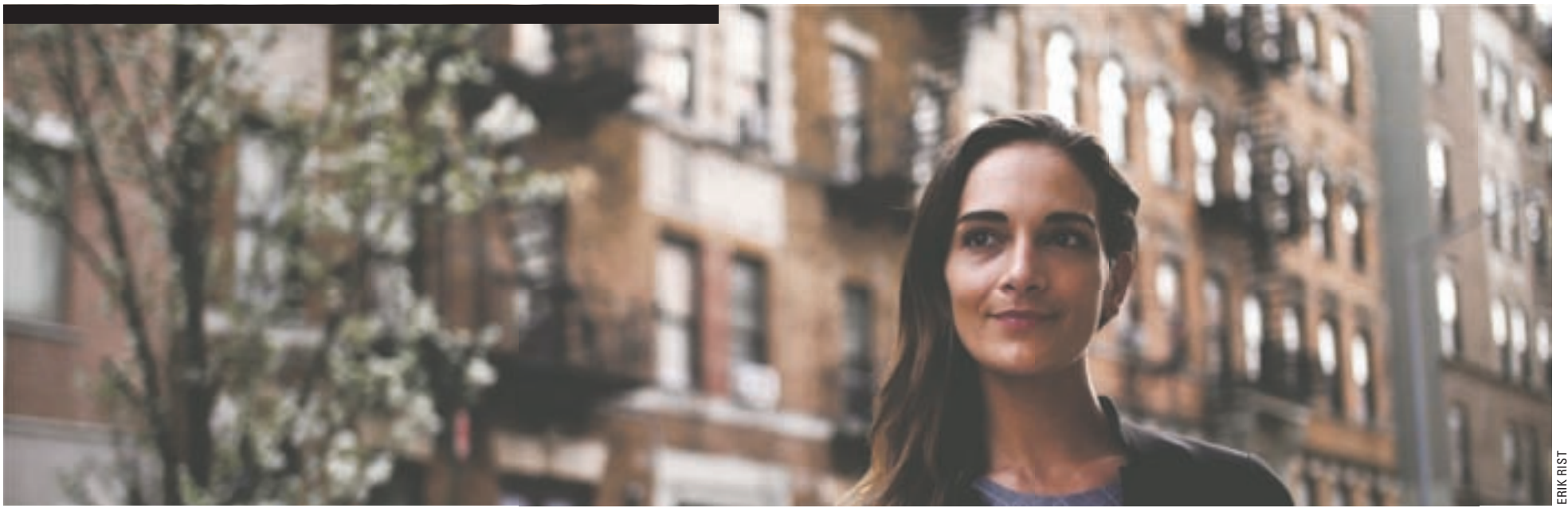
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A COLLECTIVE PRESENTATION BY THE
WORKING GROUP ON GLOBALIZATION
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Following cultural critic Sara Ahmed’s insight that “use is a small word with a big history,” we approach the various ways that “use”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

questions/more info: marxedproject.org



ERIK RIST

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

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

BY JOHN TARLETON

Julia Salazar was another ousted tenant looking for a place to land when I sat down to interview her in mid-April.

Due to byzantine state regulations, the freshman state senator's original district office near the Myrtle-Wyckoff subway station in Bushwick had been a temporary one. Now she was moving into another temporary space in South Williamsburg. Nonetheless, Salazar was confident that she would eventually obtain a permanent home for her district office.

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

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

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

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

JULIA SALAZAR: The political dynamic has changed profoundly in Albany in the last year, particularly in the state Senate. These nine bills collectively constitute Universal Rent Control. We believe housing is a human right and tenants across the state deserve basic protections from being evicted and facing homelessness. Currently, 100 New Yorkers per day are evicted. The housing crisis is like a sinking boat with many holes in it. If we only eliminate vacancy decontrol, we only plug one of the holes and we're still on a sinking ship. If we only end the vacancy bonus or eviction bonus, we're still on a sinking ship. We have to address all these loopholes and policies at once for all tenants to be protected.

One key change tenants are seeking is the elimination of the Major Capital Improvement (MCI) and Individual Apartment Improvement (IAI) loopholes, the stated purpose of which is to allow landlords to recoup the costs of improving their buildings. How do you respond to those who say that if those provisions are eliminated apartments across the city will fall into disrepair?

MCI and IAIs are widely abused by landlords who sometimes use them to justify huge permanent rent increases, which lead to evictions when tenants are not able to afford the new rent after an MCI or IAI has been applied. There will always be a need for investment to maintain buildings. But given that tenants pay rent every month, the burden of maintaining a building needs to primarily be on the property owner and not on the tenants who didn't make the investment to buy the property.

You've previously led a rent strike as a tenant. Can you talk about that experience and how it has shaped your understanding of what needs to be done today?

When I was a college student living in Morningside Heights, Harlem, I lived in an apartment that was not rent stabilized. I had roommates and the building was rapidly falling into disrepair because of a virtually absent management company and landlord. They weren't adequately heating the building. They wouldn't make urgent repairs we needed in order to live in a safe environment.

I sought out resources from the Metropolitan Council on Housing and the city and determined that we could withhold our rent in order to make management act. We held out our rent for a few months before management even noticed. They still refused to make repairs. We went to housing court and ultimately we won concessions from management. When it was time to renew our lease, they did not invite us to do so. The experience was a testament to how powerful it is to organize with your neighbors. It also underscored for me the need to systematically change the laws to protect tenants. You can't do it one building at a time as we are forced to right now.

What has it been like to go from battling a single landlord to being a first-year lawmaker going up against the full might of the real estate industry?

The real estate lobby's role in New York State politics is absolutely outsized. It's been daunting to confront it up until this point. I was very deliberate in my campaign about not taking any money from the real-estate lobby or from corporations. And the movement is growing of legislators who are committed to not be beholden to real estate and who support publicly financed elections. Publically financed elections would in turn allow more people not beholden to run for office.

New York progressives have long hoped for the day that they could end Republican control of the State Senate. That day is here, but now it appears the Democratic supermajority in the State Assembly is under the sway of the real estate industry and is retreating from some of its past support for tenants. What's your take on the situation?

By the end of this session we'll have a clearer idea of which legislators are really committed to representing their constituents. Some of them have been slow to respond to the demands of the public. This is the moment to do that.

The state capital is known for being an insiders' club. Can that change?

It's been really helpful for me that advocates are in Albany much more frequently. It's really a different place than what I witnessed previously being an advocate and community organizer. There are many more people in the capital than there were before. It's a constant reminder to all of us as legislators that the public is watching.

Should Democrats who drop the ball on rent law reform be primaried in 2020?

I think they should expect to be primaried. Voters have to be able to hold us accountable somehow. It's healthy for us to have competitive elections. It's indicative of increased access to our electoral process.

With the deadline for renewing rent laws coming up on June 15, how can New Yorkers get involved and what kind of impact does it have when they do?

It's important that anyone who cares about this issue uses their voice and also joins forces with those who have already been organizing. Call or email your elected officials and emphasize that we need all of these rent laws and not just the few they may be comfortable with. I know personally it makes an impact on me if I have a flood of constituents calling for my support on specific legislation. My colleagues are hearing from constituents far more than they used to and it's at the forefront of their mind all the time.

Looking beyond the immediate battle, as a democratic socialist what are your thoughts on how in the future more decent, affordable housing could operate outside of market logic and be put under social control instead of private control?

In the immediate term, tenant associations are really crucial to building collective power and protecting tenants. Just talking to your neighbors, getting involved in the movement for collective power, is really important. The organizations that provide necessary legal services for tenants are crucial. We need both legislative solutions and more community-driven ones. We want to see more community land trusts, more worker-owned businesses, less of an emphasis on private property as king.

Like healthcare, housing should be treated as a human right. We need to fundamentally challenge the practice of basing someone's housing on their income and how much profit it generates for someone else who has more than they do. That is a long-term project, but in my mind that is not fundamentally separate from the immediate need to empower tenants. I think the latter is necessary for us to eventually create a more caring economy and a more equitable society.

ORGANIZED MONEY VS. ORGANIZED PEOPLE

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

NY STATE ASSEMBLY FOR SALE?

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

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

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

A universal health care plan for all New Yorkers? It needs further study. Publicly funded elections? Where could we find \$100 million in a \$172 billion annual state budget for such a thing? A pied-à-terre tax on the multi-million dollar second homes of the 1% that would rake in \$600 million per year for public schools. Well, how do we really know if it's their first or second homes?

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

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



PHOTO: HOUSINGJUSTICEFORALL.ORG

NUMBERS GAME

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

REAL ESTATE GROUPS DONATING TO THE DACC:

Rudin Management
Glenwood Management
Durst Organization
Time Equities
Extell Development

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Sandra Erickson Real Estate
Simone Development Companies
Solow Building Co.
SL Green Realty
Makras Real Estate

ORGANIZING FROM THE GRASSROOTS

The Housing Justice For All Coalition is made up of dozens of organizations. Some of the groups spans the city or the state while many others are based in neighborhoods where working class residents are being impacted by an onslaught of gentrification and displacement. Here are a few of the leading organizations. For information about all of the coalition members, see www.housingjusticeforall.org/who-we-are-1.

MET COUNCIL ON HOUSING

Metcouncilonhousing.org
Met Council has been at the forefront of tenants rights struggles in NYC for over 50 years. It also operates a tenant hotline (212-979-0611) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 1:30-5 pm, publishes a monthly bilingual newsletter for members and has a weekly radio show (“Housing Notebook”) on WBAI-99.5 Mondays from 7-8 pm.

NEW YORK COMMUNITIES FOR CHANGE

www.nycommunities.org
Emerging from the collapse of ACORN, New York Communities For Change has been building grassroots political power with low-income communities of color since 2010.

MAKE THE ROAD NEW YORK

Maketheroadny.org
Make the Road has offices in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Long Island and Westchester County and with more than 20,000 members is the largest member-led immigrant rights organization in New York.

NEW YORK CITY DSA

www.socialists.nyc.org
The Democratic Socialists of America have seen their membership grow by tenfold since 2016. The NYC DSA chapter is the largest in the country with more than 5,000 members. It is active in both electoral politics and has various issue-based working groups including a Housing Working Group.

NW BRONX COMMUNITY & CLERGY COALITION

www.northwestbronx.org
Forged in the fires that engulfed the Bronx in mid-1970s when landlords set fires to hundreds of buildings to collect the insurance money, NWBCCC has been fighting for 45 years to make the Bronx a place where all people can thrive.

WOODSIDE ON THE MOVE

[@twitter.com/WoodsideMoves](https://twitter.com/WoodsideMoves)
Fighting to keep Western Queens a place where working class, immigrant families can thrive.

DONATIONS BY REAL ESTATE AND ASSOCIATES TO CARL HEASTIE

	PAC 2018	Individual Contributions (2009-2018)
Real Estate	\$11,000	\$76,900
Real Estate & Assoc	\$70,500	\$179,610
Total	\$81,500	\$256,510



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR, KEVIN P. COUGHLIN

PUT 'EM ON SPEED DIAL

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

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

ANDREA STEWART- COUSINS
518-455-2585 (Albany)
914-423-4031 (District Office)

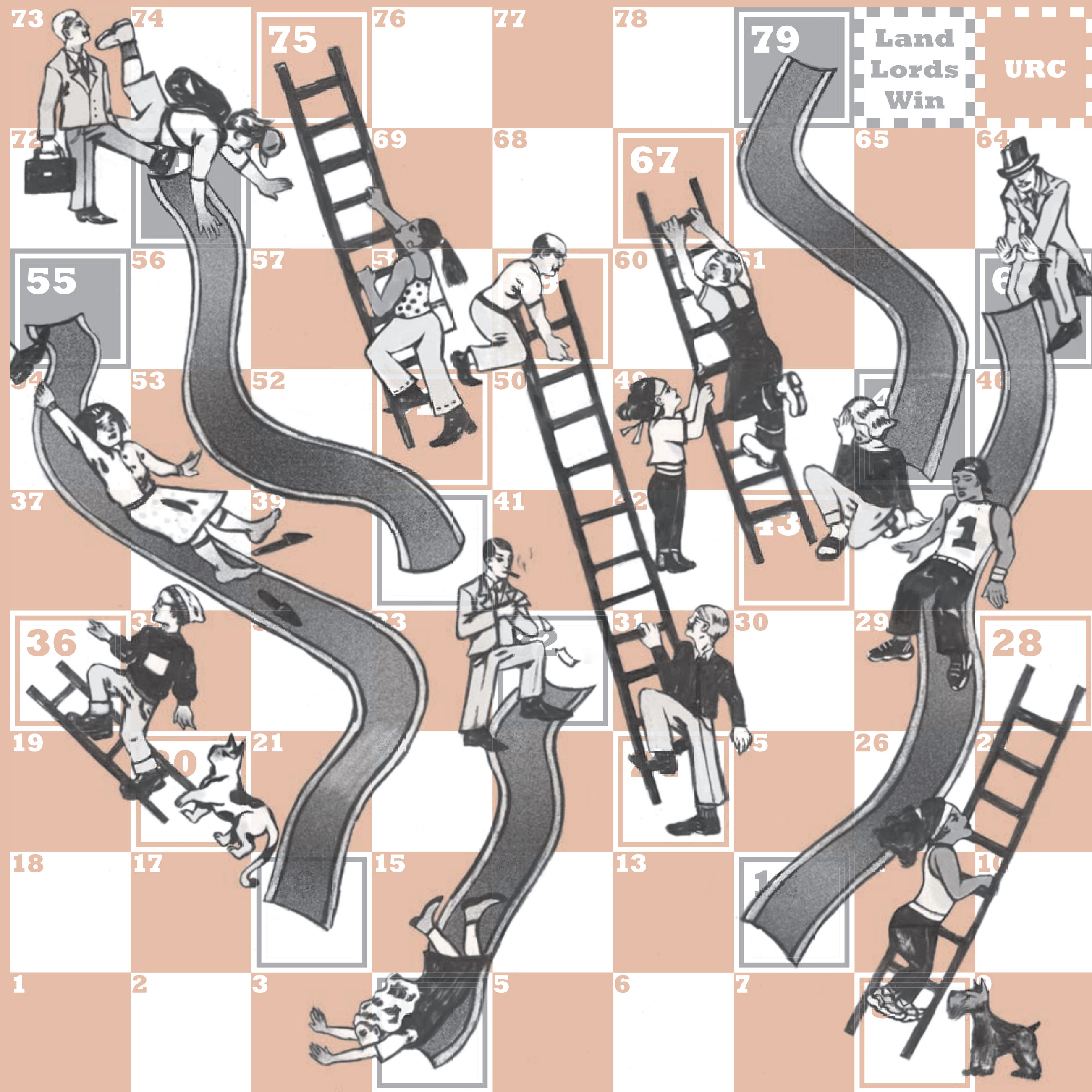
CARL HEASTIE
518-455-4812 (Albany)
718-654-6539 (District Office)

ESTA CASA ES TU CASA:

Tenant advocates are stirring things up at the statehouse this year. There are lots of groups to plug in with.

LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE BANK:

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (right) has received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the real estate industry.



TENANTS VS. LANDLORDS

A BOARD GAME FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

DESIGN: MIKAEL TARKELA
 ILLUSTRATIONS: TIFFANY PAI
 TEXT: JOHN TARLETON

CHUTES & LADDERS

8»28
 Voters boot the Republicans out of power in the State Senate for the first time in a half century and overthrow the GOP-allied Independent Democratic Conference.

20»36
 Upstate and Downstate tenants form a coalition to expand tenant protections across the state and build a larger, more diverse base of support for pro-tenant legislation.

32»4
 Not enough tenants to organize resistance, too many have been evicted and are looking for new homes.

24»59
 Tenant activists canvass their neighborhoods to build public support for sweeping rent law reforms.

43»67
 State legislators are bombarded each week on Tenant Tuesday with phone calls demanding they support Universal Rent Control. Meanwhile, busloads of citizen lobbyists travel to Albany to personally visit legislators and urge them to side with tenants, or else be primaried in the next election cycle.

51»75
 A mass rally held for renters rights ramps up pressure on lawmakers.

55»16
 Landlords drop millions of dollars on non-stop media scare campaign.

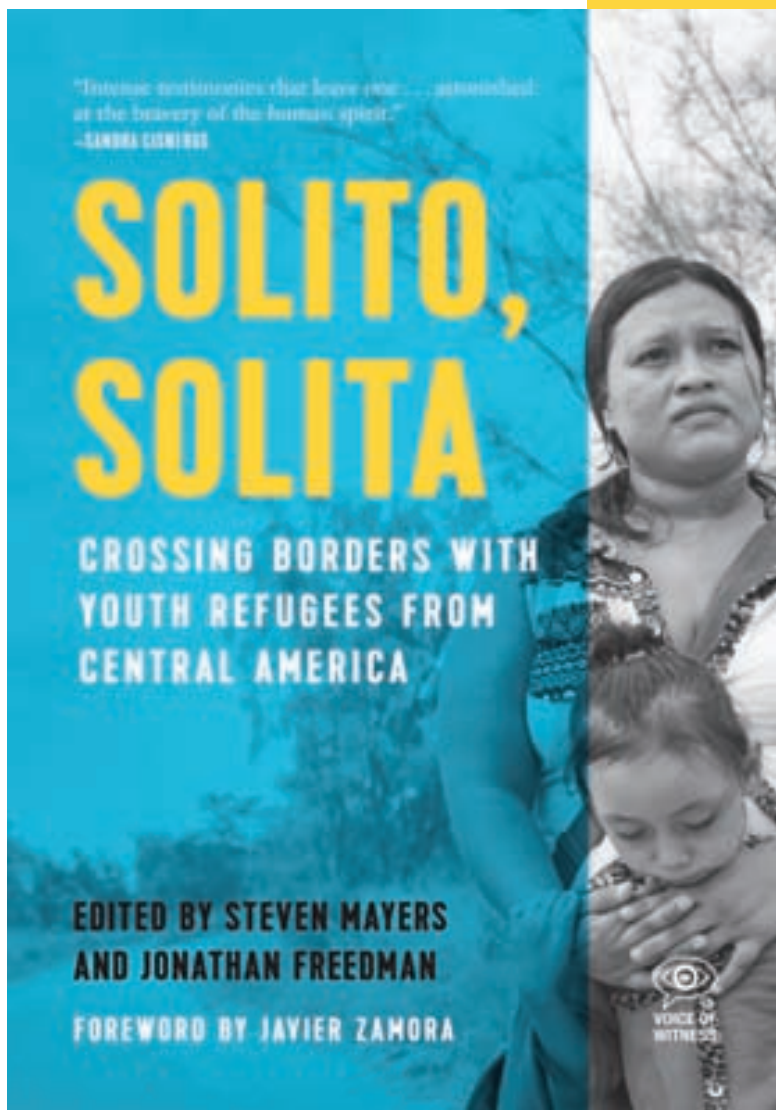
63»12
 Landlords give hundreds of thousands of dollars to Democrats in the State Assembly who previously supported sweeping rent law reforms but now refuse to say if they still do.

71»40
 Governor hosts \$25,000 per plate fundraiser that draws many of NY's leading real estate barons.

75»47
 Governor backs modest rent law reforms, but refuses to support Universal Rent Control.

RULES OF THE GAME

- To start the game, roll a single die. The highest number becomes the landlord. Everyone else is a tenant. The more tenants in the game, the better their chances of winning.
- Tenants win when any one of their pieces lands directly on the final square (universal rent control, or "URC") before the landlord lands directly on the next-to-last square, which signifies the defeat of the tenant movement.
- To move across the board, roll a single die and advance according to the number that comes up. If you roll a six, roll again. If your number is higher than the number of squares left on the board, remain in place.
- The landlord goes first. Class privilege has its advantages.
- The chutes and ladders are reversed for the landlord, i.e. a tenant setback (the chute) allows the landlord to climb and a tenant gain (the ladder) sends him sliding backward.
- Solidarity can make the difference. If the landlord is on the verge of winning, tenants can give their next roll of the die to another tenant who is further along on the board. However, a tenant can only do so once and must exit the game at that time.
- When the tenant side has three or more players who roll the same number consecutively, each tenant gets an extra turn.



They are a mass migration of thousands of young people from Central America, yet each one travels alone: solito, solita.



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BRIEFING ROOM

'AFFORDABLE ENOUGH'

The troubled New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is considering taking yet another step toward privatization. With the city struggling to make the billions in repairs needed to maintain its dilapidated public housing stock, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced plans last year to turn 62,000 apartments over to a private management company. Now the agency is weighing whether to tear down two buildings at the Fulton Houses in Chelsea and replace them with larger luxury towers built by private developers. Seventy percent of the new units would be market rate, the remaining 30 percent would be, in the words of de Blasio spokesperson Olivia Lapeyrolerie, "affordable enough" for NYCHA residents to make rent. The sell-off would earn NYCHA \$168 million within five years.

A GREEN NEW DEAL FOR NYC

The New York City Council approved a sweeping package of bills in April that has drawn comparisons to the Green New Deal currently before Congress. While its timetable for reducing greenhouse gas emissions is longer than that put forward by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Climate Mobilization Act is the most comprehensive piece of climate change response legislation enacted by a city to date. It seeks to cut emissions at the city's largest buildings by 40 percent by 2040 and 80 percent over the decade that follows. The city will also shut down its 24 power plants and replace them with renewable energy sources. Forty thousand jobs are expected to be generated.

BIG MONEY TAKES ON AOC

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez will be up against a sea of dark money when she seeks re-election in her Bronx-Queens congressional district next year. Bronx Republican Party chairman Mike Rendino told the *New York Post* in April that he is in touch with a donor "worth over \$200 million" who has "connections to raise money in Manhattan." This individual is eager to unseat

the outspoken freshman congresswoman. The Stop AOC Political Action Committee, founded in March by Virginia lawyer Dan Backer, has so far raised \$32,000, according to its latest financial expenditure report.

FOREIGN INDIGNITARIES

The Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce was informed they are not welcome at the Museum of Natural History after it announced plans to honor Jair Bolsonaro this May. The museum's annual gala will be held at the Marriott in Times Square instead, after threats of protest from museum staff and the general public. The Brazilian president has expressed a number of openly racist and homophobic views throughout his political career and recently announced that he has been in discussions with President Donald Trump about developing the Amazon rainforest. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will be honored at the gala as well.

SMASHING THE LINKS IN THE SURVEILLANCE STATE

Oh, how brittle our modern contraptions in the face of stone-age weaponry! The NYPD arrested Juan Rodriguez of Kips Bay on April 24, accusing the 41-year-old of smashing more than three dozen LinkNYC internet kiosks from Midtown to the West Village. His implement of choice: a rock. Rodriguez's motive was unclear but some wish he had taken out more. Rodriguez was caught, of course, because he did not disguise his face and each Link is equipped with three cameras. But the machines have raised troubling privacy concerns since Mayor de Blasio unveiled plans to place what now amount to nearly 2,000 Link kiosks on NYC sidewalks in 2014. The New York Civil Liberties Union has warned that Intersection, the Alphabet-backed company (read Google) that operates LinkNYC, has the capability of collecting vast amounts of user data. Last year an undergraduate researcher at the NYC College of Technology discovered LinkNYC code that allows the company to continuously track devices users connect to its kiosks.

SHUNNED: Both the American Museum of Natural History and Cipriani have bowed to public pressure and declined to host a gala honoring Brazil's far right President Jair Bolsonaro as the Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce's "Person of the Year." The event is now scheduled to be held May 14 at the Marriott Marquis near Times Square. More protests are expected.

— INDEPENDENT
STAFF

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REAL ESTATE RULES, BUREAUCRACY OBEY AND COMMUNITIES RISE UP

BY TOM ANGOTTI

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

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

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

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

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

REAL ESTATE & THE GROWTH MACHINE

For real estate and its government allies, rent regulations, strict zoning rules,

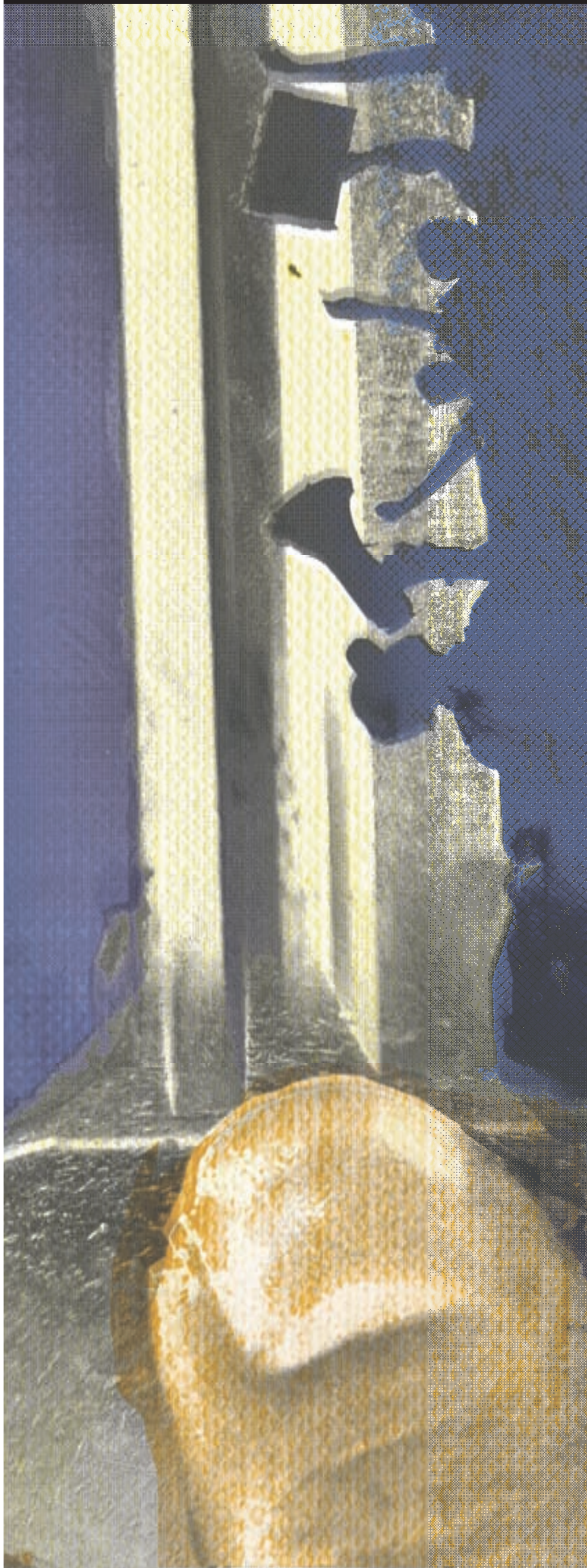
community boards, preservationists and environmentalists are responsible for the housing crisis. Their solution is more growth, more tax subsidies, fewer regulations and defeat of what they call “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) sentiment — opposition to new development. Their alternative is YIMBY (“Yes In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

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

For real estate, more housing is always the solution. It's pure trickle-down economics: the market builds for the wealthy and as their needs are met the benefits filter down to lower-income people in the form of lower rents. Or government-subsidized “affordable housing.” It sounds neat but it never works that way. Instead higher land values and rents trickle down and make everything more expensive, displacing tenants and homeowners with the lowest incomes. New York is one of the most racially segregated cities in the world and low-income communities of color face intense displacement pressures while having fewer alternatives because of pervasive discrimination in housing. Yet nobody in government is responsible for dealing with displacement, historically the greatest threat to the survival of communities of color.

PUBLIC HOUSING

It wasn't always like this. During the Great Depression, the New Deal financed the construction of housing for working people throughout the nation and provided capital and operating subsidies to local housing authorities. NYCHA was the largest and arguably one of the better-managed authorities in the nation. In the 1970s, the Nixon administration cut subsidies and channeled funds toward public-private partnerships. This became the foundation of neoliberal housing policy and was embraced by a national bipartisan consensus. While cutting funds for public housing, policy makers accepted the conservative idea, promoted by reactionary southern Democrats during the New Deal, that public housing



DAVID HOLLENBACH

was a socialist project that promoted poverty and interfered with the private market.

NYCHA, the single largest provider of low-income housing in the city and nation, is on the way to becoming a public-private partnership in which the private partner will ultimately rule.

While billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg tried and failed to implant luxury housing in eight Manhattan projects, Mayor Bill de Blasio created Next Generation NYCHA, a plan to turn all of NYCHA into a playground for real estate developers. While the city and state consistently failed to fill the gap in funding due to federal cutbacks, the bipartisan consensus is now that the solution is to take the public out of public housing and bring in private investment.

The 1970s saw massive housing abandonment and service cutbacks as industry fled to low-wage regions. Local tax revenues declined and real estate promoted the notion that new private investment would save the city. Community groups fought abandonment by taking over buildings and lobbying government for financial support. Thus was born the partnership between community-based nonprofit developers, big real estate and government — though the community partners were and still are junior partners.

While much attention has been paid to the city's program for creating new "affordable housing," community advocates have pointed out how the income requirements for this housing make them unaffordable for those who need housing the most, including the more than 60,000 people living in shelters. At the same time, funding for NYCHA has declined and it too is becoming a "public-private partnership." The struggle to keep the public in public housing is one of the most important facing us today.

COMMUNITIES, ORGANIZING & GOVERNMENT

Despite this gloomy picture, signs of long-overdue changes are emerging. Thanks to tenant organizing, an overhaul of rent regulations that increases tenant protections may soon be approved in Albany. Tough community organizing forced Amazon, one of the biggest corporations in the world, to back out of a sweetheart deal to move part of their headquarters to Queens. And every one of Mayor de Blasio's community rezonings to promote development in communities of color has faced fierce opposition, slowing down developers.

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

The permanent government has deep

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

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

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

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

Tom Angotti is Professor Emeritus of Urban Policy and Planning at Hunter College and the Graduate Center and editor with Sylvia Morse of Zoned Out: Race, Displacement and City Planning in New York City.

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Working class women of color and young white socialists in East Harlem join forces against a private equity slumlord.

Ep. 2 - Seeing Green

Community organizers in Crown Heights and Flatbush clash with their community board representatives over zoning changes.

Ep. 3 - No Relief

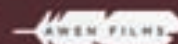
Activists and tenants mobilize against rent hikes as the New York City Rent Guidelines Board prepares to vote on the 2018-2019.

Ep. 4 - Beyond Repair

With State rent laws set to expire this summer, a Queens tenant speaks out against the Major Capital Improvement program and the unfair rent increases it enables.

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A NEIGHBORHOOD REMEMBERS

AN ORAL HISTORY PRESERVES BUSHWICK ONE STORY AT A TIME.

BY CHELSEY SANCHEZ

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

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

How did “Cities for People” come about?

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

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

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

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

It also sort of demystifies the process, right? Because it’s always easy to point and start that divisive conversation about

who’s to blame for all this. But how do we turn the page and move toward finding concrete solutions? I wanted to use the stories I was collecting as a catalyst to get people together.

How can people from other neighborhoods or cities replicate this project?

We have an activists’ toolkit, which has resources and information on other projects that are documenting housing inequity in the city, because my project is not the only one in Bushwick or even in the city. The idea is also, rather than just it being an archive, people can use the stories

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

FOR THE RECORD:
Oral historian Cynthia Tobar.

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

Could you speak on your personal history with Bushwick?

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

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

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

I’d say building a sense of community, even if it starts within your own block or within your own building. I don’t know how they do it in these fancier buildings, but the smaller, old-fashioned six-family buildings, you got to bump into your neighbor at some point in the stairs. Say, “hello.” Learn a little bit about them. Look out for one another. Get plugged in with the local activists. Show support to the local businesses and the supermarket. The

C-Town down the street may not have your petits cornichons and fresh mozzarella, but if you need a box of cereal and milk, go and support the local businesses here, too. Also, plug in to existing activist organizations that are doing the heavy lifting of having to deal with City Council members, and rally and attend the meetings.

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

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

Read and watch the oral histories that Cynthia Tobar has collected at CitiesForPpl.org.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CYNTHIA TOBAR

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

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

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

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Celebrating the legacies of Ho Chi Minh & Malcolm X

May 2019 THE INDYPENDENT

ACTIVIST SCHOLARS TAKE ON BIG DEVELOPERS

Brooklyn Tides: The Fall and Rise of a Global Borough
BY BENJAMIN SHEPARD & MARK J. NOONAN
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2019

Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State
SAMUEL STEIN
VERSO, 2019

By Derek Ludovici

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

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

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

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

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

The second half of the book takes a participant-observation approach, with Shepard sharing his experiences marching with Black Lives Matter, agitating for transportation alternatives and taking a direct action approaches to hurricane recovery and community gardens.

All in all, this book does what it sets out to do — highlight the agency of everyday activists residing in the borough. Shepard recounts the initial days after Sandy destroyed homes and infrastructure along Brooklyn's coastal

neighborhoods. He underscores the “mutual-aid” approach that activists took to distributing aid, delivering supplies by bicycle in the absence of the local and federal government's response to the emergency.

One of the many strengths of the book is telling the story of so many social movements — not just the goals and outcomes, but the experience of fighting against injustice. The book includes the voices of multiple activists and moves across the

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

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

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

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

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

Urban struggle is precisely where *Capital City* and *Brooklyn Tides* intersect. Stein concludes the book with a vision of planning that is messy, where coalitions merge to represent diverse constituencies and where marginalized voices are expressed in a way that neat and simple top-down planning models cannot accommodate. Shepard and Noonan highlight the diversity of struggles occurring in, but not unique to, Brooklyn — efforts to swim against toxic waves of racist policing, eviction and climate catastrophe in order to reach a just, inclusive and ecologically sound future.



NAOMI USHIYAMA

geographical space of the borough. At times this coverage feels thin, but this is a qualm that could be raised with any study that attempts to take on such a large project.

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

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

Stein's main category is what he terms the “real estate

WHEN CHINA COMES TO THE RUSTBELT

American Factory

DIRECTED BY STEVEN BOGNAR & JULIA REICHERT
NETFLIX, 2019

By Mark Read

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

Fast forward 17 years and a lot has changed about the Tribeca Film Festival, as well as America. The festival has expanded to include not only a robust range of international films, but also selections of video games, television shows and virtual reality programming, all on offer for a full week to a celebrity-obsessed audience of industry insiders that rivals Sundance. And America? Well, in terms of the political landscape, it's safe to say that many of the people who were lambasting Bush as the worst thing that could happen to the United States are today eating their words. Given the current moment it seems appropriate, even inevitable, that America once again emerges as a prime subject at this year's Tribeca Film Festival.

Many of this year's higher profile films examine essential questions about who we are as a country — the meaning of our history and the contest over that meaning, the challenges and uncertainties we face and how we are (or are not) meeting those challenges. This is especially true of Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert's masterful documentary film *American Factory*.

“We fought and won these battles for safe working conditions, for the weekend, for a dignified life, over 70 years ago,” a union organizer shouts, rallying his troops for an upcoming vote at the Fuyao Glass America factory in Dayton, Ohio. “And now we need to show the Chinese ownership what they need to do if they want to employ people here in America.”

The scene is but one of many striking moments in this truly remarkable film, which lays bare the stark and disorienting reality of U.S. workers in the era of globalization. *American Factory* methodically and sensitively exposes the specific, localized impacts of historically tectonic shifts in global economic and political power that have radically altered the lives of millions of working people across the world. What these shifts portend not only for U.S. workers but all workers and indeed all people is the central question here — one that the filmmakers ultimately answer, albeit provisionally. Spoiler alert: It's not a happy ending.

American Factory picks up where Bognar and Reichert's previous film, *The Last Truck: Closing of a GM Plant*, left off. *The Last Truck* chronicles the 2008

closure of a major automotive factory in Dayton, Ohio. Bognar himself is a Dayton native and as a team the filmmakers have been documenting the region for the last 20 years. Almost 3,000 jobs were lost as a result of the 2008 closure, a devastating blow to the Dayton community. It is an all-too-familiar “rust-belt” story, a tragedy wherein American workers lose their jobs to workers in countries with looser regulation and lower wages.

American Factory tells a far more complicated and ultimately more troubling story. In 2014 that same GM factory was purchased by the Fuyao Glass company, a Chinese-owned global powerhouse in the automotive glass industry. Fuyao, upon being induced with generous tax subsidies from local and state governments, retrofitted the facility, hired thousands of U.S. workers and brought over hundreds of Chinese workers to live in the United States while they trained and supervised the Dayton workforce. Positive PR was the explicit goal of

The jobs on offer, as it turns out, are non-union, and pay less than half of what workers had been earning at the GM plant. Despite this, the factory loses money for the first 18 months, for which the U.S. workers are blamed by their Chinese bosses, who see them as insufficiently willing to sacrifice for the good of the company. U.S. executives are fired and replaced by Chinese executives. There's a slew of safety violations. Chinese workers themselves, who have been thoroughly indoctrinated to view their CEO as a demi-god and the company as their saviour, demean their U.S. counterparts. There's a fight over unionization. Agitators are fired, workers intimidated and the unionization vote fails.

With worker unrest moderately assuaged with slight pay raises and improved safety an uneasy truce settles at the Dayton plant. The final scenes of *American Factory* are chilling, but not entirely without encouragement. The filmmakers pay a final visit to “Rob,” an American worker who we have followed throughout the film as he learns from and bonds with his Chinese counterpart, “Liang.” Rob has recently been let go from Fuyao, downsized for reasons that are left unexplained. While sad to have lost his job, he speaks fondly of Liang, whom he describes as his “Chinese brother.” Next we hear from Liang himself, one of the most dedicated Fuyao workers, with the burn scars to prove it. “My generation, I think we want a little more now. We have more expectations,” he says, as his newly arrived children play in the yard.

Finally, we see Cao Dewang, the Fuyao CEO, as he tours the factory floor with the company's automation team. “This machine will allow us to eliminate four workers in the next two months,” the automation expert reports, “and these will

allow us to cut two more in the next four.” The tour continues like this for a while, the scene fading as the suited executives walk past the very workers they are plotting to “eliminate.”

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

Look for more coverage from the Tribeca Film Festival at independent.org.



IAN COOK, COURTESY OF SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

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

IT WAS A FEEL-GOOD STORY ABOUT GLOBALIZATION. BUT THEN THINGS GOT COMPLICATED.

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

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JON QUILTY

TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE

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

— WANETTA, Jersey City

Dear Wanetta,

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

Justice begins in the imagination.

— Rev

• • •

That Mueller report is some good reading, Reverend. The man's a regular W.P. Wodehouse and doesn't even know it. But it stuck in my craw watching Assange get carried from the Ecuadorian Embassy like a big hairy baby in the arms of the bobbies. I'm all for taking on The Donald and Assange ain't no saint, but to go down for exposing the dirty deeds of the Pentagon. That stinks of bull, Rever-

end. My friends say he had it coming. I couldn't disagree more. You as peeved as I am?

— TIM, Boerum Hill

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

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

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

May you travel in wildness,

— Rev

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WORKERS UNITE! FILM FESTIVAL

WORKERSUNITEFILMFESTIVAL.ORG | MAY 10TH - MAY 23RD 2019

FRI, MAY 10TH | CINEMA VILLAGE

OPENING NIGHT SALUTE UNITE HERE!, NYC RETIREES ROCK!

PROGRAM 1:

00:00: **Ya Bz nBBW B** 00:30: **A2A0 2V**

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

00:00: **YKy dz Ya hy** 00:30: **nA0O 0: v4r OaeayH: aAe**

PROGRAM 3: UNION ORGANIZING MEETS THE TWILIGHT ZONE

00:00: **Y0Z:W YWBD:YK** 00:30: **ri(AB: f ODe**

SAT, MAY 11TH | CINEMA VILLAGE

SALUTE TO THE NYLHA - CLIMATE CHANGE IS A LABOR ISSUE

PROGRAM 4:

00:00: **nB BfDmB yYz** 00:30: **6 6vma7 v2A8** 01:00: **HnT y: m hAv(nvAon: : n7i A7o ODe 07: A7v y7: nv mcOTy:O**
01:00: **AYAr m: i (nv vmy07r vHa: A4: vav**

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

00:00: **BhDmhla hDW** 00:30: **(a7n04Ar 6 6vma7 v2A8** 01:00: **Aan sD 7A0**

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

00:00: **cyhl KVB wVa r dB Ya Bt Z YvWKa B YyVvW** 00:30: **onA7: r nA7 A7**

SUN, MAY 12TH | CINEMA VILLAGE

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY! BIRDS SAVE THE EARTH AND NO NUKES!

PROGRAM 7: FAMILY FILM. STUNNING ANIMATION!

00:00: **dVhyt nB dt v** 00:30: **4d: nv 8ADn**

PROGRAM 8:

00:00: **nB Kyv nB DBvW hyt nB Ya r v** 00:30: **(nm 7v(v7: n sD Ooi**

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

00:00: **dmnY dIBt W vohy YD** 00:30: **(a7n04Ar sD i T: A7o T: Aay(nv Dn004: Ty aAyO sD Ad5 07i 077: c**

MON, MAY 13TH | CINEMA VILLAGE

PROGRAM 10: THE UK'S OBAMA IS COMING | FREE EARLY SHOW

00:00: **nB hZYD h B**

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

00:00: **D/Kr IB cyt v eYK** 00:30: **OaAD m nOT: A7o 7 T7yv: n**

PROGRAM 12: ARGENTINA ON THE MOVE!

00:00: **KByYv dBv nB dZ W IBBT** 00:30: **mAn 5 i 07H: A2d d: 60T ahOAD**

TUES, MAY 14TH | CINEMA VILLAGE

PROGRAM 13: WORKER, POET, GRAVEDIGGER | FREE EARLY SHOW

00:00: **ht Duhl: C/D d: cyu YBW**

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

00:00: **hil B: yVBD** 00:30: **n6) v: nA: y**

PROGRAM 15: OUR BACKYARDS ARE NOT BATTLEFIELDS!

00:00: **Syt B: BBT** 00:30: **mi Aey 08 y7: f vCny** 01:00: **HnT y: m hAv(nvAon: : n7i A7o ODe 07: A7v y7: nv mcOTy:O**
01:00: **AYAr m: i**

WED, MAY 15TH | CINEMA VILLAGE

SALUTE TO SAG-AFTRA, WGA AND AFM - HOW TO STAY UNION ON A LOW BUDGET FILM

PROGRAM 16: FREE EARLY SHOW | ENCORE SHORTS AND PRIZEWINNERS

00:00: **nBmhvngu Y B: VZ** 00:30: **A2A0 2V 4: 7 m mchYr Oae**

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

00:00: **00ay dv7: s0a n7v4 Tvy: y** 00:00: **nB hynhWky DyW** 00:30: **(36S**

PROGRAM 18: UNION ORGANIZING MEETS THE TWILIGHT ZONE | ENCORE FOR A HUGE HIT!

00:00: **Y0Z:W YWBD:YK** 00:30: **nAv nDv 0: nDv**

THURS, MAY 16TH | CINEMA VILLAGE

SALUTE TO THE INDEPENDENT DRIVERS GUILD FILMS ABOUT THE LIES BEHIND THE GIG ECONOMY

PROGRAM 19:

00:00: **c B** 00:30: **(nv 4rDe OT7: nA7: r nAv nDv 0: nDv**

PROGRAM 20: UBER MAY GO PUBLIC, BUT THEY'RE HIDING SOMETHING

00:00: **Sr B: Dhyt** 00:30: **onA7: r nA7 A7 T: 0705 OTy(ar7yA: Aon: s0a0) yon7i nsv: C**

PROGRAM 21: HOW THE YELLOW CAB INDUSTRY WAS DESTROYED IN NYC

00:00: **Ky dMB B: BBD** 00:30: **00eA7: (naOTon: nv n5) 00y: s d: avvi 05 0: 0: aA2**

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

00:00: **cyhl KVB wVa r dB Ya Bt Z YvWKa B YyVvW**

FRI, MAY 17TH | PEF HO

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

SAT, MAY 18TH | DC 1707 AUDITORIUM

PROGRAM 24:

00:00: **33pr** 00:00: **lhZ** 00:30: **Yy BDW Bht cyuz d: hKvYD hIfey ha vBZ** 01:00: **YyDYu nB hWylmD: BDr: Sycl: y**

SUN, MAY 19TH | DC 1707 AUDITORIUM

PROGRAM 25:

00:00: **W h yyKhl Wf: Wda a hi BDr YVW ha Tz: mndt mYD: Bz vBBI BBT: hyt ThD: KBvW**

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

PROGRAM 26:

00:00: **DyVky B: da v i S m Y hl Ika r BDr Bil WDBv (PRIVATE)**

PROGRAM 27:

00:00: **nhyv: YKW O: hy WIZ: YC: B hD: YKv: mYD BDr** 00:30: **n7Dn: 5 i (n7: m45**

TUES, MAY 21ST | WORKERS UNITED AUDITORIUM

PROGRAM 28: SALUTE TO THE IBEW LOCAL 3 AND THEIR FIGHT FOR LABOR RIGHTS

00:00: **DyVky B: da v i m Y hl TTB: yW Bv Bil vWDBv**

PROGRAM 29:

00:00: **Sycl: y ca B: anVky: u: C/DmYD BDr: anW**

WED, MAY 22ND | PARK CHURCH CO-OP (GREENPOINT, BK)

PROGRAM 30:

00:00: **Kvc da B: Br DhW: y: C/DmS** 00:30: **dW BIB W: y: YC: y YDB nYDW YID: YllhuB: YvWKa B: YyVvW: hqW: Bih: fB: ZvTB d: hCuKBvW: hZ: nB: nB**

THURS, MAY 23RD | PENN SOUTH MUTUAL REDEVELOPMENT HOUSES

PROGRAM 31: NYC RETIREES ROCK!

00:00: **Ya Bz nBBW B** 00:30: **3m p00000 (a7n04Ar 4: 7: c: 0: ncl(nv mi Adh: Tany: Os) mac: v: aac: : 07v m: 5**
01:00: **HnT y: m hAv(nvAon: : n7i A7o ODe 07: A7v y7: nv mcOTy:O** 01:00: **AYAr m: i**

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