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A professor of sociology and coordinator of the Policing and Social Justice Project at Brooklyn College and author of The End of Policing.

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AIXA RODRIGUEZ

An ESL teacher and a member of Bronx United Educators and the Movement of Rank and File Educators, the social justice caucus of the United Federation of Teachers.

TOM ANCOTTI

Author of New York For Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate and co-editor of Zoned Out: Race, Displacement and City Planning in New York City. He is professor emeritus of urban policy and planning at Hunter College and The Graduate Center, CUNY.

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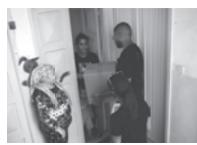




















INDY

RADIO NEWS

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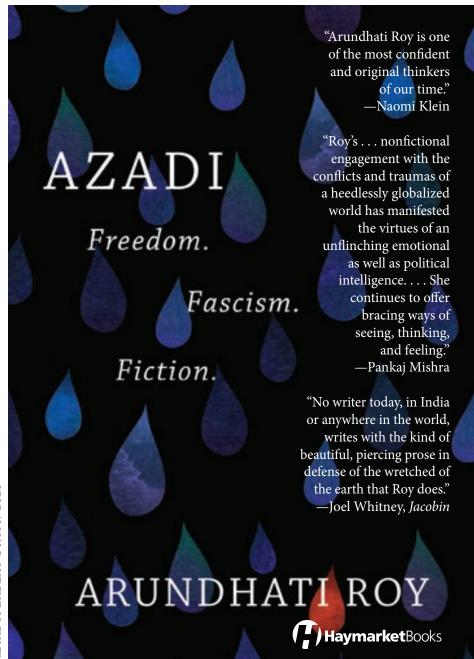


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IEFING

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

the end to the "body shop"

Construction workers rally near Penn Station Sept. 15 to demand system of supplying low-wage nonunion labor to contractors.

AN INJURY TO ONE:

COPS STILL GIVING **VENDORS** \$500

City police are still handing out summonses to street vendors despite Mayor Bill de Blasio's June promise to phase them out. "Unlawful vending can adversely affect local businesses and quality of life," patrol chief Fausto Pichardo posted on Twitter Sept. 14 after a sweep in the World Trade Center area. "Why do I have to feel like a criminal if I'm just working?" food vendor Nabil Boussbaa, who got a \$500 ticket for having his cart less than 12 feet from a crosswalk, told The City. (The legal minimum is 10 feet.) The Street Vendor Project, which supports vendors' rights, estimates that about 20,000 peddlers sell food and other things on city streets, but the number of permits to sell food legally has been capped at roughly 3,000 since 1983. About 1,350 people are on the waiting list, and City Councilmember Margaret Chin (D-Manhattan) has introduced a bill that would increase the number of permits.

INDUSTRY CITY <u>ABANDONS</u> BROOKLYN REZONING

Industry City CEO Andrew Kimball announced Sept. 22 that he was dropping his application to have the city rezone the 35-acre industrial complex on the Brooklyn waterfront. The \$1 billion project, the largest private rezoning application in the city's history, would have converted former warehouses and lofts to office, retail, and academic space. Opponents said it would have accelerated gentrification in the largely Latino Sunset Park neighborhood and not brought the jobs the developers promised. Kimball blamed "the current political environment and a lack of leadership." Local City Councilmember Carlos Menchaca had announced his opposition in July, and earlier in the day Sept. 22, four of Brooklyn's six House members sent a letter telling the Council that the rezoning would exacerbate displacement of renters and eliminate one of the city's "few remaining manufacturing hubs." The Protect Sunset Park group, which collected more than 3,500 signatures on a petition against the rezoning, proclaimed a victory "against racist city planning" that was "truly a feat of everyday people power."

CONSTRUCTION **WORKERS PROTEST** 'MODERN DAY **SLAVERY**

Wearing orange-and-black facemasks and waving "I AM Worthy" signs, more than 200 construction workers rallied near Penn Station Sept. 15, as Laborers Union locals launched a campaign against the "body shop" system of supplying low-wage nonunion labor to contractors. "It's modernday slavery," John Simmons, who worked for a Long Island body shop that advertises itself as "a non-union, non-prevailing wage" company, told the crowd. These companies, which have provided labor to major local construction projects, usually pay minimum wage and often hire parolees, who can be sent back to prison if they don't stay employed.

REPORT: PANDEMIC SLAMS NYC RENTERS

As many as four-fifths of New York City tenants are having trouble paying rent during the COVID-19 epidemic, the Metropolitan Council on Housing said in a report issued in September. The tenants'rights group's survey of 406 people who contacted it found that almost two-thirds had already been spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent, and 79 percent had been laid off from work or had their hours cut. Met Council's tenant hotline is 212-979-0611.

NYC IS A WHAT?

President Trump took aim at his former hometown and three other U.S. cities Sept. 2, designating New York; Seattle; Portland, Ore.; and Washington, D.C., "anarchist jurisdictions" and instructing federal agencies to look for ways to deny aid to these Democrat-led cities.

Leaders of the targeted cities were quick to respond. "This has nothing to do with 'law and order,'" tweeted New York City mayoral spokesperson Bill Neidhardt. "This is a racist campaign stunt out of the Oval Office to attack millions of people of color."

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ONE KEYSTROKE AT A TIME

AMID DISTANCE LEARNING BOOM, ED TECH COMPANIES PROFIT FROM LAX PRIVACY OVERSIGHT

By Katya Schwenk

t the beginning of May, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced a plan to "revolutionize" education. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, he said, would mastermind it, assembling a task force of experts to create a blueprint for a new kind of learning, one that would last beyond the pandemic and the chaotic first weeks of online education.

"It's about time," Cuomo said at a press conference. "The old model of everybody goes and sits in the classroom and the teacher is in front of that classroom and teaches that class and you do that all across the city, all across the state, all these buildings, all these physical classrooms."

"Why," he asked, "with all the technology you have?" The backlash was swift.

"Bill Gates Is Not the Man to Reimagine New York Education," read the headline of one *Forbes* piece, recalling the Gates Foundation's troubled history with high-tech education reform. New York City educators and school administrators were incensed to learn that the Cuomo-Gates task force included no New York City school officials.

The city's schools had their online reopening on Sept. 21, and some in-person classes began Sept. 21, with more slated to reopen for partial in-person learning on Sept. 29 and Oct. 1, barring strikes or more delays. Since May, little has been made public about the progress of the Gates initiative in New York.

But the whole affair, for many, was emblematic of an education system ever more beholden to Silicon Valley and the education technology industry. Advocates have long argued that high-tech reformist initiatives like Gates' brainchild, the Common Core, served corporate interests more than those of students. They have warned, too, that the growth of the for-profit education and testing sector has made way for exploitative student data practices, despite relatively strong federal privacy legislation for youth. Now that learning is necessarily online, the trend has only accelerated.

As students return to school, some New York parents and advocates are calling for additional oversight of these technology-saturated classrooms.

"Distance learning was kind of a disaster for us," Carrie McLaren, a Brooklyn mother of a 12-year-old son, tells *The Indypendent*. Suddenly, she said, his education was filtered through the internet and You-Tube — and "YouTube would love for your child to stay on YouTube all day long." Educational videos assigned by teachers quickly led her son down "rabbit holes," the inevitable result of a platform primed for engagement rather than education. It makes sense, she says: These resources are easily accessible and schools "were just totally overwhelmed by distance learning."

WiFi networks in schools often block sites that are overly distracting, house explicit content, or otherwise pose a risk to students. Now, limiting what children look at as they learn online falls on parents. Federal law prohibits the personal data collection of users under 13, but privacy is still a concern — as is predatory advertising.

"My son's education and well-being are irrelevant to Google," Mclaren says. "Google's business model is to grab and hold the attention of users, and to creatively profit from their data." The online behemoth has repeatedly faced charges of student data misuse, though it claims its products are privacy protective. The details of its contracts with New York City schools, though, are mostly not public.

Like districts around the country, New York City struggled to balance the messy transition to distance learning with the potential ramifications of using tech platforms for education. In April, the DOE banned Zoom, citing security concerns with the platform, like so-called "Zoom-bombing," but has since reversed that ban. City officials say they have worked with Zoom on a new, "tailored" platform, but the details of the city's contract with the company, like its relationship with Google, remain murky.

In 2014, New York State adopted several strong, and hard-won, privacy requirements for vendors that handle student data. Among other things, the law requires that contractors not sell students' personal data, and that a "parents' bill of rights" be included in all contracts, which outlines strict guidelines for third-party use of student data. New state regulations, passed in January, mandated that some contract information for these vendors be made public. New York City is still catching up.

"A lot of school districts are not prepared to comply with the privacy requirements of the law, which require transparency and no use of data for commercial purposes or marketing," says Leonie Haimson, executive director of the local nonprofit Class Size Matters and longtime student privacy advocate. "I don't think anybody's really making sure that is happening."

Of several contracts that Haimson provided to *The Indy*, obtained via public records requests and dating from 2014 to 2016, none included the full list of requisite privacy stipulations from the 2014 state law. The Department of Education has also not made public a complete accounting of contracts that implicate student data, as is required by the January law — though the city has until Oct. 1 to do so.

The city says its more recent contracts are compliant with state law. "And our contract renewals also have appropriate, compliant terms," a spokesperson wrote to *The Indy*. "Many of our ongoing agreements include

these terms, and we are phasing out or swiftly updating contracts that do not have the proper protections."

Noncompliance is a trend Amelia Vance of the Future of Privacy Forum has observed nationwide.

"Very few educators have actually been trained in anything regarding student privacy," she explains to *The Indy*. "So [in the spring] you ended up with a lot of educators and administrators who were adopting programs that didn't meet privacy standards."

At the same time, the New York City and school districts across the country have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on tech for students.

Fundamentally, this spending is critical to ensure equity: Online learning heightens underlying racial and class disparities, in part because of serious gaps in access to broadband and technology. Without universal access to learning software and the internet, students cannot have universal access to education.

Yet city lawmakers have questioned the particulars of the expenses. In March, the city's Department of Education opted to purchase iPads for students, a towering \$270 million investment. That figure includes another \$40.5 million to IBM, to install software in the iPads.

"This is such a waste of money," City Councilman Ben Kallos told the in April. "For what they spent on an iPad, they could have bought a full functioning laptop for every kid in the system. Instead, we got a bunch of iPads which don't really create equity when families have laptops and broadband."

Aixa Rodriguez, a high school teacher and the founder of the advocacy group Bronx Educators United for Justice, echoes Kallos's concerns. "The iPads were the biggest fail," she says. "I had so many kids struggle. Writing a research paper — iPads were not conducive to that. And they weren't giving extra tech to these kids. They wouldn't give an external keyboard. I need proper tech and that was not the proper tech at all."

The iPads were a reminder that education technology is no panacea. It can also widen or reinforce inequities.

Vance worries that the growing popularity of online behavior management platforms or other high-tech metrics to evaluate students' participation or performance could lead to discrimination. Schools across the city, for example, use a platform called "ClassDojo" to evaluate and track students' behavior — long controversial among privacy advocates. These systems have also been criticized for automating discriminatory classroom discipline, which, even without algorithms, already targets Black children at higher rates.

"I worry that parents and students might be surprised on their first report card, because some of the analytics don't capture the information that administrators might think they do," Vance says.

Haimson concurs. "One of the most dangerous forms of privatization is outsourcing instruction, assessment and behavior management to these private, for-profit companies.

"That was happening at a very fast pace even before the pandemic," she says. Now, the trend has accelerated.

IE INDYPENDENT October 2020

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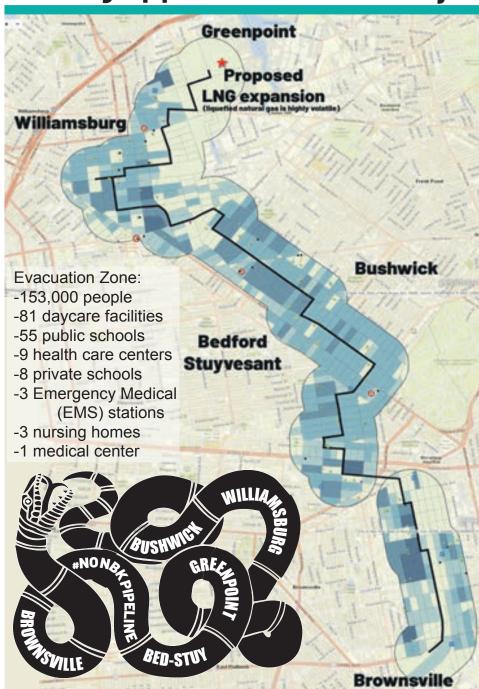
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RED WAVE RISING **HOW A SOCIALIST SQUAD COULD** TRANSFORM CITY COUNCIL

By Jordan G. Teicher

n the early hours of July 1, Brandon West watched as the City Council voted on the 2021 fiscal year budget. He hoped it would fail. West, a democratic socialist running to represent Brooklyn's 39th district in the City Council, had been in the streets for weeks demanding the city cut NYPD funding, and had helped organize the Occupy City Hall encampment. That night, he'd wanted to be at City Hall with those protesting the budget, which significantly cut funds for virtually everything except for the NYPD, but the night before, he'd been injured in an altercation with police there. Instead, he was at home taking ibuprofen, disappointed but not surprised as the final vote, 32-17, flashed across the live stream playing on his computer.

Of the 17 councilmembers who voted no, he noted, only nine believed the cuts to the NYPD weren't meaningful enough.

"I knew we didn't have the votes. I wasn't expecting something magical to happen," he says. "But to essentially have these folks in City Council ignore what was going on — it hurt."

For West, the budget crystallized the need for a major shakeup in city government. As he sees it, establishment Democrats in City Council won't push for the kinds of radical changes needed to meaningfully address New York's crises of economic and racial injustice. But if elected, he says, socialists will.

"Are we going to have these small reforms that are going to potentially make things better or are we going to erase the structures of injustice and create alternatives?" he says. "That is the real difference."

In next November's elections, 35 of the City Council's 51 members will be term-limited out of office, presenting a rare chance to alter the balance of power in the legislative body. While the New York City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) hasn't yet announced how many races it will throw its endorsement and significant volunteer labor

behind, socialists have already announced candidacies in all five boroughs. In Brooklyn's 39th district alone, which stretches from Park Slope to Cobble

"There are folks in this City Council who have been there for quite some time who have gotten very comfortable and are not responding to the current political moment with the urgency that they should be," says Chi Anunwa, co-chair of DSA's New York City chapter (an organization to which this reporter belongs). "This is true for the failure to meaningfully defund the police and it's also true for housing. I think the left could potentially do a lot around those issues with fresh blood."

It's unclear how rankedchoice voting, which will debut in the 2021 elections, will impact the prospects for insurgent City Council campaigns. But if the slew of socialist victories in New York State legislature races this summer is any indication, a red wave in the City Council is a real possibility, potentially marking the biggest shift in the council's makeup since the progressive class elected alongside Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2013.

"Generally speaking, that class was very conventionally center-left," says Ross Barkan, a columnist at The Guardian and a former State Senate candidate. "It was not looking to really significantly upend the status quo in any way and it was largely deferential to the mayor. The next City Council will probably be very, very different."

Hill, three socialists are seeking the office.

Such a change would be required, for instance, to establish an Elected Civilian Review Board (ECRB), a strong mechanism for police accountability, which activists have been advocating for years. Unlike the Civilian Complaint Review Board, which is appointed by the mayor, police commissioner and City Council, an ECRB would be elected by and accountable to voters.

Kristin Richardson Jordan, a democratic socialist and thirdgeneration Harlem resident running to represent Manhattan's District 9, supports an ECRB as a transitional measure on the road to police abolition. "They would have the power to fire and suspend local police officers," says Jordan. "I think that would change the whole culture and nature of policing.'

IN NEXT YEAR'S **ELECTIONS, 35 OF** TY COUNCIL'S OF OFFICE, ESENTING A RARE LEGISLATIVE BODY.

RADICAL REFORMS

What a squad of socialists in the council could actually achieve depends to a large extent on how many get elected. While any number of socialists would make a difference in the districts they serve, it would take a fairly substantial number to make a citywide impact. Ten socialists, for instance, could profoundly influence the election of the council speaker, the second-most powerful position in city government. That election, in turn, would affect the selection of powerful committee chairmen and the day-to-day priorities of the council — both powers of the speaker. The speaker also helps determine the composition of a Charter Revision Commission, which can propose major changes to the structure and function of the city's government.

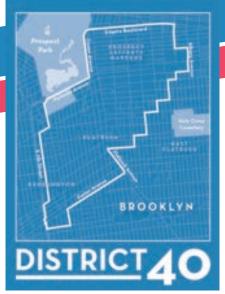
A charter revision would also be required to dramatically overhaul the city's piecemeal approach to planning, which has a significant impact on issues such as gentrification, affordable housing and homelessness.

'We're in a position right now where land-use changes end up being fought out on this rezoning by rezoning basis with one councilmember having a great deal of power and often either passing it against the will of their constituents or saying no and then taking a huge political hit for it," says Samuel Stein, a housing policy analyst for the Community Service Society of New York and author of Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State. A charter revision,

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RED WAVE RISING

Continued from page 8

Stein says, could lead to a comprehensive, citywide planning model that brings land-use decisions under community control and could help fulfill the socialist aim of a housing guarantee.

In the absence of charter revisions, socialist councilmembers could still shift the needle on both policing and land use simply by exercising powers that have been largely neglected in the past.

Instead of letting the police department operate as a "private fiefdom," Barkan says, a socialist caucus could much more aggressively monitor the department by bringing NYPD officers and leaders into the council for hearings and investigations.

Likewise, according to Stein, a group of socialists could band together and use councilmembers' often-ignored ability to proactively propose community-led land use plans for their districts. In that way, they could collectively reimagine broad swaths of the city.

While all those changes could be meaningful, the 2023 budget is the arena where socialists potentially have the biggest opportunity to remake the city — but it's also an issue of great uncertainty. If Democrats win the White House and the Senate and then send direct federal COVID aid to state and local governments, socialist councilmembers could push for that money to fund a recovery program that centers municipal projects over private development.

"Public infrastructure, public housing, public works: that's how we're going to dig ourselves out of the sinkhole that we're in," says Victoria Cambranes, a democratic socialist and native Brooklynite running for City Council in the 33rd District.

Socialists, along with some of the progressive councilmembers who opposed the 2021 budget, would also be in a stronger position to divert money away from the NYPD toward social services.

"It's not all about the socialists that we get into that body, although we want to get as many as we can," says Justin Charles, a member of DSA's National Political Committee. "I think it's about the socialists being able to create space for other progressives to work in coalition with us toward the kind of vision that we're putting forward."

If Republicans retain control of the White House and Congress, however, the federal government will likely continue to hang state and local governments out to dry. In the absence of federal aid so far, Gov. Andrew Cuomo has refused to allow the city to borrow billions of dollars to pay for basic operating expenses and resisted calls to raise taxes on millionaires and billionaires to balance the State's deficit.

Moreover, his recent move to take control of the New York State Financial Control Board, which was set up by the state in the 1970s, means he could be looking to exercise even greater power over the City's finances and impose harsh austerity measures.

"If there's no federal money, and Cuo-

mo refuses to raise taxes, and the city is not allowed to borrow money, no matter how left-wing the City Council is, it'll be quite difficult to enact real change. That costs money," says Barkan. "You can change laws, but the big stuff will be very hard to do."

WIELDING THE BULLY PULPIT

In the face of austerity and opposition across city and state government, the council's relatively small size compared to the state legislature means leftist councilmembers would have a significant bully pulpit to build their movement. Just ask Alderman Andre Vasquez, who was elected to Chicago's City Council last spring along with five other socialists.

Having socialists in government amplifying the concerns of fellow activists and labor organizers and informing their campaigns, he says, is "incredibly powerful." When the Chicago Teachers Union went on strike for two weeks in the fall, for instance, "they knew that they had us on the front line" and the socialist caucus's support ultimately "added more leverage to their conversation."

Passing socialist legislation, however, has proven challenging. Vasquez and the rest of the Council's socialist caucus were elected on a platform of putting the city's police force and its power provider under democratic control, establishing an elected school board, and placing a moratorium on charter schools, among other measures. As those initiatives come up against institutional opposition, Vasquez says, members of the caucus now find themselves split on how to best navigate the political terrain.

"There are some of us who understand that we don't have the numbers and want to continue railing against the system because that causes the kind of tension that raises awareness," he says. "Others of us look and say, 'There are 50 council members, and we need to get to 26 votes, so let's build relationships with colleagues who aren't democratic socialists and figure out how we can get to those numbers and affect change."

If socialists end up a minority in the New York City Council and face resistance from both the powerful mayor and governor, similar deliberations — and their accompanying frustrations — will surely occur. But socialists like West believe that such challenges in the City Council are worth confronting. Combined with movement-building in places like Occupy City Hall, working within the existing halls of power represents a difficult road to change — but still, perhaps, the best one available.

"We've got to create the world we want," West says. "It's less pie in the sky than it would have seemed before."

NYC AFTER COVID

STILL THE REAL ESTATE CAPITAL OF THE **WORLD?**

By Tom Angotti

hile most New Yorkers have been locked in their neighborhoods during the pandemic, the privileged ones left for the Hamptons and exotic estates around the world. Manhattan office and retail spaces shuttered, the restaurant and hospitality industries crumbled, and recently settled gentrifiers went back to where they came from. The city's powerful real estate industry is coping with declining property values and rents and everyone is wondering who and what will survive the pandemic.

This new reality is leading many to question whether we are facing a new period of capital flight and fiscal austerity that will make demands for deep change more difficult to achieve, as in the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. Or whether we are facing new opportunities for liberation from the clutches of finance and real estate. I think both obstacles and opportunities are real and worth understanding.

CONFRONTING AUSTERITY, DEMANDING FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

Even if capital flight and austerity continue, New York City will likely remain a major node for global capitalism. Big real estate, investment capital and wealthy New Yorkers survived the fiscal crisis of the 1970s and are likely to survive this one. They are coveting their half-vacant towers, dazzling finger buildings and historic brownstones. They will hold on until the market turns up again.

Already we are hearing many economists repeat their eternal credo that only new market-rate development can bring people back and save the city. They may accept billionaire Michael Bloomberg's declaration that the mega-luxury Hudson Yards is the "last great neighborhood in Manhattan," but they still look greedily at the privatization of Manhattan's public housing and conversion of the remaining small manufacturers and retailers into upscale boutiques.

In the main, however, big real estate shifted its strategic focus decades ago toward investments in the inner suburbs and outer boroughs, particularly the Brooklyn and Queens waterfronts, the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn and Northwest Queens, in areas that 40 years ago were victims of the city's budget cutting and "planned

Urban real estate still serves as an outlet for excess capital in both good and bad times (Rockefeller Center was built during the Great Depression). Today's pile of excess capital may shrink a bit but the biggest hit will be felt by labor, pension funds and household savings. When capital faces its next great cyclical downturn, the city's upscale enclaves will be expanded, while our neighborhoods will again face austerity.

In the last fiscal crisis, labor and community advocates and veterans of the civil rights movement fought back against service cuts. Today we face the impending crises with new and old social movements. Over the last several years community and housing activists **LOUD & CLEAR:** Amid a public health crisis, tenant activists call for rent cancellation.

scored big victories over the ravenous real estate industry. Tenant groups moved forward on rent regulation and communities of color beat back Mayor Bill De Blasio's rezoning plans that would have promoted new development and displaced renters and homeowners. These fights have led some candidates and elected officials to pledge they will take no money from real estate. Plans for new megaprojects, like Sunnyside Yards in Queens, are facing early opposition, building on the defeat of Amazon's plan for

new development in Long Island City. As we struggle to get back to work and school and fight evictions, promises of more luxury condos plus a few "affordable" housing units will ring hollow.

CHANGE THE POLITICAL CLASS & DEEPLY REFORM **GOVERNMENT**

While it will be a relief to get the growth machine off our backs, our community-based and labor movements face the challenge of building a serious set of alternatives. The seeds for these strategies are already planted in our neighborhoods and the question facing us is how they can grow.

During De Blasio's two terms, a new generation of progressives won seats on the City Council. More people of color occupy important positions in government. However, attempts at deep reforms have been monumentally frustrated. Some of this can be attributed to the power of the Democratic Party machinery, lobbyists and the sheer weight and complexity of the city's bureaucracy.

Going forward, we must be careful that we don't just back a progressive-sounding mayor (we've been there before) but support more independent candidates who are not tainted by wealthy donors and the machine. They should have roots in our diverse social movements and neighborhoods and bring new energy and ideas to government. However, good people and good government are not enough. We need big, transformative proposals that are rooted in our historic social, community and antiracist struggles. As an urbanist from Brooklyn who has worked most of my career inside and outside government, I offer a few big ideas in this small space:

- Governance Activists and experts with roots in our communities need to fully understand and transform all of city government's agency silos, one by one, so they respond to the needs of neighborhoods and not lobbyists.
- Planning Provide real alternatives to the rule of real estate. New York City has never had a comprehensive plan that charts long-term strategies for infrastructure and services. Support real community, citywide and regional planning and put zoning in its place.
- CLIMATE JUSTICE Stop promoting luxury waterfront development. Protect frontline communities that are vulnerable to flooding. Make resiliency planning real and racially just.
- Policing Follow the calls of the decarceration and Black Lives Matter movements to reorganize

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SWING STATE SOLIDARITY

NYC-BASED GROUP AIDS GRASSROOTS ORGS IN FOUR KEY STATES THAT COULD TIP 2020 ELECTION

By Steven Wishnia

f we're going to make a difference in this election, we have to get involved in other states," says Suzanne Bohnker of Brooklyn.

Since early 2019, Bohnker has been volunteering with Water for Grassroots (W4G), a group formed in 2017 to connect activists in New York, where there is little they could do to affect the results of a presidential election, with grassroots organizations in swing states. Its strategy, explains cofounder Peter Hogness, is to create a way to help defeat Donald Trump "without giving the Biden campaign a blank check," and to do that by collaborating with "people doing long-term issue work locally," in order to avoid the political energy that goes into a

This year, W4G is supplying volunteers for phone-banking and other ways of contacting voters to organizations in four states: Pennsylvania Stands Up and Make the Road Action in Pennsylvania; New Florida Majority; LUCHA in Arizona; and Durham for All in Durham, N.C. It's also working with Reclaim Our Vote, a nonpartisan group that is helping people ensure they're registered to vote in "key voter suppression states" such as Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Texas.

Hogness expects that the number of people doing "substantial volunteering" will surpass the 150 the group had in 2018. The organizations it works with generally do a mix of endorsing progressive candidates and helping people vote.

campaign dissipating after the votes are cast.

Pennsylvania Stands Up emerged after Trump's election in 2016, when people held emergency town-hall meetings in every county of the state, says deputy organizing director Julia Berkman-Hill of Lancaster. It now has eight chapters working in 11 counties, including Philadelphia, the Lehigh Valley, Reading, and Harrisburg as well as Lancaster. This year, its Reclaim Philadelphia affiliate backed two democratic socialists who upset incumbent Democratic state legislators in the June primary: Nikil Saval for the Senate and Rick Krajewski for the House.

"In order to have power, we need to get officials elected; in order to build our movement, we need to run campaigns," says Berkman-Hill.

The more than 30 legislative candidates the group has endorsed also includes more centrist Democrats. Flipping the nine House and four Senate seats needed to break the Republicans' legislative majority, she says, would clear the way to expand Medicaid, increase housing funding, and raise Pennsylvania's minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour, the lowest in the urban Northeast.

Durham for All, founded in 2016, has a similar outlook. "After years of doing issue-based work, we need a strategy to get people in power," says lead organizer Bennett Carpenter.



"We can't win better conditions without changing who's in power."

The group helped elect a "pretty solid progressive majority" to the City Council, he adds, but has been frustrated by the hardline rightwing majority of the state legislature, which has prevented the city of 280,000 from enacting rent controls or setting a minimum wage above \$7.25.

The COVID-19 epidemic has drastically changed campaigning, says Water for Grassroots volunteer Rory Bernstein of Brooklyn, because you can't go door-to-door, but "every-body's extremely motivated because of the dire situation."

Volunteers have also helped with "deep canvassing," which is more about talking to people about what issues are important to them and what might motivate them to vote. "It's a different way to reach voters from the traditional 'Hi, I'm representing Candidate X,'" says Bohnker, who did deep-canvassing calls to people in North Carolina who didn't vote in 2016.

"Deep canvassing creates longer, more personal conversations to really connect with voters, making sure to listen as much or more than we talk," says Hogness. "Longer calls, asking about their experiences and sharing some of our own, can often have a deeper effect, espe-

says McAdoo, but no one she's called has ever said anything about it.

"The issues are the same," says Bernstein.

Durham for All was a bit wary about working with out-of-staters at first, says Carpenter, but it takes training really seriously, he adds, and issues such as gentrification are common concerns across lines of race, class, and geography. Durham, once a working-class city of tobacco and textile mills with a substantial Black middle class, is now gentrifying rapidly as the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Research Triangle region becomes a hub for the tech industry.

This involvement in electoral politics represents a significant change for the U.S. left, which for decades before Sen. Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential race largely rejected it in favor of direct action, with the biggest exception Rev. Jesse Jackson's campaigns for the Democratic nomination of 1984 and 1988. The lesson they are drawing is that while the Civil Rights Act of 1964 never would have happened without the movement's direct-action protests, it also never would have passed without support in Congress and the political skills of President Lyndon Johnson.

"I have not in the past been a big elections person, but this

seemed like the essential thing to do," says McAdoo. She was active in the 1960s antiwar movement, but believes her generation failed to produce lasting organizations.

Jose LaLuz, a longtime labor-union activist who was a surrogate for Sanders' presidential campaign earlier this year, argues that the energy of the mas-

sive and multiracial movement against police violence "has to be translated into political engagement."

Elections are a tactic that can "build power from the ground up," he says. It's not only a matter of electing activists to office, but also "to raise these issues at a time when people's interest is much higher."

He praises Water for Grassroots for doing an "excellent job" of reaching infrequent voters, often Latino and working class, that campaigns "have left on the table."

Unlike the Democrats' centrist wing, which is concentrating on trying to persuade "swing voters" to choose Joseph Biden over Trump, these groups are focusing more on persuading infrequent voters to choose voting against Trump over staying home. Durham for All's "Swing the State" campaign is making calls to 17,000 city residents, mostly poor and Black, who did not vote in 2016, says Carpenter.

"The only good thing that came out of Trump winning is that people are more aware of who they're voting for," says Garcia. "If you come out here and put in the work and put out a message that resonates with people, you're going to win."

For more, visit water4grassroots.org.

BEAT TRUMP WHILE BUILDING POWER FOR THE LONG HAUL

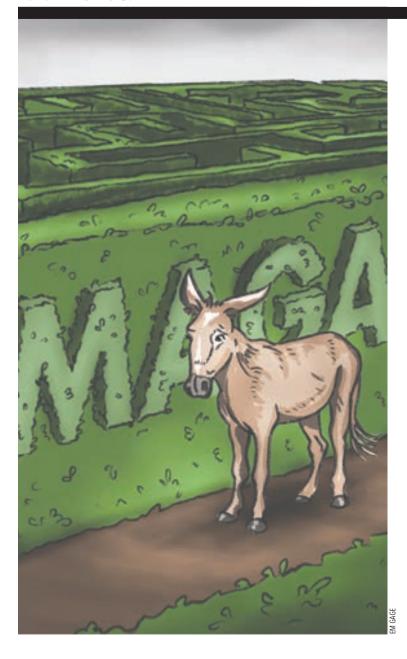
cially in talking with voters who've been abandoned by the political system."

Maisie McAdoo of Brooklyn, a retired communications specialist for the United Federation of Teachers, is one of 150 Water for Grassroots volunteers working with Reclaim Our Vote to send postcards to voters asking them if they're sure they're registered or need help getting absentee ballots or voting early. In Georgia, Gov. Brian Kemp purged more than 300,000 voters from the rolls last year.

As the election nears, however, the group will switch to phone-banking. Rory Bernstein has been calling volunteers to get them to sign up for shifts, usually 90 minutes to two hours. Make the Road Action, the electoral arm of the Brooklynbased Make the Road organization, plans to make more than 1.4 million calls to encourage voters, followed by 500,000 texts and 500,000 get-out-the-vote calls, says political director Ivan Garcia.

"You get a lot of hangups and a lot of screw-yous when you cold-call, but it was surprising how many people want to talk," says McAdoo. She advises showing you're willing to listen — "a little humility helps, and bluster doesn't."

Calling from out of state doesn't appear to be a problem. "I had to wrestle a bit with the carpetbagger problem,"



UNITED FRONT OR BUST

By Ethan Young

eople lie. People cheat. People steal. Some get punished. Some wind up taking the punishment for someone else. That's the way of this wicked world.

But a wise man once said that the pre-

But a wise man once said that the prevailing ideology of a society reflects the ideology of its ruling class. So when the president blatantly lies, cheats, steals and twiddles his lips as others suffer, it follows that people will lose confidence in truth, honesty, property and the rule of law.

It's a bitter lesson, and the capitalist class is only starting to get it. We face the distinct possibility of a presidential election where the popular vote will be irrelevant, as it was in 2016. We can't even be sure that the Electoral College will be relevant, if Trump makes a hash of the voting process and the other powersthat-be play possum, as they have on other occasions.

This is the agony of the pre-election months of 2020. The whole world is living through it, because if the Republicans continue to see the pandemic as a casino chip, the cost in lives worldwide will be incalculable. And yet it looks like they will continue this way. The Democratic Party is running against the

lurking threat to social peace that would hurt the functioning of a society based on private commerce. Trump is promoting race war and even running on it.

We can almost taste the confusion at the top of the Democratic Party. This is not how the game is played. Elections come from democracy, and if democracy is dismantled, there will be no more parties in the usual sense. Yet if Trump is beaten, the Democrats will still be faced with a situation they aren't

prepared for. More crises at once than even Franklin D. Roosevelt had to handle. Not a strong incentive to take over. But them losing would unleash hell.

Are we doomed to just stand back and watch this wretched clusterfuck? The alternative to inferno is not centrist Democratic confusion and anxiety. It's the possibility of making the left into an organized national opposition with direct ties to millions of people after Election Day. This is what we have to aim for, as hard as it is to say with a straight face. We know the centrists are afraid of that happening at least as much as they are of four (or more) years of Trump.

There is only one option for the left before the big showdown: Close ranks with the centrists and work harder than them to oust Trump, and hopefully flip the Senate. Anything else is praying for rain. This can open the possibility to avert greater disaster and change the left from a sideshow to a political force. The left's victories in Democratic primaries for Congress and state and local offices across the country shows this can be done, and electoral work and mass protest show how it's done. If we continue to push the Green New Deal and Medicare for All, both will be

Continued on next page



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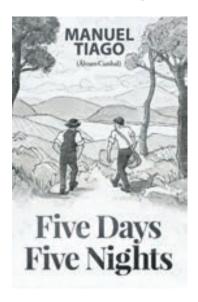
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NYC POST-COVID

Continued from page 11

the approach to public safety.

- Housing Preserve NYCHA (public housing), subsidize permanent housing for the unhoused and don't subsidize "affordable housing" that is not affordable to most working people. Expand the use of community land trusts to preserve public investments in housing and public space.
- Transportation Drastically restrict circulation by motor vehicles and prioritize investments in bus, subway, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure throughout the city, not just Manhattan.
- Sanitation Fully implement the city's Zero Waste policies, shifting from collection towards waste reduction and community-based composting and recycling.
- Public Health Fully fund the fight against the epidemics of obesity and asthma that disproportionately affect communities of color.

- EDUCATION End the inequalities in school spending and access.
- COMMUNITY BOARDS Members of the city's 59 community boards are appointed by Borough Presidents and City Council members. The boards should be elected, have adequate professional staff, and be empowered to develop long-range plans.

The typical "expert" on government will dismiss all of this saying it costs too much and we're facing fiscal austerity. When it comes to transformative changes both large and small, however, the key elements are political leadership, government restructuring and reforming agency policies.

The other day on my walk in a city park I saw the usual overflowing garbage cans guarded by useless cops sitting in their air-conditioned car busily texting. Imagine if city employees were reorganized as stewards of the land and public welfare!

Tom Angotti is author of New York For Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate and co-editor of Zoned Out: Race, Displacement and City Planning in New York City. He is Professor Emeritus of Urban Policy & Planning at Hunter College and The Graduate Center, CUNY.

UNITED FRONT

Continued from previous page

achievable despite the threat of fascism — but only if the GOP is defeated.

We have the capacity to make the move. Remote phone-banking means that wherever we are, we can work for any campaign in the U.S. We should piggyback outreach for anti-Trump votes with the campaigns of left Congressional candidates like the Squad (all up for re-election), Cori Bush in Missouri, Jamaal Bowman in New York, and Marie Newman in Illinois. Working through individual campaigns' phone banking efforts, they get voter information directly, independent of the party leaders.

Hopefully, protest will not be driven off the streets by the already proven threat of violence. There is so much to scream about, and so many ears to reach. The whole left can agree on that old Wobbly slogan, "Agitate, Educate, Organize!" Better we should have the way free to do it in public. But we can't count on that if the Republicans win, so it's time to start thinking of ways to do it when protest is prevented by law or by social repression.

Another old left idea is the united front. The concept is easier to grasp than to realize

in a movement as fragmented and politically incoherent as the U.S. left. There are simplistic alternatives: Any two people can form a "vanguard party," and any smashed soul can retreat from the struggle and light a match, wave a gun, or punch a cop. But unity is imperative, whether people want to push a progressive alternative or see that the threat to democracy requires a unified defense.

United fronts were what laid the basis for the defeat of fascism in World War II, a number of successful revolutions after the war, and the rise of industrial unionism here in the U.S. The unity in action of progressive forces is what makes the possibility of social transformation realistic for the burned-out and the damned. We should keep this in mind, even when forced to retreat, even when factional fights leave us raw, or we forget where we are and where we can be in the din of collapse.

We can make laws and elections work for us, sometimes. We can get the upper hand in street confrontations, sometimes. But in every case it depends on numbers and unity, not money or arms. That needs to be the focus of our strategy, short-term and long-term.

The U.S. gives Israel more than \$3.8 billion in military aid every year; some of it goes to imprisoning children.

"They're seized in the dead of night, blindfolded and cuffed, abused and manipulated to confess to crimes they didn't commit. Every year Israel arrests almost 1,000 Palestinian youngsters, some of them not yet 13."

—Netta Ahituv, in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* 3/16/19

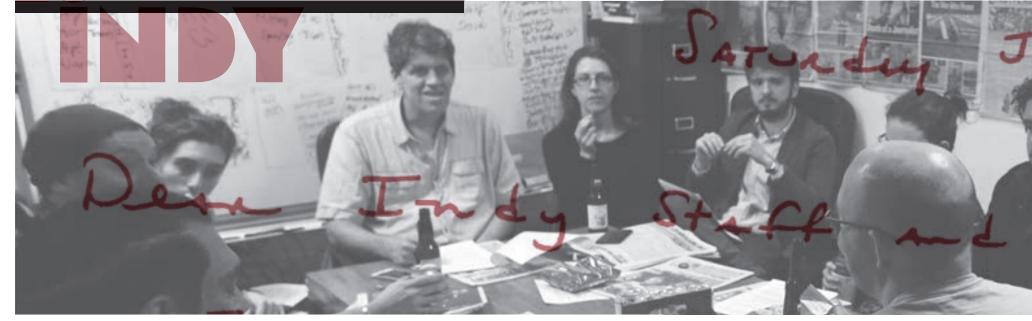
The U.S. also supports annexation and the continuous demolition and confiscation of Palestinian property, as well as the restricting of Palestinian movement.

Members of Congress are beginning to push back. Twenty-six House members have co-sponsored the No Way to Treat a Child Act (HR 2407), which would withhold U.S. military aid used to violate the rights of children (under the age of 18 as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

A joint House and Senate letter puts the spotlight on Israel's pending annexation of Palestinian lands, in violation of international law. Twelve representatives have signed a letter stating, "We will work to ensure non-recognition of annexed territories as well as pursue legislation that conditions the \$3.8 billion in U.S. military funding to Israel to ensure that U.S. taxpayers are not supporting annexation in any way,"

Where do your representatives stand on U.S. tax dollars being used to abuse Palestinian children and annex Palestinian land? **Ask them.**





UNLIKELY Journey

THE INDY HAS SURVIVED AND THRIVED OVER TWO TUMULTUOUS DECADES. NOW IT FACES ITS GREATEST CHALLENGE.

By John Tarleton

s Priscilla Felia was driving through the desolate, boarded-up streets of Lower Manhattan one night a couple of weeks after the George Floyd uprising swept across New York City, she saw something that made her pull over.

One of *The Indypendent's* bright red-and-white news boxes was standing alone on a street corner just south of Houston Street. Felia didn't expect to find anything. We had switched to publishing exclusively online at the height of the pandemic with daily reports on nearly every facet of a sprawling, fast-moving story. Nonetheless, Felia later wrote us, "I just had to stop and pay homage by touching the box and opening the little door."

Then she got a jolt: A stack of brand-new *Indys* featuring Black Lives Matter coverage filled the box.

"I nearly jumped out of my sandals," she added in her neat, handwritten script. "I was so happy and excited. I had to take extras for friends, two of which will be mailed to friends in North Carolina."

The Indypendent was launched 20 years ago this fall. It was a conspiracy of hope. Our goal was to reach tens of thousands of everyday New Yorkers like Priscilla Felia, who hungered for an alternative source of news and analy-

sis that challenged the conventional wisdom of a corporatedominated society and brought back stories of resistance from the streets of New York City and the far corners of the world.

Twenty years is both a long time and the blink of an eye. Each issue we have published has been a small miracle. To be still standing is a bigger miracle. That we're making readers like Priscilla jump out of their shoes two decades later at the sight of a new issue is the best news of all.

• • •

EVERY INSTITUTION has an origin story. Ours is a good one. It begins in the late 1990s at SUNY Purchase, where Ana Nogueira was the editor-in-chief of her college news-

paper. Nogueira's faculty advisor had promised to put her protégé on the fast track to a scholarship at the Columbia School of Journalism and a *Wall Street Journal* internship. But when Nogueira tried to publish hard-hitting articles on police brutality, the minimizing of the number of sexual assault cases on campus and other abuses of power, her mentor overruled her.

"She told me I was through, because 'that's not how the real world works,'" said Nogueira, who never looked back.

A couple of years later, the placid 1990s ended with a bang when tens of thousands of protesters, including this writer, swarmed downtown Seattle and shut down a summit meeting of the World Trade Organization. Diplomats had gathered from 136 countries to hammer out a series of global free trade pacts that would have expanded corporate power while undermining labor, consumer, human and environmental rights. Instead, those talks collapsed amid the tumult. After decades of retreat and defeat, it was a rare and stunning victory for the left that gave a jolt of energy to many radical movements in this country and beyond.

"The Battle of Seattle" also gave birth to Indymedia, a decentralized global network of left-wing media collectives (and the source of the "y" in our name) that spread to more than 200 cities around the world and pioneered the use of online crowd-sourced reporting a decade before the rise of

The Indypendent was a product of the movement moment we emerged from, and most of us believed fervently in making decisions by consensus. Passionate debates ensued. Was it more authentic to keep a writer's misspelled words and errant commas on the page? Could we have an editorial hierarchy of any kind and still be true to our egalitarian politics? Were there any circumstances in which advertising could be a legitimate source of funds? One thing we were all convinced of was the futility of electoral politics, especially involvement with the Democratic Party.

A fan of Indymedia donated a 2,500-square-foot loft space in midtown Manhattan with a high-speed Internet connection for us to work out of. The Indymedia office became a community hub that saw frequent visitors. It also became a squat, thanks to the kitchen and shower on site. As many as seven of us at a time lived there, throwing down mattresses in the nooks and crannies of the space, going out late at night to forage from bountiful local dumpsters. When I would wake up on cold winter mornings in my makeshift home in a 3-foot by 8-foot storage closet in the back of the office, I could see my breath. At least the commute to work was short.

• •

When you are living in a countercultural space like the one we created, it's tempting to want to withdraw into an activist bubble, ignore the larger world and all its ugly, messy contradictions and create your own private clubhouse. However, events outside our control forced us to an-

swer the existential questions we had been debating. When a pair of jet planes full of passengers crashed into the World Trade Center on 9/11, every paper in the city howled for war, including The Village Voice. Our page one headline read "How Should We Respond?" The article by Mike Burke quoted peace activists instead of retired generals working for military contractors and asked "Wouldn't fighting terror with terror propel the nation, and indeed the world into a war where there may be no win-

we an old one inside, but I wist had to stop and pay homize to stop and pay homize to touching the box and opening the the dook. Lo and behold!

social media. Within months, Nogueira and others began organizing a New York City chapter of Indymedia. She also rustled up a \$500 grant from the Puffin Foundation to print the first four-page, black-and-white edition of this paper that would speak to New Yorkers who might never find the NYC Indymedia website.

Our young paper threw open its doors and drew activists and artists, crackpots and visionaries, novice reporters and veterans of the alternative press.

"I've been in love with print ever since the 1980s, when I worked at the [New York] *Guardian* independent radical newsweekly," says Ellen Davidson, who joined the project in 2001 and is active to this day. "When you're out on the streets organizing, there is nothing like handing someone a newspaper to get your message out. They'll take it home and read it later. And people absorb information differently when it's on a printed page than when it comes through a screen."

ners?"

In such a fraught environment we had to use every word well to connect with skeptical readers instead of repelling them. Our circulation doubled from 5,000 to 10,000. The turnout for our weekly meetings quickly tripled. We began to hold monthly reporting workshops to even out the skills imbalance within our group and to get more aspiring people's journalists into the streets. We also added a culture section, which offered another way to talk about what mattered to us without being tethered to the ebb and flow of events.

"The Indy reminds us we exist," Naomi Klein once said of the paper, meaning that the wide-ranging grassroots coverage in its pages each month gave concrete form to the much-touted "movement of movements" that can seem more like activist hype than reality.

Unfortunately, you can't find what it takes to print a

THE INDYPENDENT October 2020



EDITORIAL MEETING: The Indypendent's *editors and* writers gather at the paper's Downtown Brooklyn office circa 2018.

newspaper at the bottom of a dumpster. So we had to learn how to raise money. There were underground dance parties

and a four-color 36-inch by 24-inch poster that depicted where the weapons of mass destruction were made and stored in the United States. It sold briskly at anti-war rallies and was snapped up by lefty community radio stations around the country that used it as a fund drive premium. Eventually we lost our virginity, selling our first ads to a radical bookstore and a feminist sex toy shop. And to be honest, it felt pretty damn good. We were helping ourselves and community-based organizations and businesses we wanted to flourish.

In 2004, American Apparel threw a pile of dough at us to hawk their undergarments on our back page in the run-up to massive protests at that year's Republican National Convention in New York. It was the first and only large corporate account

within a couple of years here in the United States. The Indymedia network was mostly defunct by the end of the 2000s, technologically superseded first by blogs and then social media and finally eviscerated by internal strife. Still we powered ahead, covering powerful new movements we could have scarcely imagined when we began: Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, Me Too, climate justice and the revival of socialism as a serious political current in this country for the first time in decades.

"We had a self-described socialist within spitting distance of the American presidency," Nicholas Powers wrote in his post-mortem of Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential run. "The world was watching, because when you peeled off the ideology, what was left was a simple thing. We

of my sambals. I was so hyppy and excited. I had to take extrass for friends, two of which will be mailed to Noeth Canolina, Ratheigh and charlotte

we've ever landed. Before we took it, we checked with the union that was trying to organize the American Apparel's workers and it assured us there was no boycott being called for against the company. We used the extra revenues to switch to fullcolor covers that increased our visibility and attracted more talented illustrators. We had two modestly paid staff positions for the first time, which allowed me to move out of the storage closet and into the rent-controlled apartment of a friend of the paper. We also used some of that undergarment money to spin off a monthly Spanish language edition, El Independiente. In that same era, we helped launch Indykids, "a free paper for free kids" ages 8-12 that still publishes.

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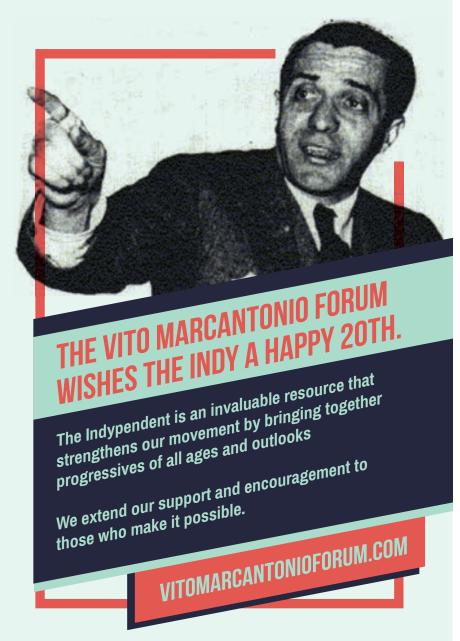
THE ALTER-GLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT that The *Indy* sprang from petered out

wanted to love our neighbors. We wanted everyone to have enough because we're tired of hurting each other to get it."

We also became more sophisticated in our understanding of local politics. This allowed us to help our readership map power in this city and how to confront it. When the Sanders campaign inspired local versions of his challenge to the Democratic Party machine, we jumped into covering them with gusto. The first socialists to run in local races lost but, we noted, ran stronger than expected with hundreds of volunteers hitting the doors on their behalf. Electoral politics no longer seemed hopeless. In 2018, we became the very first print publication to put then congressional candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on their cover.

"HOLY SMOKES!" She tweeted.
"Our campaign is the FRONT PAGE STORY of NYC's classic monthly, @ TheIndypendent!"



























ISPOSSIBLE

For 20 years THE INDYPENDENT has been a bold, progressive newspaper and website that provides a unique voice in the NYC media landscape. Here are some of the highlights of our journey so far.

By Indypendent Staff

ISSUE 2 Inspired by the Nov. 1999 Battle of Seattle and a subsequent wave of anti-corporate protests that rippled around the world, The Indypendent launches as a four-page, black-and-white newspaper dedicated to covering radical social movements in NYC and beyond. It is a part of Indymedia, a global network of grassroots media projects that flourished in the early 2000s, hence the "y" in our name.

SEPTEMBER ISSUE 11

The Indy publishes a four-page special issue within 48 hours of the 9/11 attacks and another 12-page special issue a week later. As the Bush administration rushes to exploit public rage and fear following 9/11, The Indy becomes a magnet for New Yorkers who are alarmed by where the country is headed.

NOVEMBER ISSUE 22 A who's who of leading Democrats, including Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden, can't figure it out. But four months before the United States invades Iraq, The Indy publishes a special issue titled "Why War? Why Now?" The issue debunks official rationales for war, offers a first-hand glimpse in and covers the growing antiwar movement highlights dozens of sites in the United S destruction are developed and produced. nales for war, offers a first-hand glimpse into the lives of ordinary Iraqis and covers the growing antiwar movement. A two-page center spread highlights dozens of sites in the United States where weapons of mass SUMMER ISSUE 52

While corporate media push unsubstantiated scare stories about protesters and terrorists besieging New York during the upcoming Republican National Convention, The Indy trumpets the rights of dissenters and reports on the myriad reasons they are taking to the streets. Two August issues have print runs of 100,000 and 150,000, the largest circulation in decades for a radical, grassroots newspaper.

DECEMBER ISSUE 62

John Tarleton profiles Harold Noel, a Brooklyn-born Iraq War vet who finds himself fighting mental illness and sleeping outside at the onset of winter while his family falls apart. Noel's story is subsequently picked up by a number of national outlets. Noel tells The Indy, "I walk around crying every day. I feel lost in my own land; the land I fought for. ... Sometimes I just feel like picking up a gun and calling it quits. ... But, something's got to get better. I didn't just risk my life for nothing. There's a God out there — somewhere." A month later, an anonymous donor puts up \$18,500 to cover a year's rent for a three-bedroom apartment in the Bronx for Noel, his wife and three kids.

FEBRUARY ISSUE 65

With the Republicans entrenched in the White House for another four long years, The Indy declares it's "Moving Beyond Bush and Dick" in its first annual sex issue. Featured articles include a look at the working life of a dominatrix, boot fetishes, BDSM and the use of safewords, a how-to guide for making dildos and a firstperson piece on fighting back against the police harassment of queers cruising in Central Park's Ramble area.

ISSUE 76

The Indy publishes a post-Katrina special issue that looks at the blatant disregard for Black lives in the response of the government and the corporate media as well as the hidden heroics of people coming to each other's aid. "I'm in the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans, the only part that isn't flooded," writes former New Orleans Black Panther and community organizer Malik Rahim. "The water is good. Our parks and schools could easily hold 40,000 people and they're not using any of it. This is criminal. People are dying for no other reason than the lack of organization."

NOVEMBER ISSUE 112

When the House of Representatives approves the Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Act by a vote of 400-6, it seems a sure bet that the measure will sail through the Senate and be signed by President George W. Bush. However, when Jessica Lee's reporting reveals how the legislation could be used

by the government to target people engaged in First Amendment-protected activity and traditional forms of nonviolent civil disobedience, a firestorm of criticism ensues from activists and civil libertarians across the political spectrum. The legislation subsequently dies in the Senate. Lee would later win a Project Censored award for writing one of the 10 most important under-reported domestic news stories of that year.

APRIL ISSUE 119

Using the story of a dementia-afflicted, 86-year-old homeowner in Crown Heights as a starting point, Joseph Huff-Hannon does a deep dive into the predatory practices of sub-prime mortgage lenders in neighborhoods like Crown Heights and Bed-Stuy. "If the housing market falls precipitously here as it has across much of the nation," Huff-Hannon warns, "a cascade of foreclosures is likely to follow. An alarming number of those losing their homes will likely be

MARCH ISSUE 133

Sarah Secunda captures the zeitgeist of the Great Recession in her coverage of striking immigrant workers at the Stella D'oro bakery in the Bronx who find themselves locked in a bitter labor battle against a private equity company demanding deep cuts in

SEPTEMBER ISSUE 155

In a special back-to-school issue of The Indy, we hear from activist parents, teachers, students and radical education scholars on the pitfalls of corporate school reform, overreliance on standardized testing, the importance of teachers unions and the misuse of "gifted and talented" programs to maintain a system of de facto segregation in New York City's public schools.

FALL ISSUES 170-172

The Indy publishes three special issues during Occupy Wall Street and its immediate aftermath. Coverage ranges from photo essays and first-person pieces to analysis of the relationship between Occupy and labor unions, the police and the 99% and why taking over public squares in major global cities is such a powerful tactic.

NOVEMBER ISSUE 181

We publish a 20-page, post-Sandy special edition that includes the latest news on relief efforts and how to get involved, a look at the real estate industry's drive to build on the waterfront and a deep-dive (so to speak) piece on the impact of rising ocean levels over the coming centuries.

JANUARY ISSUE 183

As Barack Obama begins his second term as president, The Indy appoints a Shadow Cabinet of visionary thinkers and doers. Each Shadow Cabinet member writes a short essay about what they would do upon taking office. Shadow Cabinet appointees include Secretary of State Laura Flanders, Attorney General Michael Ratner and Secretary of Energy Bill McKibben, who titles his article "One Thing Before I'm Fired."

DECEMBER ISSUE 202

After protests erupt across the nation in response to the non-indictments of police officers who killed Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Nicholas Powers writes in The Indy, "We show our hands because we're scared of being killed by officers who have been given license to kill Black people and go unpunished. I'm asking you to take this weight from us. I'm asking you to hold your hands up too."

OCTOBER ISSUE 209

Soon after Donald Trump jumps to the front of the Republican primary field, The Indy runs a cover story on Trump's career as a crony capitalist. While many pundits at the time assume Trump's buffoonish campaign will soon flame out, the piece's author Peter Rugh warns that the former reality TV star can very well win the White House and if he does, "President Trump" will morph into King Donald I.

JANUARY ISSUE 221

Millions of people in hundreds of cities take to the streets in women-led marches on the day after Trump's inauguration. In conjunction with the marches, we publish a 20-page Women's March special edition that amplified the voices and concerns of the most progressive

"Holy SMOKES!" Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweets on June 2, 2018. "Our campaign is the FRONT PAGE STORY of NYC's classic monthly.

The Indy's profile of AOC's under-the-media radar run for Congress marks her first appearance on a newspaper or magazine cover. But it won't be the last after the 28-year-old democratic socialist goes on to win a historic primary victory over Queens Democratic Party boss Joe

MAY ISSUE 246 "Take Down The Landlords" screams the

headline of the May 2019 *Indy*, a 24-page affordable housing special edition. A month later, tenants rights advocates did just that, winning sweeping rent law reforms in the NY state legislature that stunned the real estate industry.

AUGUST ISSUE 257

When COVID-19 hits New York full force in March, The Indy responds by publishing more than 80 original articles on indypendent.org during the first three months of the pandemic. Coverage includes first-person pieces from frontline nurses facing PPE shortages, reports from inside Rikers Island, profiles of a sprawling network of mutual aid groups, a look at the growing Cancel Rent movement and reviews of the best anti-capitalist movies to watch while secluded at home. Our August cover story gives voice to the growing opposition of parents, teachers and support staff to a poorly conceived plan to reopen New York City's public schools.

















WHAT THE INDY **MEANS TO ME**

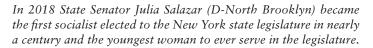
SOME OF OUR FAVORITE READERS SOUND OFF

By Indypendent Staff



SEN. JULIA SALAZAR

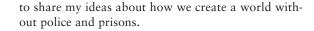
The Indypendent is an extraordinary publication because it actively engages readers and contributors. The Indy doesn't stop at reporting, but motivates us to become actively involved in the greater movement for social justice. When I was a freelance writer, The Indy empowered me to collaborate with other writers and editors to pursue our common political project. The Indy's work has a lasting and meaningful impact because it's a publication that inspires readers to take action. The Indy has shaped my political development as a community organizer by demonstrating the importance of amplifying the stories of those who are directly impacted by inequality and oppression. In New York's political climate, power is too often consolidated in the hands of the very wealthy, and that power is used to dominate the public narrative. For 20 years, The Indy has played an indispensable role in countering that narrative by speaking truth to power, serving as a platform for the struggles of everyday New Yorkers. From reporting on the statewide movement for housing justice to investigating the mechanics of the Queens political machine, The Indy has been a leader in the popular education of the public. *The Indy* is a model for what it means for a news publication to provide a crucial public service and to operate with integrity.





ALEX VITALE

The United States is experiencing a national crisis in policing. But the fight to end abusive policing is primarily a local struggle targeting local political actors. Unfortunately, across the country, local reporting has either gone out of style, or is under the control of a shrinking number of news conglomerates with little interest in directly challenging the "thin blue line" politics that stands in the way of the changes we need to implement to create safer communities without aggressive and invasive policing. That's why it's imperative that we have a source of independent local news like The Indypendent. And part of what makes The Indy so powerful is that it doesn't just report on events that are relevant to our movements, it directly works to help build those movements. It does that by including the voices of people doing the organizing for an audience of politically engaged readers. It's a sounding board for ideas and analysis that is essential to any real movement. And, because our movements are becoming more powerful, a growing group of mainstream journalists and political insiders are watching what's happening in The Indy. It's that diverse audience of movement activists, journalists, political insiders and, yes, the general public, that makes *The Indy* an appealing place for me



Alex S. Vitale is professor of sociology and coordinator of the Policing and Social Justice Project at Brooklyn College and author of The End of Policing.



Since its launch two decades ago, The Indypendent has been a crucial voice for the New York City left. It gives us news, opinions and connections to each other that we would have great difficulty establishing without it. For the climate justice movement that has meant that *The Indy*, in its print and online versions, consistently covers the actions and concerns of the movement. It covers the small, local actions that are never covered by other citywide media; it covers the big demonstrations and actions that are barely covered and often dismissed or misinterpreted by the corporate

The Indy has "followed the story" of the climate movement as it has ebbed and flowed over the years. The Indy knows that the thick thread that connects one environmental effort to the next is essential for the movement to understand itself more fully and for the broader public that may not be directly engaged in climate work to be better informed. It knows that the depth of the movement is measured by its importance to people of color and work-

Because *The Indy* is a movement journal, it helps us to see the movements we are most invested in in the broader context of progressive organizing. We read about our own work and about the work of the other progressive movements too. That helps to give us good ideas for future organizing, to make contact and connections with groups we didn't know existed and to broaden our understanding of how the left is progressing in general.

I believe the left is on the verge of becoming more powerful and effective than it has been in decades, and I know that *The Indy* will help advance that power through its insightful and accurate coverage. Because its writers and editors know the power of the broad movement, not just its smaller parts, The Indy will help us move forward together. Happy 20th anniversary, Indypendent!

Nancy Romer is a co-founder of the NYC People's Climate Move-



The Indypendent is more necessary today than it was two decades ago when it was founded. With local journalism collapsing and national outlets prioritizing spin and profitability over real reportage, The Indypendent is a reminder of what is possible — principled, radical journalism that goes beyond the hype. I'm heartened every time I see a copy of The Indypendent on the street or an article shared online. Here's to another 20 years.

Astra Taylor is a writer, organizer and documentarian. Her books include The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age and Democracy May Not Exist, But We'll Miss It When It's Gone.





UNLIKELY JOURNEY

Continued from page 17

• • •

The past dozen years have seen the collapse of the media industry. Hundreds of thousands of journalists have lost their jobs. Newspapers in particular have been gutted — by the 2008 financial crash, by the Google/Facebook duopoly making a mockery of antitrust laws to hoover up online ad dollars and most recently by the pandemic and the economic crisis. Throughout, we've been able to survive and even thrive.

This isn't easy to do because there is a constant churn among our volunteers. Like the waves of the sea, they roll in one after another and make their mark, then recede and are replaced by others. While there are a some long-timers who have stuck with it for a decade or more, most *Indy* participants are active for several months, a year or two or three and then move on with new skills, new confidence, valuable clips, a keener sense of what they want to do in life, a deeper knowledge of the city and its social justice movements, long-term friendships that will endure beyond the paper. Some, like Ana Nogueira, move on to full-time media jobs. She became a producer at Democracy Now! as did Mike Burke, another *Indy* co-founder.

From the vantage point of 20 years, what's striking to me is how consistently outstanding our volunteers and staff have been: talented, passionate, hard-working, politically aware, eager to give voice to the issues they care about. The chance to be a part of a vibrant, supportive community counts for something too in our alienated, atomized society and often inspires people to give more of themselves to the project.

"I got involved in January and haven't looked back," says Amba Guerguerian, *The Indy's* administrative manager. "I'm grateful to be a part of something that is so people centered."

• • •

In 2016, a chance encounter we had with a new reader while handing out papers at a subway station led to us receiving the financial support we needed to dust off long-shelved plans to place news boxes on street corners across the city and more than double our print circulation to 45,000 copies

Was that luck or perseverance?

Either way it has made it possible for us to introduce many tens of thousands of progressive New Yorkers to down-ballot leftists such as AOC, Tiffany Cabán, Julia Salazar and Jabari Brisport among others. We're also amplifying the voices of New York City social movements fighting and not infrequently winning against ICE, NYPD, Amazon, the landlord lobby, the bail bond industry, the police unions, Gov. 1% and our bumbling mayor for starters.

We want to continue to do great work in 2021 and beyond, but the coronavirus calamity that has laid waste to our society has not left us unscathed. Some of our major donors have had to pull back. Most of our events-base advertising may not return any time soon either. And while we've had an unprecedented explosion of ads in this 20th anniversary issue, that is not going to be enough over the long haul. To ensure *The Indy* survives these perilous times, please visit page 22 and see how you can do your part.

John Tarleton joined the Indypendent collective in fall 2000. He is the paper's executive editor. His favorite dumpster score back in the day was a nice unblemished pineapple and cinnamon raisin bagels to nibble on while working late at night.



WE SIMPLE.

The outpouring of ads celebrating our **20TH ANNIVERSARY** issue is inspiring. Still, we have only one viable path for the long run: for more readers who value the paper to become Indy Members, for as little as \$50 per year.

This fall we need to raise **\$80,000**, or we will have to scale back what we do in 2021 — fewer issues, fewer pages, fewer stories told about the movements fighting to shape the future of post-pandemic New York City.

THE DOTS ON THE OTHER PAGE represent \$80,000 in increments of \$50. The more you give, the more quickly we can fill the remaining circles. For example, when you give \$100, you fill two circles, \$200 four circles, \$1,000 twenty circles.

The good news is we're off to a fast start. We've raised **\$19,600** so far in donations and pledges, almost one-fourth of our goal, or 392 circles filled.

PLEASE HELP US FILL MORE OF THOSE CIRCLES TODAY. WITH YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP, YOU WILL RECEIVE:

- An Indypendent tote bag.
- Free access to all of our weekly e-newsletters.
- Access to monthly Zoom events in which we talk to authors and activists about the important issues of the day.
- The chance to participate in our annual spring vision meeting.

If you give \$100 or more, we will include a free one-year print subscription, in addition to everything else you will receive.

You can give online at **indypendent.org/donate** or send a check to **The Indypendent / 388 Atlantic Ave, 2nd Fl / Brooklyn, NY 11217**

Thank you for your support. It means more now than ever.

THE STAFF & VOLUNTEERS OF THE INDYPENDENT

NAME

ADDRESS

ADDILLOG

STATE/CITY/ZIP

EMAIL

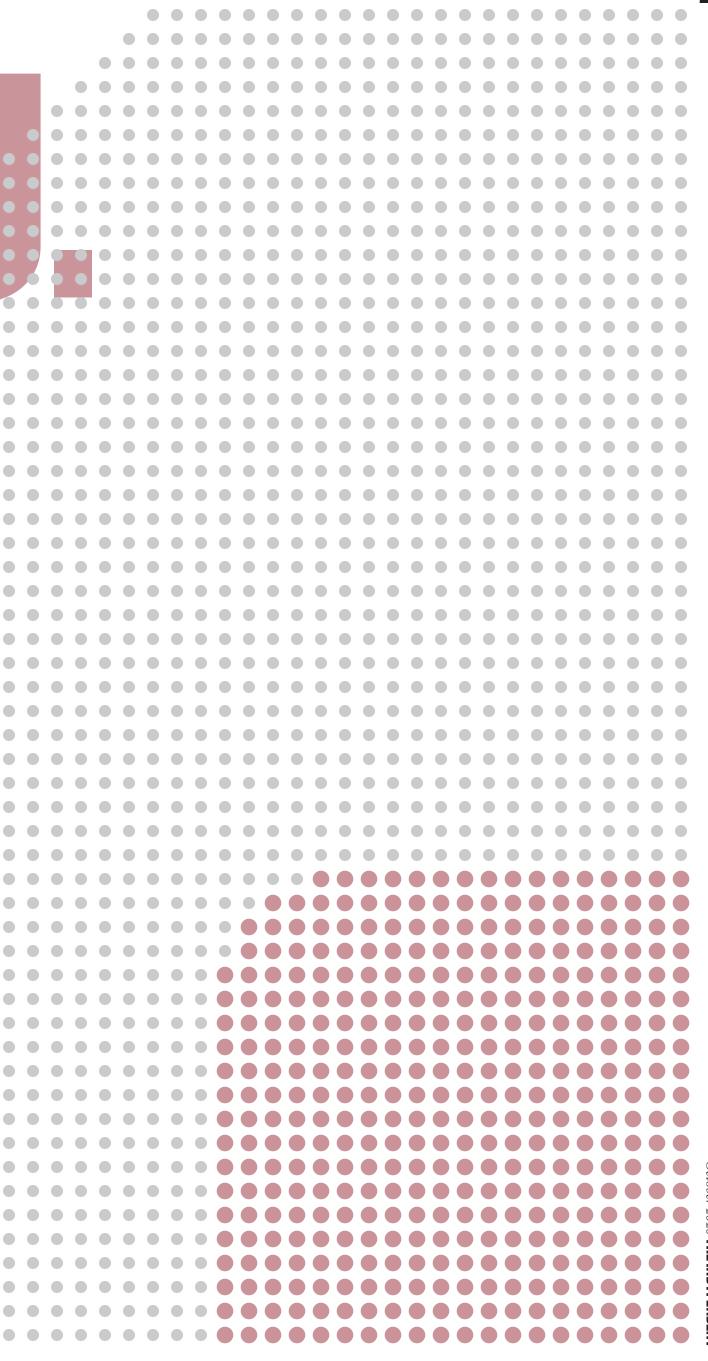
IF YOU WISH TO DONATE VIA CREDIT CARD AND NEED ASSISTANCE, CALL US AT 212-904-1282 AND WE WILL GET BACK TO YOU PROMPTLY.



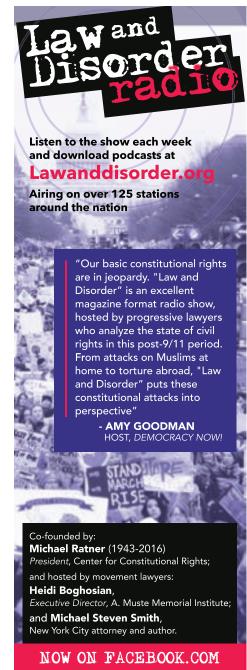


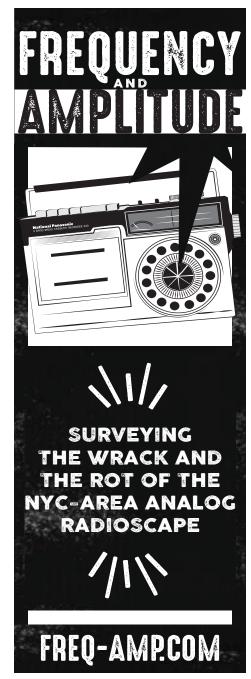


















CONGRATULATIONS TO THE INDYPENDENT ON 20 YEARS OF SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER.

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FROM ITS INCEPTION, THE INDYPENDENT HAS BEEN AN EXPERIMENT IN PARTICIPATORY MEDIA. HERE ARE SOME OF THE MANY HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE WHO HAVE WRITTEN, EDITED, PHOTOGRAPHED, DRAWN, DESIGNED, MADE VIDEOS AND DISTRIBUTED THIS PAPER.

Kat Aaron • Aya Abdelaziz • Eman Abdelhadi • Rae Abileah • Jack Adam • Arun Aguiar • Moumita Ahmed • Najla al-Nashi • Yasir al-Rawi Sam Alcoff • Linda Martín Alcoff • Kazim Ali • Aimee Alison • Nicholas Allanach • Jackson Allers • Charlyne Alexis • R. 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BEIRUT COMES TO ITS OWN RESCUE FROM MEGA-EXPLOSION

TO MUTUAL AID

By Shawn Carrié

he picture on the TV screen fizzles out with the last gasp of electricity, as you hear it cut on the entire street. A welcome quiet, albeit an imposed one — another minute and you probably would've thrown something at the TV. You opt for a walk through the city, past the eternal construction sites, the empty vegetable stands and the crackling glass shards of a bank's broken windows. The last round of protests achieved little, and the armed guards still stand outside the capitol building, staring vacantly at the senile politicians stepping out of limousines into another session of closed-door crisis planning.

Then, past the detritus of late capitalism's wasteland, you see the rows of tents. The hands of a caring busybody packing used cardboard boxes with food and bandages. The open-air meetings crowded around tables in front of laptops and maps, while volunteers are greeted and assigned tasks, joining a well-organized and collectively run machine.

This is Beirut — where just over a month ago a hangar containing fireworks and more than 2,700 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded in a fireball, taking more than 200 lives and shattering everything within a two-mile radius. The shock wave ripped through windows and tore down walls with a violent crash and total disregard, from the working-class factory workers' district of Qarantina to the upscale hipster neighborhood of Mar Mikhael.

No one was surprised at the revelation that it was the blithe ineptitude of the system that had allowed a literal powder keg to lie for years in a limbo. No one was surprised when poor refugee workers at the Port of Beirut were blamed for starting the fire, haphazardly sparked by a metal welder sent to do a job without the slightest regard for workplace safety. What did surprise many, however, was how people came together to respond in the absence of any kind of official response.

A day after the explosion, residents streamed in from all across Beirut — those who weren't injured brought what they could to those who needed it. They set up a triage center, with tarps for shade, tables to start organizing the supplies that needed to go out and the growing pile of canvassing forms to track where they needed to go. They didn't ask for permission.

Weeks later, Beirut's Base Camp is still installed as an open air headquarters of several groups of volunteers working to get people free services that the Lebanese government is failing to provide.

"We all met each other during the revolution that started October 17 of last year," says Samer al-Khoury, one of the founders of the Base Camp, and a member of the activist collective Minteshreen (Arabic for the spread). "We try to help people in terms of whatever they may need that we can give them, whether it be physical, medical, or humanity."

Base Camp's presence echoes Zuccotti Park, Tahrir Square, and the ethos of the encampments that dotted public squares around the world in 2011, or the community-led disaster relief that New York saw in the wake of Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

Some of the volunteers are activists and community members; others have (or had) full-time jobs. Dividing into teams, some head out to survey needs in the neighborhood or sort glass and debris for what can be recycled, while their counterparts at Base Camp crunch the data into spreadsheets and work the phones for emotional support.

It all gets done remarkably fast, especially considering that most government offices in Lebanon still conduct business with paper records. Not that they couldn't find a more efficient way; dysfunction and corruption is a hallmark of the Lebanese government. Base Camp is open about its critique of the system in choosing to operate outside of it, modeling the type of transparency that they want to see their community run with.

In Lebanon, "community" is a loaded concept. With the country's politics of identity fully institutionalized, Lebanese often complain that the system sees them not as citizens, but rather as mem-

PEOPLE POWER: A volunteer from the Base Camp brings relief supplies to a Beirut family. Such actions have become necessary due to Lebanon's dysfunctional government.

ALL GONE: A passerby looks out at the Port of Beirut which was destroyed by a massive ammonium nitrate explosion.

bers of a sect — each controlled by a deeplyentrenched establishment of religious oligarchs and monied elites. As much as

they have taken to the streets to push for reform and even revolution, the corrupt establishment parties have found a way to remain in power.

Nowhere is the gap between a people's potential and their reality more clear than in Lebanon's capital. A city of opulence and rot, Beirut was already reeling from economic cataclysm long before the explosion hit. Lavish and vacant condominiums crowd a downtown that has been gutted by vulture developers who prefer to leave them empty, waiting for new investors that don't appear to be coming.

In late 2019, recession took a turn to something worse. Families saw their entire savings evaporate under searing inflation. The nightly news replayed stories of public suicides of those who'd lost hope, parents who turned to stealing to feed their families, and armed robbers who sobbed as they begged for their victims' forgiveness.

The political class remained apathetic and unrepentant. While the poor lined up at banks to withdraw an allowance that is barely enough to cover basics, the rich whisked their money and assets out of the country before they became worthless. Protests

sounded the alarm about what everyone knew was happening, but when the leadership shuffled a few faces, little changed.

It's commonly accepted that the system is rotten to the core, but nobody knows what to do about it, or what kind of replacement could win popular support from all of Lebanon's sects. Since the explosion in early August, little has changed, and hope is fading that even a catastrophe of its size will have the power to change the establishment. But things are now back to the same unbearable "normal" — there have been two more fires at the port, and another major construction project downtown burned down, as no one who employs workers seems to have learned the necessity of safety standards.

Predictably, animosities have once again begun to fester between neighbors, as the political establishment played to familiar and base tendencies to sow divisions between people.

The kind of polarization that this Middle East nation of nearly 7 million people has become accustomed to shouldn't sound foreign to Americans today. Nor should they think that their government institutions are impervious

to a self-interested cadre — hostile to democracy and openly sowing division — that might usurp power to serve its own corrupt interests.

It's precisely this political future that Base Camp is rebelling against. By rejecting the hand they've been dealt, Beirut's youth seek to carve out new possibilities beyond the traditional lines that politics have been drawn along since French colonizers first established the sectarian political system in the 1920s to make Lebanon easier to divide and rule.

For now, their grassroots efforts have earned a measure of legitimacy that the state's "officials" have lost — tipping the balance to become the preferred point of distribution for aid that is coming into Beirut from international NGOs and for-

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eign dignitaries who visit Lebanon on their way to meetings with government officials.

Coordinators say that state officials have stopped by — not to offer any concrete support, but usually to ask for data on who they've been helping — a request that has been flatly denied. They don't have any misconceptions that politics is a game of vultures, looking to steal their shine if they can — but they consider it a success that they're showing up the competition by demonstrating what can be done with people power. Base Camp welcomes aid from anywhere it may come from, and works to make sure it goes to where it's needed in a transparent way.

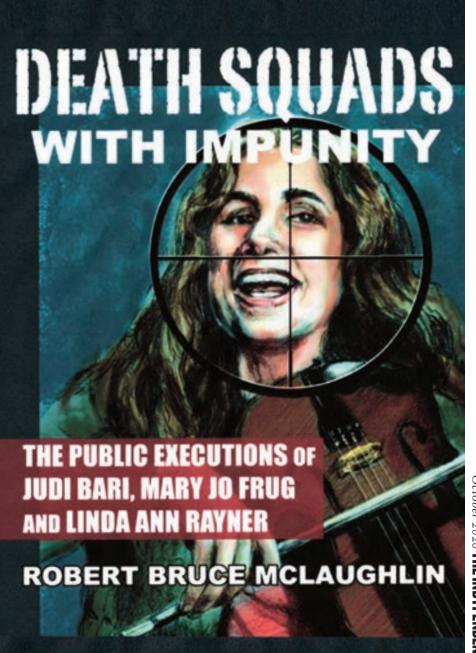
The blast brought residents of Beirut a brief moment of togetherness, and while ever small, there is hope that community will be the remedy to help make it though. After all the city has endured, if they can do it, it's an example to all of us.



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INDEPENDENT MUSIC IN PERIL

NON-CORPORATE VENUES ARE FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL WHILE ARTISTS HAVE NOWHERE TO PERFORM

By Olivia Riggio

or Bronx-based rapper and multimedia artist Dominic "DOMO SXCRAZY" Queen, creation and performance are a means of therapy. He had plans throughout the spring and summer to play shows around the city and even festivals throughout the country, but after the second week of March hit, every performance was swiftly cancelled.

"Pretty much, in an instant, all of it stopped," he says. "All of it was taken away from me in an instant, and that really messed me up."

Queen frequented independent venues like the Starr Bar in Brooklyn and played shows booked by Brooklyn Wildlife, an independent arts curation organization. But coronavirus shutdowns have caused the live music industry to go on an indefinite hiatus. Indie venues have been forced to close their doors, often with negative revenue after refunding ticket sales.

The prognosis is bleak. Ninety percent of independent venues across the United States say they'll have to permanently close their doors if they don't receive aid in the next few months. Many already have, according to the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA), a coalition of indie venues across the country formed as a response to the virus's devastating impact on these cultural hubs.

Its members and allies are demanding Congress pass two pieces of legislation — the RESTART Act and the Save Our Stages Act to ensure their survival.

Rev. Moose, executive director of NIVA and managing partner and co-founder of Marauder, an independent booking firm, began hosting weekly virtual town hallstyle meetings with independent venues and promoters at the beginning of the pandemic.

"We were like, 'Hey, I think we're all screwed. We have got to take this to D.C. Who is fighting for us in D.C.?" says Moose, recalling NIVA's formation. "We realized there was no one. So, you have to do it yourself when there aren't other options."

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) failed to meet the needs of independent venues, Moose said, because the lion's share of the expenses venues face concern rents, mortgages, insurance, overhead and carrying costs — not payroll.

The two pieces of legislation the group is pushing for are similar, but differ in specificity to the music industry. The RESTART Act, introduced by Todd Young (R-IN) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) in the Senate and Jared Golden (D-ME) and Mike Kelly (R-PA) in the House, would expand the PPP and allow small businesses to take out forgivable loans to help them stay afloat.

The Save Our Stages Act, introduced by Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), is a \$10 billion grant program to aid venues, promoters, producers, managers and booking agents whose businesses were decimated by the pandemic. Both pieces of legislation have bipartisan support. They also have the backing of more than 600 artists, including the likes of Billie Eilish, Lady Gaga, The Black Keys, John Mayer, Dave Grohl and Neil Young. Together they've signaled their support for the legislation in a letter NIVA sent to Congress.

"These are not politically motivated" bills, says Moose. "This is economically motivated and culturally motivated. These are the venues in these local communities that host fundraisers and charity events. They're rented out for birthday parties and weddings. They're the ones that international artists come and play through. They host everyone from young upstarts to global phenomenons, and I think that every single member of Congress has been to a live event at some point or another, which has made it a lot easier to get their support. But without a vote, we have nothing."

Independent venues are also incredibly important to local economies. Arts and culture contributed \$877.8 billion — 4.5 percent of the nation's gross domestic product — in 2017, according to the National Education for the Arts. The financial value arts and culture adds to uct — in 2017, according to the National Endowment the U.S. economy is about five times greater than that of the agricultural sector. While much of that revenue stems from big stadium performances, smaller clubs around the country make up a significant portion as well, bolstering local tourism and economies.

"Next to each independent venue that I had either booked a show at or had one of my friends play at, there's a pizza shop, or there's a hamburger or donut shop that everyone goes to and gives business to when the show closes," says Yacine Niang, booking manager at Starr Bar. "It's not just about the venue. It's about art and culture and localized economies."

Independent venues allow people like Niang to cut their teeth in the industry and practice their skills in a supportive and collaborative environment. They also create space for queer artists, femme artists and artists of color to share their art in a way the commercial music industry often restricts or rejects.

For Queen, independent spaces allowed him to leave the microcosm of Bronx hiphop, share his art with diverse groups and listen to other genres of performance he may not have otherwise discovered.

"They kind of gave me a platform," he says. "First, they showed me that it was okay to be yourself and brought different people together. But also, it was like, 'It's okay to be who you are, and enjoy other things outside of your realm."

Venues like Starr Bar also approach art from a social justice lens. The Bushwick venue opened in 2017, and its first event was a benefit for the Standing Rock Sioux #NoDAPL movement.

WHAT VENUES HAVE **FACED**

Caroline Olbert works doing live sound for ShapeShifter Lab, a music venue in Brooklyn. She moved across the

country from California about a year ago to work in music and found herself jobless among millions of others this spring. She's been relying on a combination of her savings, her family's support, stimulus and unemployment checks and some freelance audio editing work.

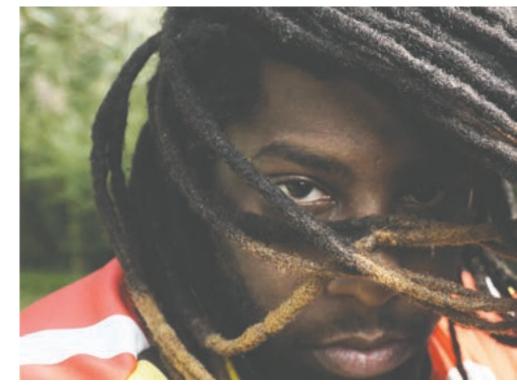
"It felt like March came, and then after that first week, everything just hit," Olbert says. "We had a couple of events at the end of the first week and into the second week and every single one of them cancelled, everybody went into quarantine, and my boss had to email everyone on staff and just be like, 'Yeah, we're not coming back next week. It's indefinitely off."

ShapeShifter began hosting virtual shows this summer, which Olbert now sound-engineers, but occasionally bands have been forced to cancel their performances for various virus- and non-virus-related

Starr Bar has also been hosting a series of virtual interviews in a series called Quarantine TV. The series focuses on various social justice and public health topics. Rev. Moose spoke with Niang during one episode about NIVA.

Remaining a social justice-based venue on a solely virtual platform has been a shift from the lively concerts and benefits of the past, says McNair Scott, co-proprietor of

In the past, he says, visitors came to Starr Bar to "get





together and network and celebrate. Every week, probably, if not more, we would have fundraisers. People would use the space to raise money for the things they were working on." Recreating that atmosphere has proved tricky.

"We've put a lot of thought into how we'd do it and social media is sort of the best way we can replicate that now."

With lockdown restrictions easing in New York City this summer, the Starr Bar team has been serving drinks and food to go, and the venue now occasionally holds outdoor dining events where bands and DJs play to a small crowd. Now, the issue of not attracting too many people is a cumbersome balancing act.

"People are trying a bunch of different things," says Scott. "It's just less vibrant."

ARTISTS GRAPPLING MENTALLY & FINANCIALLY

With spaces to perform and network being forced to close their doors, artists' careers are also a fraction of what they once were. Queen said that in the beginning of the shutdown, he struggled to create. The isolation and anxiety brought on by the crisis, the trauma from racial tensions across the country and the unfortunate timing of his laptop breaking plunged him into depression.

"I couldn't DJ," he says. "I couldn't do nothing. My spirit was so low."

Luckily, music was not Queen's main source of income. For Mike Frazier, a Brooklyn drummer and dad, it was.

the Parade Grounds near Prospect Park to practice. It felt good to play again and soon Frazier found himself calling friends to join him, which eventually led to him curating an outdoor concert series. As of September, it has taken place four days a week for 11 weeks. At first, Frazier was paying the patchwork of musicians he assembled out of pocket, but the buskers have since begun making enough money in tips.

Frazier is currently working through plans to apply for permits in order to continue the series next summer.

"In my heart, I'm satisfied and I feel really good," he says. "And, weather permitting, for how long I can continue doing it, whenever it stops, I feel like we did something special and necessary for what's happening."

THE FUTURE OF INDEPENDENT EVENTS

Outdoor events, along with virtual events, may be the new normal for the foreseeable future. Both have pros and cons. Outdoor busking makes performances accessible to wide audiences, but artists may struggle with making profits in the form of voluntary tips.

When it comes to virtual events, Olbert says she sometimes finds it disheartening to be engineering a band in the empty venue and hearing the quality of the live sound, versus the way the band sounds through simple computer speakers. But it also allows venues to draw populations it may not have otherwise been able to draw, like those who live too far away to attend shows.

There's also the benefit of accessibility for those with disabilities. Those who face limitations that previously prevented them from attending live shows can now enjoy live music from their homes.

Live virtual events, however, can't continue without investments in the venues that host them. Balancing public health with artists', bookers' and venues' need to maintain their livelihoods requires increased federal aid.

"We're not saying that we have to be open," says Moose. "What we're saying is that we were forced closed and if we're forced closed — and we're going to continue to be closed as long as it makes sense because that's for the good of our community — we just want the support to be able to do what's right for our community."

There's also the fear that

as these independent venues lose money, they will get bought out by large corporations like Live Nation and AEG Worldwide, dissolving local control of these spaces. Katherine "K.P." Powell ran an independent venue in Asheville, N.C., and has managed independent bands on the road. She said she is not sure what the world of independent music will look like after the pandemic, but that a possibility could be corporate control of the once independent realm.

"We've seen them kind of come from the top and trickle down into much more pervasive control. I think there is a valid fear in the idea that with this economic collapse in small to mid-sized venues that a larger corporation with the funds could come up and buy them out and have much larger control of the industry than they

already have," she said.

It has happened already in regards to booking. In 2017, the corporate entity Goldenvoice (owned by AEG Worldwide) took over booking of the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco, leading to layoffs of many of the historically independent venue's employees. On the East Coast, AEG operates under monikers including The Bowery Presents, which books at Brooklyn Steel, Music Hall of Williamsburg, Rough Trade NYC and other venues that are owned independently.

GROUNDED: Bronx-based rapper and multi-media artist Dominic "DOMO SXCRAZY" Queen had his live performance schedule upended by the pandemic.

OFF-STAGE: Yacine Niang (left), booking manager of Starr Bar, and Starr Bar co-proprietor McNair Scott are experimenting with new ways to safely stage performances at their Bushwick-based venue.

Corporate control of booking independent venues may prevent scenes from developing organically, Powell said.

"In a scene that's not dominated by this corporate curation, what's worth investing in happens organically and happens based on what's appealing to audiences and what's appealing to the culture and what's appealing to people on a local level," she said.

Overall, Moose said, when venues are locally owned and operated, community members have more of a say in what artists come through, how much tickets and parking cost and even what food and drinks are served.

As protests against systemic racism continue, it is also important to remember these venues are community spaces to share art, culture and ideas. They help nurture the talent and bolster the voices of diverse groups of people in ways corporate, commercial venues and bookers do not.

"This is a conversation that's intersectional," Niang says. "As we talk about independent venues, it's important to remember that many of them are locally owned. A lot of the venue owners are reflective of the communities they come from. And if we want Black artists, if we want queer artists, if we want women artists to be invested in and to be booked, we have to save independent venues."





A few years ago, Frazier left the restaurant industry he had worked in for 23 years to pursue music full time. His wife, Nataliya is a music teacher. Frazier said he's maintained a side hustle throughout the pandemic, but also found himself depressed after dealing with the death of his industry and the struggles his two young sons faced with remote learning.

"If there's one word to describe how I've felt during this whole pandemic, it's stranded. I've been stranded," he says.

The family took advantage of the stimulus check, which, in reality, didn't amount to much: "For a household of my size, it was literally one month of rent ... It was less than my monthly expenses."

One day over the summer, Frazier took his drums to

HOMELESS, LIKE YOU & ME

Priscilla the Princess of the Park WRITTEN BY PAT LAMARCHE ILLUSTRATED BY BONNIE TWEEDY SHAW CHARLES BRUCE FOUNDATION, 2020

By Eleanor J. Bader

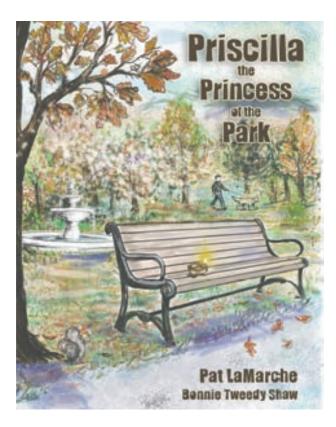
f it's Tuesday afternoon, it's tea time in the park. And, mind you, that's High Tea, served from the finest imaginary kettle and using the freshest, most savory, imaginary leaves.

Priscilla, an elderly homeless woman turned wanna-be princess, is the convenor. Her court is a ragtag assortment of elementary school-aged kids who run, walk and wheel their way to this after-school soiree. Not surprisingly, it's the highlight of their week.

Racially, ethnically and economically diverse, the youthful gang includes curly-haired, spunky Magdalena, whose parents believe their daughter's royal playmate is imaginary; brothers Tomas and Hugo, one tender-hearted and the other prone to bullying; Jillian, born with spina bifida, who has perfected the art of wheelchair dancing; and twins Jeff and Beth, who work hard to hide the fact that they live in a car with their single-parent dad.

Writer LaMarche — yes, this is the Pat LaMarche who was the vice-presidential candidate of the Green Party in 2004—says that Priscilla the Princess of the Park was written "for kids aged seven to 700." It's an impressive effort. Nineteen short, beautifully illustrated chapters introduce a bevy of themes, all meant to sensitize readers to the realities of U.S. homelessness and highlight the humanity of those who live in the streets, in parks, and in cars, storage facilities, and overcrowded dwellings.

Nonetheless, the story is somewhat sketchy. Princess Priscilla, for example, remains mysterious, an enigmatic soul whose backstory is never revealed. Although I found this frustrating, the



fact that Priscilla the Princess of the Park is just the first installment of what will eventually be a four-part book series, means that the door is open for this and other unanswered questions to be resolved.

That said, parents, grandparents, guardians, teachers and community educators may want to supplement the volume with a discussion of what it means to live without shelter. Of course, this has to be done carefully to avoid scaring the bejesus out of kids and filling their hearts and minds with anxiety and fear. Still, if presented well, the book will increase awareness, empathy, and compassion toward the homeless.

What's more, timing is everything.

Ironically, as Priscilla became available to readers in the late summer, COVID-inspired eviction and foreclosure moratoriums were beginning to expire in many regions of the country, a horror that is expected to lead to a groundswell of homeless individuals and families.

Here in New York City, kids often see homeless folks huddled in doorways and on subways and likely have concerns and questions about the who, why and how of their existence. Reading about Priscilla and her courtly subjects can be an effective way to jump-start a conversation about social justice, poverty, and housing policy. It's then our job to help kids imagine — and grow up to build — a world without poverty, where everyone is treated with respect, no matter their financial status or life trajectory.





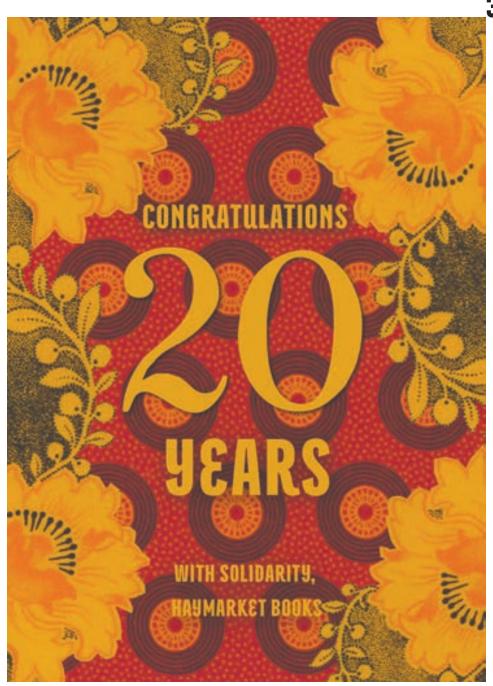
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DAVID GRAEBER SCHOLAR, TROUBLEMAKER, **FRIEND**

By Eric Laursen

ossibly the last thing David Graeber wrote for publication was an introduction he co-authored, with his longtime friend and intellectual comrade Andrej Grubacic, for Mutual Aid, the classic work on the history of human (and animal) cooperation by the 19th-century Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin. Discussing the impact of Kropotkin's book, which challenged the dog-eat-dog morality that capitalism had embraced through a misreading of Darwin's theory of evolution, David and Andrej said the following: "Such interventions ... reveal aspects of reality that had been largely invisible but, once revealed, seem so entirely obvious that they can never be unseen."

Anyone who knew him will immediately recognize this as pure David, laying out his lifelong quest to uncover patterns and tendencies in human behavior that our rulers — the authorities, the state, organized religion, capitalists and the rest — work so hard to obscure. Uncovering these patterns, as Kropotkin did in his book, is not just fun and enlightening — which appealed to David's impish side - but a lifeline, offering us alternative paths in a world marked by fear, exploitation, poverty, war and mass murder and the destruction of any culture outside the marketplace.

In our two decades of friendship and occasional collaboration, I never knew David happier than when he could begin a sentence, "Well, the funny thing is ...," always followed by a paradoxical observation about some institution, famous person or aspect of human history and development. He made learning and enlightenment genuinely stimulating, but he was also intensely serious about it, because for him, as for all the best thinkers, everything the world, human life — depended on it.

David and I became friends in early 2000 as members of the New York City Direct Action Network, which brought together anarchists and anarcho-tolerant activists, initially around the mass protests that followed the 1999 shutdown of the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle: the same setting that gave birth to The Indypendent. Like me, he had been politically active and an anarchist for years, but his literary debut as such came in 2004 with the publication of a "tiny little book" (as he called it), Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology. Still my favorite of his writings, it identified an anarchist strain in anthropology going back to some of its earliest practitioners and laid out a series of projects for the anarchist movement that are just as exciting to consider today, including:

- a theory of the state,
- a theory of political entities that are
- a new theory of capitalism,
- an ecology of voluntary organizations,
- a theory of political happiness,
- an analysis of the privatization of desire, and
- one or several theories of alienation.

The book was a kind of manifesto, and the common denominator in all the above was the same as it would be throughout David's life as scholar and activist: to make us see our world and ourselves differently, as hopeful, as unbounded. Some of these projects he tackled himself before his death, others are a challenge and an inspiration to the rest of us in the movement.

Arguably, David's finest hour as an activist and author was the serendipitous publication of Debt: The First 5,000 Years just as public anger over the economic debacle of 2008 was coalescing into Occupy Wall Street and the wave of autonomous, directly democratic organizing around it. An early OWS organizer, David will always be associated with the slogan, "We are the

99%!" (although he did not claim sole credit for it). His real achievement was to make us see debt for what it really is: a system of domination that privileges those who are assumed to have "good credit" and disadvantage those who are assumed not to. Many people had some understanding of this after the 2008 crash, but David - in his book and through his work with OWS — helped crystallize it and make it a focal point for organizing.

David was always bombarding us with fresh ideas and perspectives, from the Rolling Jubilee Fund that buys and erases debt to the plague of "bullshit jobs" to the "secret joys of bureaucracy" to his delightful essay on "The People as Nursemaids to the King" (read it and find out). Many of us remember the time Washington, D.C., police kettled hundreds of activists, including David, and he turned the tables by ordering dozens of pizzas to be delivered to the captive masses. (Like Emma Goldman, David came to the revolution to dance.) There was never a problem or a situation, as far as David was concerned, that couldn't be tweaked to signify something other than what we're told it signifies, and probably something liberating. It could be in the form of written word or direct action, but either way, it bore the mark of his unique mind.

With David gone from us at 59, the tragedy is that there would have been so much more. We can still look forward to his last book, The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity, which was written with David Wengrow and attacks the many false assumptions that reinforce inequality as an inevitable part of human development, which comes out next year. But he won't be around to provide the playful turn of thought that he always brought to our theory and practice as activists. Personally, I'll remember the many times we swapped ideas, frustrations and plans when we both lived in New York — often in front of a laptop on the floor of his apartment in the union-sponsored Penn South complex (David was a proud New Yorker, proud of his working-class roots) or in a small restaurant on West 32nd Street where David could satisfy his relentless craving for Korean food. I regret that we'll never do it again.

What we still have is the books — his "children," he called them — and the opportunity they give us to study his method, absorb his faith in self-organizing and mutual aid, and try to apply it ourselves. Here's how I distill it:

Observation. Paradox. Analysis. Communication. Action. Occasionally, all at the same time.

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TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE

Hey Billy,

I've been watching West Coast forest fires on my computer, and I'm freaking out. There are whole towns being consumed by flames. Giant smoke clouds covering cities hundreds of miles away. Then there's the hurricanes and the ice sheets cracking up faster and faster. This is some scary shit. I didn't doubt the science of climate change, but I thought it was something that would happen in the future. Now it feels like we may have raced past the last off-ramp and we're on the highway to hell. If there's still hope, tell me about it, please.

MITCH Astoria

Dear Mitch,

The Earth can absorb a thousand Donald Trumps and spit them out before breakfast. Along the way, lots of us will die and we're dying now in droves. Wealthy white people are moving to the Adirondacks and they think they are safe.

Safety is no longer a realistic goal. For so many years, the USA's safety was based on the theft of the safety of much of the world. Now our imperialism and racism are backdrafting at us in the form of wildfires, monster storms and waves and waves of invisible animals sneaking into our oxygen supply. What a drag!

I apologize, Mitch. I should respect your question. I'm scared too. And, yes, there is one thing that can bring a measure of safety in this world. Get Donald Trump out of office. Dear Reverend Billy,

I've waited almost four years for the chance to vote Trump out of the White House. And now it looks more every day like Trump and his buddies are going to steal the election. If that happens, what should we do? What will you do?

EVELYN Crown Heights

Dear Evelyn,

Yes, it is very likely that Trump will take the White House hostage. He has many scenarios there with the Republican Senate and a stacked Supreme Court. Trump will send militias to more cities, which will embolden local racist police. He will sign off on assassinations, increasing pollution, the rich getting richer.

I find myself looking to David Graeber and John Lewis and RBG for answers. In their dramatic lives, they persevered and won the day. God knows — it wasn't easier for them than it will be for us. Wouldn't they counsel us to stay steady, make trusting, sharing relationships, toward a social movement of resistance and love? From death, I hear them saying, "Don't fear death — be bold!"

Lovealujah!

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

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