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# INDYPENDENT

**#271: JUNE 2022**



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SUE BRISK

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**FUN ON THE FARM**

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**JUNE 1 (AND ONGOING)**

6PM-8:30PM • FREE

**UPTOWN ARTS STROLL KICK-OFF**

The Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA) in collaboration with local artists, businesses, community leaders and institutions will feature open studios, art exhibitions, concerts, literary events and performances during the month of June, throughout Northern Manhattan from West 135th Street to West 220th Street. On June 1, join NoMAA for a night with honorees, entertainment and more to kick off the month-long arts showcase in West Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood! HARLEM SCHOOL OF THE ARTS 645 St Nicholas Ave, Manhattan

**OPENS JUNE 3**

SHOWTIMES (EXCEPT THURSDAY):

12:30PM, 3PM, 5:30PM, 8PM • \$15

**FILM: *Miracle***

In this gripping, genre-subverting Romanian procedural, the driving question is not *Whodunnit?* but rather who are these people and what is the nature of their entanglement? Is God dead or our only hope in a world gone to hell? When a young novice sneaks away from her isolated convent in rural Romania to attend to mysteriously urgent matters, a shocking incident takes place.

**FILM FORUM**

209 W Houston St, Manhattan

**JUNE 4**

2PM-4PM • \$3-\$11

**BOOK TALK: *Utopia and Modernity in China***

The contradictions of modernization run through the whole of contemporary Chinese history. *Utopia and Modernity in China* examines the conflicts inherent in China's attempt to achieve a 'utopia' by advancing production and technology. A presentation and discussion with editors David Margolies and Qing Cao offered by The Marxist Education Project.

Virtual event. Register online via <https://bit.ly/3wxWouA>

**TUESDAYS JUNE 7-JULY 26**

6PM-8PM • \$160-\$320

**BASIC PORTUGUESE LESSONS**

Português Básico 1 is a beginner's class with a focus on listening, speaking and developing communication skills in Portuguese from the first day, without resorting to translating into one's native language. This course will give you a solid base and allow you to start communicating with Portuguese native speakers. Offered by The People's Forum.

Fill out application/register via <https://bit.ly/3Mk35qP>

**JUNE 9**

9AM-3PM • FREE

**JUNETEENTH FOR TEACHERS**

Join the Schomburg Center as it shares resources to support teaching inspired by Juneteenth. The program opens with a conversation with journalist and creator of The 1619 Project, Nikole Hannah-Jones. Participants will learn about new K-12 curricula based on the library's collections, a new DOE Black Studies Curriculum, hands-on practice with databases, poetry-making, books for all ages and other teaching resources inspired by the themes of Emancipation and Black Joy.

For teachers. Registration required via <https://bit.ly/39tLk9C>.

515 Malcolm X Blvd, Manhattan

**JUNE 11**

7PM-10PM • FREE

**SUMMERSTAGE: Herbie Hancock**

Legendary pianist Herbie Hancock will open this year's free SummerStage Festival along with trumpeter Keyon Harrold and a DJ set from Pete Rock. There will also be a side stage performance by Asha "DaHomey" Griffith.

**RUMSEY PLAYFIELD**

Central Park, Manhattan

**JUNE 14**

10AM-6PM

**CITY BEACHES OPEN**

NYC is a beach city! Don't forget it! NYC Parks maintains 14 miles of beaches, which it operates from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. During beach season, lifeguards are on duty and bathrooms are open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Brighton Beach (BK), Cedar Grove Beach (SI), Coney Island (BK), Manhattan Beach (BK), Midland Beach (SI), Orchard Beach (BX), Rockaway Beach (QNS), South Beach (SI) and Wolfe's Pond Beach (SI)

**JUNE 18**

9AM-2PM • COST OF TRAVEL

**MARCH ON WASHINGTON**

The Poor People's Campaign is working to confront the interlocking evils of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, militarism and the war economy, and the distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism. The group is organizing a June 18 Mass Poor People's & Low-Wage Workers' Assembly and Moral March on Washington, which will be a disruptive gathering of poor and low-wealth people, state leaders, faith communities, moral allies, unions and partnering organizations. RSVP via <https://bit.ly/3FT3dLa> for updates on logistics and transportation or sign up with <https://rally.co/poor-peoples-assembly/from/brooklyn-ny> to book a rideshare/bus from Brooklyn. WASHINGTON, DC

**JUNE 18**

8PM • COST TBD

**CHOREOPOEM/OFF-BROADWAY**

*For Colored Boys on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown/When Freedom Aint Enough* is a five-person choreopoem that was birthed out of frustration, self-examination, and reflection. It will be performed as a one-time event on the eve of Juneteenth.

**THEATRE ROW**

410 W 72 St, Manhattan

**JUNE 24**

7:30PM (DOORS 6:30PM) • FREE

**CELEBRATE BROOKLYN: Fonseca | La Cumbiamba eNeYé**

On a world tour for his newest album release, *Viajante*, Fonseca will dazzle the Bandshell with his signature mix of pop and traditional vallenato rhythms from Colombia. The Afro-Indigenous-Colombian ensemble La Cumbiamba eNeYé recreates the traditional open-air Cumbia gatherings of their homeland.

**LENA HORNE BANDSHELL**

9th St & Prospect Park West, Brooklyn

**JUNE 25**

6:45PM • \$20

**ONE-TIME SHOWING: *The Unknown Country***

In this narrative/documentary hybrid, Tana, a grieving woman, starts an unexpected road trip from the Midwest to the Texas-Mexico border to reunite with her estranged Oglala Lakota family. Navigating a surreal natural landscape, as well as a complex post-2016 social climate, she meets familiar faces and strangers along the way as "human exchanges imbue a subtle sense of lyricism into the habitual" (*Indiewire*).

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

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SUE BRISK

# VOICES OF CHOICE

BY JENNA GAUDINO

On the night of May 2, Politico leaked Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito's drafted majority opinion on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. The draft upholds the Mississippi case that bans most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy and goes even further in fully striking down *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 Supreme Court case that legalized abortion. With 26 states contemplating abortion bans if *Roe* falls and Republicans hinting they would seek to enact a national abortion ban of they regain control of the federal government, tens of thousands of pro-choice advocates draped in green and pink gathered at Cadman Plaza on the afternoon of May 14 to protest the decision. The crowd chanted, "If people's rights are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!" as it marched across the Brooklyn Bridge and into Lower Manhattan.

## MELODY JONES

I've been protesting since 1969, the year I graduated from high school. A lot of people say they're exhausted. I'm not exhausted; I'm invigorated. Stay out of my body. Everything is going back more than 50 years.

I had an abortion back when it was illegal. I was just a little girl. I was 18. It was very back-door. It was horrible, just horrible. It was so many years ago — I've sort of blocked it out in my mind. I remember going to a very close male friend of mine and he was close to his older sister and she hooked me up. It was really painful. No medication. I remember coming home and wishing I could tell my mother. And my mother was a part of the feminist movement, and I would've been able to tell her, but I was so ashamed. I'm ashamed that I didn't have a safe place to talk about it. Because you didn't really talk to other girls about it. You just didn't share that stuff. I just had to grin and bear it. But I was incredibly lucky. There was never any doubt in my mind.

## CHANDRA DARICE

I think it's been a long time in the making. It's been so calculated. It's devious! From trigger laws to the appointment of judges. And we've had these liars who sit on the highest court of the land, who lied through their [nomination] hearings. The American people have the right to know where they stand on these positions.

I'm a woman, a Black woman, and a member of a marginalized community that will be the first to bear the brunt of these decisions

## SUPREMELY PISSED: A pro-choice protester breaks it down.

that will cost women their lives. You can't ban abortion. You can ban safe and legal abortion. I think there's such animosity towards people who are poor. People in positions of power don't want to provide any sort of services after forcing women to carry to term. It's a war on women. It's a war on the poor. It's a war on Black women.

It's so easy to mind your business. People say they're pro-life but they support the death penalty. It's hypocrisy. They say life begins at conception but then they do in vitro [fertilization]. And it's like, really? I know you don't believe that an embryo is a fetus because who would put their child into liquid nitrogen for years at a time and possibly leave them in there forever? I know you don't believe that there's a soul in there. So cut the bullshit. Stay in your lane. And keep your nose out of people's uteruses.

## ANGELA HAMLET

I'm 60-years-old and when I first heard the news I felt physically ill. They're trying to take us back to 1815. So what's next? They want to make a law to make me a slave again? It's going to get really bad if women don't stick together. And that has nothing to do with Black or white because Amy Coney-Barrett is a white woman and Clarence Thomas is a Black man so I'm not even talking about who's Black or white, I'm just saying that women need to empower themselves right now.

If you have a little girl growing up in a church family, and she makes a mistake, she's going to be cited for murder! And then they want to make it illegal for women to travel across state lines to get abortions. They want to make women criminals! And they don't want to give you condoms or birth control pills, so what is their exact agenda? What is their agenda? They want you to have a baby but they don't want to give you food stamps to feed your baby. They don't want to give you \$15 an hour as a minimum wage. It's barbaric and it's criminal!

## LORIS BOYD

Within the time that I grew up, just before *Roe v. Wade* became law of the land, a number of women I know — and all these women were Black women — they resorted to different methods to have an abortion. One person that I know of died because she tried to abort within the eighth month.

We cannot allow a minority to speak for the majority. We have to change that.

## JOHNATHAN DAVIS

I feel so angry and upset and frustrated that we have to be doing this, at this point.

They found, at 20 weeks, a genetic anomaly — the viability of







# OUTRAGE IS NOT ENOUGH

BY LILLIAN CICERCHIA

There is not much new to say about the leaked Supreme Court decision that is poised to overturn the legal precedent set by *Roe v. Wade*. That precedent stated that women have a right to privacy and therefore the right to an abortion. The shortcomings of the privacy precedent are clear. It's only indirectly a right to have an abortion, as it's really a right to not have the state directly involve itself in one's medical decisions.

The U.S. rightwing has challenged this ruling for years in the streets and in the courts, state by state. The story of the end of *Roe* is the story of the most organized, militant and successful conservative social movement of the past fifty years. In the end, the Democratic Party didn't stop them. Neither did the reproductive rights and social justice nonprofits that so many depend on for health care and legal support.

Am I angry with the right? Oh, yes. Beyond the court cases, I have watched them harass, intimidate and lie to women in front of clinics over and over again. I have never lived in a country where they did not dominate the political argument. I have watched them invade and bomb clinics, murder doctors, stalk clinic workers and follow women around their neighborhoods and to their homes, all in the name of protecting "life." From Texas to New York City, the antiabortion right is unscrupulous and unforgivable.

But this outcome was entirely expected. As a result, I am now angrier with the abortion rights movement — from leftists to liberal Democrats.

Now that *Roe* is almost dead, I'd like to be clear about why that is. Seventy percent of the U.S. population supports abortion rights. The fact that we have lost these rights to a minority coalition should prompt self-criticism. It is our responsibility to put together a majority coalition that can safeguard basic reproductive rights. It is our responsibility to frame the issue in a way that challenges culture-war narratives with a universalist program that advocates for those rights. We didn't. So let's take stock.

*First, we accepted the right's terms of debate.*

At every turn, from Hillary Clinton's abortion should be "safe, legal, and rare" speech to the right's "abortion is rac-

ist" charge, we implicitly accepted that abortions are malign or allowed ourselves to be put on the defensive. We decided that it was better to downplay abortion services at women's clinics and instead argue for the funding of Planned Parenthood because it provides routine pap smears. Well, the right wasn't coming after Planned Parenthood because of the pap smears, were they? It is contradictory to demand that the abortion rights movement de-emphasize abortion when abortion is the issue that animates the right's challenge.

*Second, the abortion rights movement has become captive to the liberal nonprofit world, with all of its terms and conditions.*

This captivity is both strategic and moral. The nonprofits are "doing the work." They are "community organizing" and "in the struggle." They are providing vital services that people need. They surely know what's best, especially when it comes to securing public and private funds for their operations. Only they know how to navigate the legal and electoral systems with their lawyers, lobbyists and grant writers.

This world contains an intricate web of professional activism that you almost need a degree to understand, which puts us on amateur footing when we notice their strategy is failing. Upon receiving criticism, the nonprofits pull out their moral guns by insisting that they are

## THE FACT THAT WE HAVE LOST ABORTION RIGHTS TO A MINORITY COALITION SHOULD PROMPT SELF-CRITICISM.

the ones on the front lines protecting the most vulnerable women — and that their "privileged" critics have nothing worthwhile to say.

*Third, the movement did not unambiguously get behind a federal universal health care plan.*

Here it is worth distinguishing between socialists and liberal Democrats since the former have strongly supported Medicare for All. The latter, however, have not, which can be seen in Planned Parenthood's inconsistent state-by-state position on the matter. In some cases, they support it. In other cases, they don't. I suspect that either position is largely dictated by their relationship to their state Democratic Party.

But we ought to ask why feminist actors have been unable to push nonprofits like Planned Parenthood to the left on health care. The only way out of the state-by-state strategic morass is to win a federal health program that includes

abortion coverage — so it is important to assess our seeming incapacity to knit together a reproductive-rights coalition that sees universal health care as a medium-term goal.

The issue, it seems, is intimately related to the nonprofit capture problem. And it also speaks to why calls to deemphasize abortion lack a concrete policy strategy. How can we guarantee abortion access without integrating it into a compelling universal program that protects other reproductive rights as well?

*Fourth, the movement criticized its own ideology, and then made no strategic improvements.*

For thirty years now, leftist feminists have been criticizing liberals' "pro-choice" ideology for failing to address a wide array of reproductive health concerns and inequality of access to it. The "pro-choice" framework is indeed insufficient, but the alternative "reproductive justice" framework is still a largely academic and nonprofit-driven idea that falls prey to the same strategic problems.

In other words, these internal disagreements have done a respectable job of challenging some mainstream, liberal feminist narratives but have done little to change the course of the movement. It is politically impotent to have two com-

**UNCERTAIN FUTURE:** Tens of thousands of pro-choice marchers converged on Foley Square on May 14 including members of the Thank God for Abortion performance troupe.

peting ideologies with no discernible strategic differences. What does it matter if you have a more robust ideological framework if it doesn't generate a distinct politics? How, we should always ask, does it change the strategy to win abortion rights specifically?

*Fifth, the abortion rights movement accepts outdated narratives about what this is all about.*

The left has held onto the notion that the antiabortion movement is a backlash against the feminist and civil rights movements. The right, the narrative goes, wants white women back in the home and pumping out babies so as to control them and prevent Anglo-Saxon demographic decline. Women of color are simply collateral damage in this effort. It is, therefore, some amount of feminist success that

Continued on page 9





SUE BRISK

# MAKING THE NUMBER 2 SPOT MATTER

## ANA MARIA ARCHILA IS RUNNING TO TRANSFORM THE ROLE OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

BY JOHN TARLETON

In your New York State, the governor is an all-powerful monarch. The lieutenant governor may as well be a potted plant.

The governor dominates state budget negotiations, is free to raise tens of millions of dollars from well-heeled interests and faces no term limits. For over a decade, Andrew Cuomo reigned supreme in Albany. Now it's his former protegee Kathy Hochul's turn.

Hochul's first choice for the number two spot, Brian Benjamin, was indicted in April on federal corruption charges. Hochul is now seeking to install Antonio Delgado, a two-term Hudson Valley congressman, in her old job.

Delgado appears ready to sit dutifully in the corner and receive an occasional watering for as long as Hochul is in power. But first he has a fight on his hands from Ana Maria Archila who is running on the Working Families Party ticket with NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams.

Archila is the co-founder and former co-executive director of Make the Road New York and the Center for Popular Democracy. Unlike Williams who faces nearly insurmountable odds running against Hochul, Archila's campaign has been gaining momentum with a steady slew of progressive endorsements in advance of the June 28 Democratic primary. Because the governor and lieutenant governor appear separately on the ballot in the primary, the Democrats could end up with a Hochul-Archila ticket. Were Archila to become lieutenant governor, she would be the first leftist to win statewide office in the modern history of New York. And she told *The Independent*, she would look to use her post to empower the grassroots social movements she has organized with for decades.

This interview originally aired on *The Independent News Hour* and has been edited for length and clarity.

**THE INDEPENDENT:** Tell us a little bit about yourself, your background and what motivates you to run for Lieutenant Governor?

**ANA MARIA ARCHILA:** I am originally from Colombia, I came to the United States when I was 17. In my early 20s, I started working out of an organization then known as the Latin American Integration Center, teaching English and helping day laborers recover unpaid wages on Staten Island's North Shore. It was in that community that I learned a lesson that has carried me through the last 20 years.

*What was that?*

In that community of day laborers, I met immigrants who were 15, 16, 17 years old who had crossed the border by themselves and had come here to be able to send money home. They were working 10-12 hour days. They were taking turns sleeping in a bed, getting paid half of the minimum wage, and just living in really difficult conditions. But even after long days of work, they would come to these tiny storefronts and say, "I am ready to learn English, I'm here to learn."

They would come alive in a way that was incredibly moving and powerful. What I learned in that moment is that when people find community, when people are connected to one another, they are able to fully bring forward who they are, their histories, but also their dreams.

I also learned that our dreams coexist with the things that are challenging in our lives. We could have a more just society if we tackle the things that make life hard for people. So I've spent the last 20 years building organizations like Make the Road New York and the Center for Popular Democracy, that are organizations that allow working class communities to envision solutions for the things that are challenging in their lives, and to actually be taken seriously in our democracy.

*What are the top issues that you and Jumaane Williams are running on?*

Jumaane and I are focused on the things that are core priorities to working families, affordable housing, affordable childcare, access to good jobs for people who are in the care economy, in particular, who are primarily women, women of color, working class women. We want to move toward a real definition of public safety, away from criminalization, away from incarceration, and more focus on investing in communities, because we know that the safest communities are the communities that are well resourced.

*Four years ago Jumaane Williams ran for Lt. Governor with Cynthia Nixon and finished 25 points ahead of her. This was in part because he wasn't going up against the governor's wall of cash. Now it's Gov. Kathy Hochul with the \$20 million war chest, and many observers think you're the left candidate with the best chance of winning your race. If you were to end up being Kathy Hochul's lieutenant governor, how would that work as she would clearly prefer her own hand-picked LG?*

For as long as I have been organizing, the governor's office has been a block to progress. The lieutenant governor has

been used just as a surrogate of the governor and for ribbon-cutting ceremonies. And I think that's a misconception of the Lieutenant Governor's office, because it is not an appointed office. It's an elected office. The people of New York should have an ally inside the Executive Mansion—someone who will always be focused on elevating their voices, their dreams, their struggles, their aspirations which often get shortchanged in Albany.

*You've never run for or held elective office. What qualifies you to hold such a high office?*

I have spent the last 20 years doing politics from the ground up. The kinds of organizations that I have built are organizations that have internal democracy. So I'm very familiar with how to practice accountability to communities that are organized and how to lead in a way that is very rooted in those values.

The organizations that I have built also went from very small to very large. When I started leading Make the Road, it was an organization that was quite small. When I left it was a \$13 million organization, with 115 staff. When I joined the team at the Center for Popular Democracy, it was in its infancy. When I recently stepped down from my role, it was a \$35 million per year organization. So I have 20 years of executive experience. Most importantly, I have 20 years experience fighting to ensure that the lives of working class communities are improved by those who we elect.

*You made national headlines four years ago during the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court hearings when you publicly confronted Republican Senator Jeff Flake and demanded he listen to your story as a sexual assault survivor. You got him to briefly halt the Republican confirmation juggernaut that was moving Kavanaugh forward. What did you learn from that experience?*

The fight to stop the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh required of me something I had never given, which was to speak my own truth. In that moment, I learned two things. One is that courage is really contagious. When you see people be courageous around you, you are invited to find that seed of courage in yourself. In these moments of compounding crises—the pandemic, climate change, soaring inequality, the attacks on our democracy—what defines these crises for me is actually the courage of people who stand up for one another. The task for elected officials right now is to match the courage of people. I would be honored to bring my experience to Albany and do my very best to honor the courage of people who are demanding a more just society.



# NURSING A GRUDGE

## BK DEMS TARGET SOCIALIST NURSE IN JUNE 28 ASSEMBLY PRIMARY

BY THEODORE HAMM

In at least one race that is on the June 28 primary ballot, Brooklyn's fractured Democratic Party leadership appears to have formed a united front.

The main two camps—aligned with either Rep. Hakeem Jeffries or Assemblywoman Rodney Bichotte Hermelyn, the party boss—are coming together to support Olanike Alabi's bid to unseat Phara Souffrant Forrest, the first-term assemblywoman who belongs to the Democratic Socialists of America.

In 2020, Souffrant Forrest surprisingly toppled four-term incumbent Walter Mosley in Brooklyn's 57th Assembly District, which starts in Fort Greene and covers Clinton Hill through Crown Heights. Mosley was Jeffries' hand-picked successor when the latter moved up to Congress in 2013. Jeffries and the DSA share a mutual disdain for one another.

In the 2021 mayoral primary, Bichotte Hermelyn personally backed Eric Adams, but she was unable to provide the party's full endorsement because Jeffries supported Maya Wiley. Despite their shared centrist positions, Jeffries and Adams are not allies.

Souffrant Forrest has been a dynamic force in her first term in Albany. She helped the legislature raise taxes on the rich during the pandemic, and pushed hard for the \$2b Excluded Workers Fund that covered undocumented workers left out of the federal stimulus. Currently, the former tenant organizer is championing the Good Cause Eviction bill that protects renters from predatory corporate landlords.

The DSA is accustomed to knocking out incumbents, typically by highlighting their inactive leadership. Alabi is unable to level that charge versus Souffrant Forrest, however. Alabi's strategy is thus to campaign on the DSA's platform, touting her support for Good Cause Eviction, single-payer, and the Green New Deal. Alabi will then try to turn the race into a popularity contest, drawing on her longstanding ties to the Clinton Hill portion of the district.

"It's annoying," Souffrant Forrest says regarding her opponent's matching platform. "When I went to the endorsement interview at DC 37, they were yelling at me about my support for the New York Health Act. Alabi's website claims she also supports it — but DC 37 endorsed her."

Stalled in Albany for the last few years, the Health Act would create a single-payer health care system in New York. DC 37, the city's large public-sector-employee union (with 150,000 active members and 50,000 retirees), is one of several unions opposed to the measure, claiming it would negatively affect their members' current health care benefits.

A nurse in the city's hospital system before taking office in 2021, Souffrant Forrest is a member of the New York State Nurses Association. Along with SEIU 1199 (which represents private sector health care workers), the Nurses Association has championed the Health Act.

Does Alabi indeed support the single-payer legislation, as her platform states?

**BREAK THE MACHINE:** Phara Souffrant Forrest won her Central Brooklyn Assembly seat in an upset two years ago. She says she's ready for whatever the Democratic Party establishment throws at her this year.

*The Independent* posed this question via email to DC 37 president Henry Garrido (a close ally of Mayor Adams): "Can you comment on why DC 37 is backing Alabi, who has an identical platform with Souffrant Forrest?"

A spokesperson for the union replied, "No comment." That amounts to a somewhat less-than ringing endorsement of Alabi.

When *The Independent* reached Alabi by phone on Wednesday morning, May 11, the candidate said that she was on a Zoom call but would "circle back" via email.

An hour or so later, Alabi indeed circled back, only to say "Today won't work, as it's so last minute and [I'm] crazy busy."

The following morning, the candidate advised that "Today is crazy too."

This reporter can only assume that Friday the 13th was completely bonkers for Alabi, because she didn't respond to *The Independent's* inquiry. A fourth and final request via phone on Monday, May 16th was also ignored.

It's quite likely that DC 37's leadership is supporting Alabi because they know that she won't push the single-payer bill that she claims to support.

Alas, the Brooklyn Democratic machine operates via such cynical games. Party loyalists denounce gentrification but fill their campaign coffers with real estate loot. They claim to support popular positions, then do nothing to deliver on those promises.

As of the January 2022 campaign filing, Olabi had not yet raised any money for the current race. The next filing is at the end of May. Given her machine ties, and the large number of endorsers listed on her website, Alabi certainly should have enough cash to wage a strong campaign.

Alabi is counting on older Black voters in Fort Greene and Clinton Hill, where she grew up. She served as an elected district leader in the 57th Assembly District for over a decade. In 2020, Shaquana Boykin—a next-generation NYCHA tenant leader and foe of the Democratic machine—defeated Alabi for the district leader post. Souffrant Forrest and Boykin are supporting each other's reelection campaigns.

Souffrant Forrest is counting on the votes of activists from the DSA and Crown Height Tenants Union, and from younger residents across the district. The assemblywoman lives in the Ebbets Field Apartments with her husband Charles and their infant son David. With over \$50k to spend, Souffrant Forrest should be able to reach voters throughout the district.

"I think this race is the most competitive challenge to any DSA incumbent this year," says the DSA's Brandon West, adding that the district is "an area where the County organization really wants to regain control." West nevertheless believes that Souffrant Forrest is in a "good position," provided she wages an all-out campaign.

Souffrant Forrest says she is indeed ready to knock on doors. "I have a movement supporting me—and we will put boots on the ground," she says. The race is about to take off.

### UNIONS VS. NEW YORK HEALTH ACT

Leading the opposition to the NY Health Act (which creates a single-payer health care system in the state) is a group called Realities of Single Payer. While it is not surprising to find many insurance companies, private health care providers, and business associations among the coalition's 164 members, there are also a handful of labor unions—including DC 37 and the United Federation of Teachers. For progressive legislative candidates, it's one more hurdle to clear.

There are both concrete and ideological reasons why some unions oppose universal healthcare coverage. They depend on the dues paid by their members, but in the wake of the Supreme Court's Janus decision in 2018, workers are no longer required to pay such fees. Providing a good health package is a crucial way for unions to maintain the loyalty of their members. As Helen Schaub, policy director of 1199 (which supports the Health Act), explained to *The Body* last summer, "There's a long history of particularly municipal unions using health benefits to generate the resources to give people raises." Like any other worker, union members respond favorably to a raise.

Unions also employ large numbers of benefits administrators that handle prescription drug claims connected to insurance plans; such jobs would likely disappear with the state-run single-payer system. The leaders of many NYC unions are also temperamentally quite cautious and prefer the status quo. The result is that with the exception of the Nurses Association and 1199, organized labor is not acting in the best interest of working-class people throughout New York State.

—THEODORE HAMM





JEFFREY ZELDMAN

# THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

## TWO MILLION RENT-STABILIZED TENANTS FACING LARGEST RENT INCREASE SINCE BLOOMBERG ERA

BY STEVE WISHNIA

This is the year New York's real-estate empires struck back — with tacit support from Mayor Eric Adams.

On May 5, the city Rent Guidelines Board voted 5-4 to propose allowing landlords of rent-stabilized apartments to raise rents by 2 to 4 percent for a one-year lease renewal, and 4 to 6 percent for two years. That would be the biggest increase given since 2013, even if the board adopts the lower numbers at its final vote on June 21.

The only debate on the proposal came from tenant representative Sheila Garcia, speaking from the offices of the (CASA) in the southwest Bronx, saying “that 2 percent increase will be devastating for the people in this room.”

“Keep the pressure on Mayor Eric Adams,” CASA activist Fitzroy Christian told the about 40 people in the room after the vote, with other tenant groups and activists watching online.

“I live on a fixed income. I can't afford any increase,” said CASA activist Kim Statuto, 62. She pays rent to a property-management company that runs more than 150 buildings in the Bronx. “They're not hurting,” she says.

The real-estate industry sees Adams as its chance to recoup the profits it lost from the RGB freezing rents for 3½ years during Bill de Blasio's mayoralty, the state Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act (HSTPA) of 2019 closing the loopholes landlords used to deregulate rent-stabilized apartments, and the eviction moratoriums of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The HSTPA “eliminated all mechanisms to increase rent outside of this board,” RGB owner representative Robert Ehrlich argued. “We could return to the horrifying days of the '70s and '80s.”

“The assumption is that tenants won and now we're go-

ing to the RGB to undo some of that,” Garcia told *The Independent* before the vote.

The vehicle for those demands was the RGB's annual Income and Expenses (I&E) study, released March 31, which got more press this year than it has in rent stabilization's 54-year history. Based on financial forms filed with the city for almost 15,000 buildings containing rent-stabilized apartments, it found that owners' net operating income, profit before taxes and debt service, fell by 7.8 percent in 2019-20, to an average of \$545 a month per apartment. It was the biggest drop since 2002-03.

On Apr. 14, the RGB staff projected that landlords would need increases of up to 9 percent on a two-year lease to make the same net they'd had the year before. A 9 percent increase would have been the largest since 1989.

Landlord groups this year were actively “seeking out press” to push for a big increase, Garcia says. That enabled them “to set the goalposts,” added new tenant representative Adán Soltren, a Legal Aid housing lawyer.

“Tenants cannot afford these increases, no matter what the numbers say,” Soltren added. More than one-third of the city's 960,000 rent-stabilized households are low-income, he said.

He told the RGB that its mission is to preserve affordable housing, and it's operating under the false assumption that landlords are entitled to higher profits every year.

The numbers in the RGB study are from 2020, the year the COVID pandemic shut down much of the city's economy. It was only the fourth time in the past 30 years that landlords' net operating income decreased. The biggest decline came in Manhattan's southern half, led by a 44 percent drop in Midtown.

Adams told reporters the morning after the RGB vote that he thought a 9 percent hike was “just too extreme.”

Instead, the owner representatives proposed allowing rents to go up by 4.5 to 6.5 percent on a one-year lease, and 6.5 to 8.5 percent for two years. Christina Smyth, a real-estate attorney, argued that it “will not put a dime more of profit in housing providers' pockets.” (Some landlords have taken to calling themselves “housing providers,” on the grounds that the term “landlord” is gender-exclusive and evokes a “feudal” relationship.)

“We have to find the right position to look after those small property owners,” Adams said May 6. “They've been decimated by the increase in fuel, property taxes, so many other things.”

Most rent-stabilized apartments, however, are owned by large landlords, although the real-estate industry often touts the plight of small owners. The Rent Stabilization Association, the main lobbying group for landlords of

rent-stabilized buildings, has six members who own more than 6,000 apartments each.

Of Adams' three appointments to the RGB — Smyth, Soltren, and economics professor Arpit Gupta as a public member — Gupta is likely the most telling. The board's five public members are supposed to be neutral, but Gupta is an adjunct fellow at the Manhattan Institute, the right-wing urban-policy think tank that provided the intellectual ammunition for Rudolph Giuliani policies such as stop-and-frisk policing. He told Vox last year that he is a “little skeptical of rent control,” because it works as “a one-time transfer of equity from landlords to current tenants.”

Gupta was quiet during the May 5 meeting, as RGB public members rarely speak, but the Manhattan Institute has long been a strident foe of rent controls. It calls rent regulation “one of the worst welfare benefits ever conceived,” arguing that it is “transferring wealth to current tenants at the expense of future and market-rate tenants.”

How directly the mayor influences the RGB varies. Garcia, who is in her ninth year on the RGB, puts it as that the administration “knows what the board is thinking” before it votes, and its “silence is complicit.”

Ironically, the mayor pushed the farthest by protests in recent history was Giuliani, who chose a free-market libertarian as RGB chair. In 1995, after the board's preliminary vote recommending taking all vacant apartments out of rent regulations provoked widespread outrage, he scotched the scheme by announcing his opposition just before the final vote.

The RGB's final vote June 21, at Cooper Union in Manhattan, will be in-person for the first time since 2019. Fitzroy Christian urged the Bronx tenants to prepare testimony for its two public hearings, one in Queens on June 13 and one in the Bronx June 15.

Tenant activists are upset it is only holding two hearings instead of the usual five. Garcia said it makes a difference for board members to see faces and hear stories. One of the reasons the RGB has frozen rents on single-room-occupancy hotels for more than a decade is that no hotel landlords have shown up to ask for an increase.

Its proposed increases would give landlords bigger profits while unemployment in the Bronx is still above 10 percent, Christian told *The Independent*. “When you add cost of living to people whose income is zero, how do you expect them to survive?”

**HOME SWEET HOME:** A rent-stabilized apartment building in Manhattan.



## ABORTION

Continued from page 5

propels these reactionary politics.

This idea, I think, is upside down. It is feminism's failure to attack the deep ills of the United States' political economy that make antiabortion politics a force for reaction. Just look at countries without a militant antiabortion movement: they have public programs to support women, their dependents, and working-class families through crises and tough times. Even if such programs have been hit by austerity, they are there, and they matter. They have insulated abortion rights from conservative challenges by giving everyone a stake in defending those social benefits.

Instead, in the United States, we have white supremacists, black Baptists, Latino Catholics, and "pro-life" Evangelical feminists joining together at demonstrations to accuse clinic escorts of being the Ku Klux Klan incarnate. It's wild stuff, and it's partly thanks to our historic inability to win broader social protections.

People are anxious about the social status of the family and women's fertility for extremely assorted reasons, some of which are completely contradictory. Abortion gives them a focus. What the Left should emphasize, though, is the need to create ties between feminists, the labor movement, and health care campaigning. There is currently a middle- and upper-

class bias to most feminist politics in the United States that needs to be thoroughly dissected, understood, and repudiated.

I don't have an uplifting message to close on. I only have my two cents: the Left should take a deep breath, then regroup to fight on a stronger footing than before. It's taken the Right 50 years to get where they are, so it is hysterical to insist the "fascists" are now, finally, charging at the gates — or that another harried vote for Democrats will suddenly change things.

If the antiabortion right are fascists (and some surely are), then consider that they've been there, chipping away, for decades, often through the regular organs of the US political system. If that's the case, then we have long since been living in their world in practice if not in law. Panic is of little political value. So we may as well stop and reflect on our strategic failures, lest we wind up doing the exact same thing over and over again.

And maybe — just maybe — our side will have a "come to Jesus" moment of its own.

*This article originally appeared at jacobin.com as "We Failed to Protect Abortion. We Need a Labor-Based Strategy."*



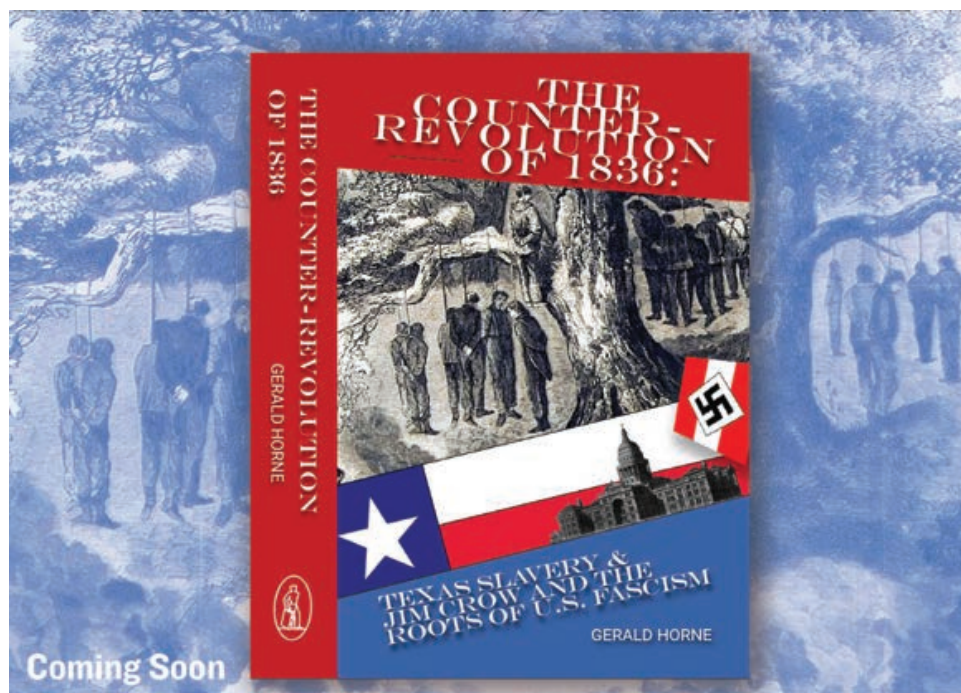
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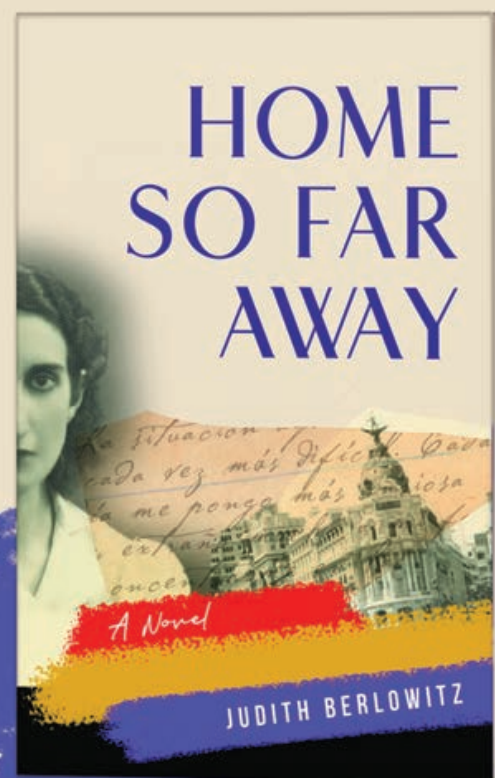


GERALD HORNE

Ever since Texas seceded from Mexico in 1836 for pro-slavery reasons, the "Lone Star State" became a bulwark of reaction. By 1845, unable to withstand pressure from abolitionism at home and abroad, Texas entered the U.S. and quickly became the right-wing anchor of the nation. By 1861, Texas was in the vanguard of secession from the U.S. again because of pro-slavery mania. By June 19th, 1865 — Juneteenth — it required the dispatching of thousands of U.S. troops to compel enslavers in Galveston to retreat from slavery, well after the "Emancipation

Proclamation" of 1863. (The rendering of "Juneteenth" in this book provides the most comprehensive account of what is today a new holiday.) Thereafter, Texas was a kingpin in imposing Jim Crow and lynchings and expropriating and liquidating Native Americans. Today, Texas threatens to be in the vanguard once again: this time in spearheading fascism. However, the lesson of this comprehensive analysis is that Repression breeds Resistance — yet one more reason why Texas could well become an anti-fascist leader nationally.

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JENNA GAUDINO



JENNA GAUDINO

# STARBUCKS UNION BATTLE COMES TO QUEENS

## FRUSTRATION WITH THE COMPANY HAS BEEN BREWING SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN

BY JENNA GAUDINO

One Monday afternoon last August, a drunk man stumbled into the Ditmars Boulevard Starbucks in Queens and began throwing syrup bottles, food and hot coffee at the baristas. He then tried to push an espresso machine on top of a worker, but failed. No managers were present, leaving the employees on their own.

"We reported it after, but you know how that goes. It's essentially, 'Thoughts and prayers,'" barista Austin Locke told *The Independent*. "That's usually how incident reports go."

Another barista, who asked to remain anonymous because she fears she could be fired, said she saw a customer throw a metal basket at a worker who was eight months pregnant, bloodying her head. The manager told the woman to file an incident report and continue working.

"It's disgusting to me. She didn't do anything. She didn't care," said the anonymous barista. Both she and Locke said they've witnessed other incidents where a customer treats a worker with violence, verbal abuse, sexism or racism.

Workers at the Astoria Boulevard Starbucks filed for union recognition in March, and the Ditmars Boulevard workers followed suit on April 14. They hope having a union will force the company to give managers better training and hold them accountable for their actions.

Starbucks baristas across the country have been signing up with Starbucks Workers United, an affiliate of Workers United-SEIU. Last December, a store in Buffalo became the first in the United States to unionize. On April 1, the Starbucks Reserve Roastery in Chelsea became the first in New York City. As of now, 75 Starbucks stores across the country had voted to unionize and more than 250 are in the process of organizing elections.

Brandi Alduk, Josue Cruz and Kevin Cunningham, workers at the Astoria Boulevard store, have all had similar experiences with unruly customers. Even before the pandemic, workers at both Queens stores say, problems included insufficient staffing, erratic schedules, low wages, stressful work environments, and a lack of communication between baristas and managers.

Both stores are so understaffed, the anonymous barista said, that during rush times, she and two coworkers serve about 80 customers every half hour. "It's almost impossible to do with just three people," she said.

Cruz said the Astoria Boulevard cafe would have benefitted from hiring an extra person during the height of the pandemic to enforce the mask mandate and run drinks to customers waiting outside. When

**GOING FOR IT:** Baristas Kevin Cunningham (left) and Josue Cruz at the Astoria Boulevard Starbucks.

**SOLIDARITY:** Local supporters rally outside the Astoria Boulevard Starbucks.

indoor dining was reintroduced, things got worse. He and his coworkers struggled to check vaccine cards, uphold social-distancing guidelines and enforce the mask mandate, all while making drinks and dealing with irritable customers.

Toward the end of February, Cruz said he and his coworkers had to work at other Astoria locations for two weeks while his store was being remodeled. The environment was even more stressful there, he said: The managers criticized baristas in front of their coworkers, instead of pulling them aside to speak privately.

"Seeing the baristas at the other stores was heartbreaking. They're scared to talk to their managers," he said. "We all have stuff going on outside of work, so we don't need to come to work and be stressed out. I want them to be able to express their opinions without being shut down. I think a union would help amplify their voice."

Many baristas' hours were reduced during the pandemic. "We're not making enough money to survive," said Austin Locke. "The store is making thousands of dollars a day and each of us is making about \$50 a day. We want to be treated like human beings. We shouldn't have to worry about making rent, paying our bills or just getting food. We all have multiple jobs because Starbucks doesn't give us enough money or hours."

The anonymous barista said she juggles two jobs, and sometimes works shifts at both on the same day, with little time to rest or eat in between.

Meanwhile, then-CEO Kevin Johnson received a 40 percent pay raise. According to the company's annual proxy statement, filed with the federal Securities and Exchange Commission in January, his salary was increased from \$14.67 million in 2020 to \$20.43 million last year. (Johnson retired in March, and was replaced by company founder Howard Schultz, who told store managers in April that unions were "trying desperately to disrupt our company.")

Starbucks boasts about its culture of inclusion, benefits and opportunities for growth — many of the reasons Brandi Alduk and her coworkers wanted to work there. However, Alduk says, many of those benefits don't help much. She has the "silver" level health-insurance plan, but "it really only covers emergency situations. If you want a higher-tier plan, your whole check basically goes into paying that insurance. Starbucks talks about their fertility treatment plan, but you would be spending your entire paycheck in order to achieve those benefits."

Starbucks refers to its workers as "partners." "We call our employees partners because we are all partners in shared success," the company says on its website. That rhetoric is part of how Starbucks gained a reputation as a progressive company that values and listens to its employees, many of whom are quick to point out its hypocrisy.

"You'd think that that term implies equal ground," said Cunningham. "As time went on, that rhetoric got old and almost irritating, because the company is still making ridiculous profits. They call us partners. Okay, then let's see that."

In February, Starbucks fired seven workers in Memphis for trying to form a union. The Queens workers

Continued on page 15



# LABOR OF LOVE

## THE EMERGENCY WORKPLACE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE IS PIONEERING A NEW MODEL FOR EMPOWERING WORKERS

By AMBA GUERGUERIAN

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed many workers over the edge, with employers subjecting them to a litany of unsafe working conditions: crowded spaces lacking social distancing, poor ventilation, lack of PPE, unruly customers, ailing colleagues forced to continue working due to a deficit of paid sick days (or none at all). The list goes on. Millions quit their jobs while other workers remained but began to speak out against poor working conditions. Although the fear of becoming infected with COVID-19 and getting sick or dying was the original spark for protesting employees, many have decided there's no normal to go back to and want to organize their workplaces.

The burgeoning new labor movement — which involves many Gen Zs and millennials — is grappling with how to channel this organizing fervor. The traditional path still trod by many is to organize elections for union recognition overseen by the National Labor Relations Board. The NLRB was established in 1935 to facilitate the organization of unions. However, employers have long since learned how to exploit legal loopholes to thwart the majority of union organizing drives, safe in the knowledge that the understaffed NLRB will only give them a slap on the wrist even when they are caught breaking the law.

Another less-known approach to organizing workers is solidarity unionism, a model in which the workers organize themselves on the shop floor, strategizing and taking collective action directly against their employer without mediation from government or paid union representatives. While this method circumvents cumbersome NLRB processes, it can be harder to garner long-term support from workers.

Solidarity unionism “is available to everybody starting right now. Workers can talk to their coworkers, form a committee, think about the demands, gather a majority and then go meet with their boss or take an action and hopefully start winning some things,” says Eric Dirnbach, long-time labor organizer and volunteer with the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee. “When workers do that, they are acting like a union. Believe it or not, they are already a union.”

### PANDEMIC MOMENTUM

EWOC was founded in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic by former Bernie 2020 organizers who didn't want to stop organizing. The initial idea was simple. “Don't Quit. Organize.” Give workers who want to organize the education and support they need to do so. EWOC employs a gamut of approaches, from one-time petitions demanding workplace improvements to solidarity unionism to the NLRB election process.

Since that auspicious beginning, more than 1,400 EWOC volunteers have received queries from more than 3,400 workers and helped workers at hundreds of workplaces organize unions or otherwise organize fightbacks against abusive bosses.

In a country where the union-membership rate — 6% of private-sector workers and 10% of all workers — is the lowest it's been in more than 100 years and an estimated 50 million unorganized workers would like to belong to a union but don't, EWOC's approach has been flexible: make use of all paths to worker organization and help workers find the path that best suits their situation.

“When folks are absolutely miserable at work, they should quit. But, I think overall it would be better for society and the working class if more people stuck it out and organized for improvements,” Dirnbach told *The Independent*. If you're already at a breaking point, and especially if you and your coworkers are on the verge of quitting en masse, “go on strike,” he says. “If they fire you, you're no worse off. ... Most non-union workers do not know they can form their own union.”

EWOC operates under the aegis of (but isn't funded by) the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which has grown rapidly since 2016, and UE, a militant, member-led national union founded in 1936. It fills the void left by conventional unions that don't want to allocate the time of their paid staff to following up on large numbers of random queries.

“EWOC will help any worker in any workplace to learn about organizing. Established unions are not really well set-up to do that,” Dirnbach said.

“Most unions will help workers get from steps 51-100 in organizing a union,” said Wen Zhuang, another volunteer organizer with EWOC. “We help get workers from steps 1-50 and then reference them to the union that is the best possible fit for them.”

To receive support from EWOC, a worker fills out an intake form via [workerorganizing.org](http://workerorganizing.org) and a volunteer that has some knowledge about the corresponding labor sector will follow up with that worker within 72 hours. From there, workers have the chance to attend organizing-in-the-workplace trainings and to have access to experienced organizers who will support their campaign.

“My overwhelming sense was that a lot of people involved with EWOC have professional experience,” said Julie, a former Target employee who was supported by EWOC. “My point person became invaluable in terms of understanding what to do, forming a committee, what it looks like to organize box retail, and how that is different than supermarket, pharmacy, warehouse or a bank.”

One unionization campaign Dirnbach has helped with as an EWOC volunteer was with an independently-owned bookstore in Santa Cruz, California whose workers began organizing at the onset of the pandemic. They reached out to EWOC after hearing about the group from people at Santa Cruz DSA. While organizing under Dirnbach's guidance, the bookstore workers decided to seek formal union recognition. Dirnbach then connected the workers with the Communication Workers of America, and a successful union election was held.

EWOC organizers tend to be quite discreet about their activities. Of his local endeavors, Dirnbach says, “My main EWOC project in NYC for the past year has been to talk with workers and help build a worker network at a large company with multiple NYC locations, that we can't discuss publicly yet.”

### A SPRAWLING NETWORK

EWOC is most strongly concentrated in California, Illinois, Texas and New York. In New York City, the group has over 500 people — workers, volunteers and trainees — involved in its network. Its volunteer organizers have successfully organized workers at Sara Lawrence College and at Bright Horizons, the nation's largest provider of employer-sponsored child care. Some of the REI-Soho worker-organizers who would eventually see through a successful union drive with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union went through EWOC's training program. EWOC volunteers also help to funnel Starbucks workers who reach out to them to Starbucks Workers United, the newly-formed, independent Starbucks union.

Not all organizing efforts have happy endings, but for many workers standing up for their rights has its own intrinsic value.

Megan, a reporter for a nonprofit newsroom learned about EWOC on Twitter, was fired from her job for “performance issues” after self-advocating for fair pay. While working at the nonprofit — the name of which she asked be secluded — she began fostering solidarity dialogue with the other workers. She reached out to multiple coworkers and set up a Slack messaging group, in an effort to create a setting where workers could communicate with each other without having management present.

“No one ever asked us what we wanted, or what we needed and there was no space to actualize our needs as workers,” Megan recalled.

“I was committed to being paid what I'm worth and being recognized,” said Megan, who found out from talking to a co-worker who saw the value of sharing their salary with her that she was being paid around 25% less than every other full-time reporter at her job. New York law stipulates that it is illegal to pay an employee a salary of less than \$60,000 unless you provide that employee with access to overtime. Megan was only paid around \$45,000 a year with no access to overtime and was expected to work long hours to finish stories on time. This,



despite her former employer running a nearly \$400,000 surplus in 2021, according to fiscal reports reviewed by *The Indy*.

Megan says it would be difficult for her to take a new reporting job that isn't already unionized. “But if I liked the job enough to take it and I thought it could benefit from a union, I would absolutely be part of that drive,” she said.

“Basically I thought unions were for government employees, or that you had to be a part of a really big workforce to be a part of a union. ... So many newsrooms have unionized and it makes a lot of sense. I see why it's necessary and I see what happens when you're not unionized. All these papers have been gutted. Local news is dying without a union,” Megan told *The Indy*.

Immediately after being fired in mid-May, Megan attended a training with The NewsGuild union on how shop stewards should handle grievance procedures.

Because union membership has been declining for decades, younger workers are less likely to have any personal experience of being in a union. Overworked, underpaid and often burdened with debt, they are nonetheless the ones revitalizing the labor movement. Younger workers across many different sectors — from laundry workers to baristas to tech workers — are coming out of the woodwork saying they want a union and better working conditions.

Julie spent months forming an organizing committee at Target, where she was making around \$15.30 per hour. She says the company's management “treats the people working there somewhere between a child and a mechanical hand. What is shared [with Amazon] is breaking things down into the most monotonous little task and giving you no agency in how you'd like to make things easier for yourself or the workday.”

Julie's committee had a handful of members that were meeting with each other regularly and engaging their coworkers in worker-rights conversations. However, when one of the organizers quit, Julie and another lead organizer saw the situation crumbling around them. They also saw that the turnover rate at their store had notably increased since they began the campaign — and both moved on to different workplaces, feeling they could make just as much of an impact elsewhere. Julie now works in the nonprofit sector and is putting feelers out about organizing her new workplace. She knows of efforts across the country to organize Target and thinks a unionization drive might be successful there in the next few years.

While her first union organizing attempt didn't succeed, Julie still considers her interaction with EWOC valuable. “As far as I'm concerned,” she says, “the core function of EWOC, the thing that makes it great, is that [workers] will take the skills they've learned, the contacts they've made, the relationships they have formed, the consciousness they have developed... into their working lives,” she said. “There are now a group of people there that now have knowledge of labor organizing at Target.”

Evan Grupsmith was working at a Brooklyn grocery store when the pandemic hit. With the guidance of EWOC, his workplace organizing committee petitioned for and gained some COVID-19-related workplace safety protections. He no longer works at the grocery store and soon will enter nursing school. He was so fond of his experience with EWOC that he is now a volunteer organizer and part of a project to set up a New York City branch. “I'm a socialist. That means workers have to control their own society, that workers should be organized and able to exercise power on their own behalf... It's imperative that we have a powerful workers' unit to build out democracy,” he said.

“Tens of millions of workers want a union, but unions have struggled to organize them. Some of that has to do with a misunderstanding of unions, some has to do with the history of organized labor in the US. We shouldn't be shy about naming these problems, undemocratic unions and racketeering have been real problems,” said Grupsmith. “The way I put it to workers is, *What do you want? Do you want to have freedom and rights in the workplace?* A union gets you that. *Even a bad union is better than no union at all.*”

“But, we should recognize that two workers working together to collectively better their conditions is already acting like a union, and that a union is not a third party, it is the workers,” Grupsmith added.

While the number of workers who see through a successful campaign is far fewer than those that initially reach out to EWOC, the group has managed in its first two years to foster 115 worker-rights campaigns in New York state. (They define a campaign as any collective action taken against a boss.) More than that, they have created a template for worker engagement that others, including traditional labor unions, can build on.

EWOC saw an increase in contacts from both workers and potential volunteers when the Amazon Labor Union (ALU) won its union election at the JFK8 Staten Island warehouse on April 1. “I think this is a really exciting time,” said Dirnbach. “Old folks like me that are in the labor

movement — folks that have been around 20 years — will often joke every five years, ‘Oh we think this is the upsurge. We think this is the year!’ So, we're saying it now. And the thing is — it might be this year. Maybe it is happening. It does seem really exciting, what's going on in the labor movement.”

Whether EWOC prepares a group of workers to become part of an already-established union, encourages them to form their own or promotes some type of solidarity unionism, its volunteers generally recommend workers take action collectively in order to realize demands. And, they say, one-on-one conversations with coworkers are the best way to organize, no matter the scale of the workplace or organizing effort.

EWOC has a long-term vision with short-term goals and strives to support workers with a sense of immediacy. At the end of each year, says Dirnbach, the organization regroup and decides how to continue their operations.

What will they discuss next time they have that conversation? “Here's my guess,” Dirnbach said, “We will probably wonder if we should really be helping workers form their own independent unions, like the ALU. I think that's a really interesting question that's forming, that is: How do you help them figure out their bylaws? How do you help them fundraise? There's all sorts of logistical and practical concerns that go into that but hey, ALU has shown it can be done.” Forming an

**TO RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM EWOC, A WORKER FILLS OUT AN INTAKE FORM VIA [WORKERORGANIZING.ORG](http://WORKERORGANIZING.ORG) AND A VOLUNTEER WILL FOLLOW UP WITHIN 72 HOURS.**

independent union gives workers the option of either taking the path of solidarity unionism or going through the NLRB officiation process, which ends in an election.

“This moment needs to be sustained. We need to make sure all the people being inspired to move have the support they need,” said EWOC volunteer organizer Wen Zhuang. She believes unions need to experiment and take more risks to find what kind of organizing strategies and tactics work best for the moment we're in. “In general, being a part of EWOC has given space for people to cultivate more of an appetite to try things out.”

Visit [bit.ly/3s0pMb8](http://bit.ly/3s0pMb8) for an extensive outline of EWOC's goals and vision.

Julie is a pseudonym. John Tarleton and Lachlan Hyatt contributed to this report.

### WEB EXCLUSIVE

In her latest essay for *The Indy*, Paddy Quick explores how capitalism is built on the unequal power relationship between employers and employees and what needs to be done about it for a labor revival to take root. For more see, [bit.ly/3wtZ8Km](http://bit.ly/3wtZ8Km).





FRANK RENO

# LABOR IN FASHION

BY LACHLAN HYATT

In 2015, after years of modeling in Mumbai, India, Nidhi Sunil was picked up by a New York City agency that promised it would sponsor her work visa and bring her the opportunity to make it big in the fashion world's mecca.

When Sunil arrived in the city, her new agency sent her to a two-bedroom apartment in Midtown Manhattan that she was to share with seven other young models from around the world. They slept in bunk beds and were charged \$2,000 a month by the agency for the accommodations. Sunil worked for months doing fashion shoots, but the agency frequently withheld her payments. For some shoots, she would only get paid in clothing or “exposure,” a common practice in the business.

The agency assessed numerous hidden charges and fees, so Sunil fell into a cycle of debt where much of her earnings had to go to paying it back. She could do little to improve her situation, as the agency possessed power of attorney over her, oversaw her finances, and controlled her work visa — another common practice in the industry. If she wanted to leave her contract, she would have had to buy her way out, no small feat when her earrings were being withheld for weeks at a time.

Eventually, Sunil waited out her contract, found a better agency with more transparent practices, and became a L’Oreal “global ambassador” and model.

“I know there’s not a lot of sympathy for models because it’s kind of like the ‘poor-little-rich-girl’ kind of syndrome... but if you look closer, it’s just a bunch of really, really young girls,” she said. “Most models that I know come from small towns. A lot of them are here trying to work and send back money and things like that. A lot of them feel like they just have to put up with whatever is given to them and make it work somehow, as opposed to asking for basic labor rights and basic human rights.”

Stories like Sunil’s are common in New York’s multi-billion-dollar fashion industry, which is rife with exploitation and unfair practices. It is a huge part of the city’s economy: The city government estimates that 180,000 people work in fashion, making up 6% of the city’s workforce and generating \$10.9 billion in total wages. The semiannual New York City Fashion Week brings more

than 230,000 visitors and generates close to \$600 million. Seeing their value overlooked, models, photographers, hair stylists and other fashion workers are organizing to demand more regulation of their working conditions.

On May Day, International Workers’ Day, an expanse of white tents and staged lighting and film equipment blocked the entrance of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in preparation for the swarms of celebrities that would appear at the next day’s Met Gala and demonstrate the opulence of high fashion. This year’s theme, unironically, was the Gilded Age, the late-19th-century era of unprecedented wealth disparities and worker exploitation.

Nearby, two dozen models, other fashion workers, elected officials, and activists held a press conference, using the Gilded Age theme to point out the glaring discrepancies in the \$2.5 trillion global fashion industry: As the owners of the upscale brands worn at the Gala, like Versace or Oscar de la Renta, get richer, the workers making up the bulk of the industry continue to struggle.

“From the runway to the factory floor, to the Amazon warehouses, to Conde Nast workers unionizing, we really believe that we are stronger together,” said Sara Ziff, the executive director of the Model Alliance, a nonprofit organization that works towards correcting problematic practices in the industry. “We’re all asking for basic dignity and respect on the job. That’s hard for some people to wrap their heads around when they see the glamor of the Met Gala, but the reality of working in this industry is it’s a luxury business where it’s not a luxury to work in the business, given the lack of basic protections.”

After having fought against sexual harassment, unfair child modeling practices, eating disorders among models, and precarious employment for the past 10 years, the Model Alliance is now pushing for stronger state regulations. Its efforts echo the campaign to win “deliverista” food-delivery workers better pay and conditions through public pressure and legislation. Fashion is far more glamorous, but workers in both industries get paid for piecework, which makes traditional unionization difficult.

The proposed Fashion Workers Act, sponsored by state Senator Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan) and Assemblymember Karines Reyes (D-Bronx), would require management companies to pay workers within 45 days of completing a job, improve transparency in contracts and agreements, and prohibit charging workers more than the daily fair-market rate for accommodation. Looking to prevent exploitative debt cycles like Sunil experienced, it would also stop management agencies from deducting predatory charges from workers’ pay.

“The issues [in the fashion industry] need to be regulated for human-rights purposes, but also because we’re trying to level the playing field for women across all indus-

tries,” said Assemblymember Reyes. “We talk about pay equity and fairness and breaking glass ceilings for women, but this industry that’s predominantly dominated by women, and they’re being exploited, should also be regulated as well.”

The bill also aims to improve conditions for other workers, such as hair stylists, makeup artists, and photographers.

“There’s no rules and there’s nothing in terms of protection,” said photographer Tony Kim, who has worked in fashion for over 20 years and has had his photos published in magazines like French Elle and Japanese Vogue. “Sometimes I wouldn’t get paid for six months, and it’s not unusual.”

In addition to late payments, Kim said that he has experienced management agencies setting up shoots, charging the client more than he knew, and pocketing the extra money, something he said is very widespread in the industry. Agencies have also resold his photos to clients without alerting him or paying him his due share.

“They’re supposed to be my agent and have a fiduciary duty to me, and there’s no language protecting artists,” said Kim. “It’s just a free-for-all that’s happening right now.”

The lack of any meaningful regulation of the fashion industry also creates an environment prone to abuse and human trafficking, says Ziff, a recipient of the National Organization for Women’s Susan B. Anthony Award.

“The Harvey Weinstein case, Jeffrey Epstein case, the Bill Cosby case, and others, all of those high-profile Me Too cases had a common denominator, which was unregulated model-management companies that were feeding the people they’re supposed to be representing and protecting to these predatory men,” said Ziff. Sunil said her experience in the industry “almost borders on human trafficking.”

At the May Day press conference, Senator Hoylman said that while the Fashion Workers Act was gaining traction in Albany and he hoped it would be enacted before the legislative session ends next month, fashion still has a long way to go toward becoming a fair industry.

“All of these are basic worker protections, the bare minimum,” he said. “Ultimately, I think we need to see full-on unionization and collective bargaining, but the Fashion Workers Act is the first step and the pathway to true workers’ rights.”





NYCU

# NY FARMWORKER OVERTIME LAWS ARE CHANGING, BUT ONLY AT A SNAIL'S PACE

By Simon Davis-Cohen

**M**artina Marisol wakes up before dawn most days to get to work at 6 a.m., on a farm upstate. She often doesn't get home until the late evening. Some weeks, she works up to 60 hours.

That schedule is typical for agricultural workers across New York State. But overtime only starts for farmworkers at 60 hours, compared to the standard 40-hour work week.

Advocates for farmworkers have long pushed to remedy the issue by requiring employers to pay workers overtime after 40 hours a week. Earlier this year, a wage board formed by 2019 fair labor legislation recommended doing just that — though under its proposal, the overtime threshold wouldn't be fully phased in for another decade. The plan is also pegged to a proposed tax credit for farm owners who pay overtime, which was included in the new state budget. This amounts to millions of taxpayer dollars to offset the cost of paying overtime.

The official summary of the 2019 Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act (FLFLPA) states that the bill “provides for an 8-hour work day for farm laborers,” or 40 hours per week. However, following heated lobbying from the farm industry, no implementing language for 40 hours was included. Instead, the bill provided overtime pay after 60 hours worked, and formed the Wage Board to pursue further expansions.

The FLFLPA was passed to begin to address what's described as the racist exclusion of farmworkers from New Deal Era federal labor protections. Farmworkers and domestic workers — then majority Black — were left out of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and National

Labor Relations Act of 1935. It was not until 1966 that farmworkers gained some protections under FLSA — like minimum wage and record-keeping guarantees. (Farmworkers also gained some rights with the passage of the 1983 Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act.) However, nationally, their wages remain only 60% of other comparable workers, and they are still left out of federal collective bargaining standards. A movement is now pushing states, like New York, to begin to address this historic injustice.

The Wage Board's latest recommendation was delayed from December 31, 2020 to January 2022, in part due to COVID-19.

Farmworker advocates are pleased with the 40-hour work week recommendation, but want a faster phase-in timeline. “To me, the biggest issue is that we actually get to a 40-hour work week. The 10-year phase-in is a very long phase-in to get to a 40-hour work week,” David Kallick, Director of the New York-based Immigration Research Initiative, told *The Independent*.

Compared to other states that have moved forward with farmworker overtime measures, New York is dragging its feet.

California passed legislation in 2016 to expand the farmworker overtime threshold from 60 hours to 40 hours. The state planned for a three-year phase-in, from 2019 to 2022 for large employers, and another three-year process for smaller em-

ployers, to be completed between 2022 and 2025.

In Washington, dairy workers won a 40-hour work week thanks to a 2019 state supreme court decision. Their benefits kicked in just one year later. Then, in 2021, the legislature expanded those benefits to all agricultural workers, via a quick two-year phase-in, from 2022 to 2024.

New York's plan would mean overtime for farmworkers would get to 40 hours by 2032, 13 years after the legislation was passed.

Not only did California and Washington move toward 40 hours much quicker than New York, they both did so without any subsidy for employers. (Oregon passed a 40-hour bill this year that includes a tax credit, which would

agricultural establishments, according to research by Daniel Costa, of the Economic Policy Institute.

In sum, “There are no smoking guns out there showing that [overtime] will (or is) destroying the industry in any way,” Costa told me.

As New York's \$5.75 billion agricultural industry gears up for the 2022 season, the overtime threshold remains at 60 hours. Under the current proposal the next expansion will be to 56 hours, in 2024. Meanwhile, the farmworker labor force remains precarious and subject to abuse, as many workers remain undocumented.

Regardless of what laws are on the books, New York farmworkers face wage theft and retaliation. “Workers often accept arrangements that don't reflect the overtime victories because they don't want to make trouble,” Jessica Maxwell, executive director of Workers Center of Central New York told *The Indy*. Sometimes, workers will be given a “salary” up to the overtime threshold, then be paid in cash under the table for additional hours, skirting overtime benefits, she said. “We see a lot of cases of wage theft related to overtime or minimum wage. ... As the overtime threshold decreases, it's possible we could see an increase in the dollar amount of this type of wage theft.”

This is one reason advocates fought hard to include collective bargaining rights in the FLFLPA. Despite COVID-19 delaying campaigns to educate New York farmworkers of their new rights under the FLFLPA, in late 2021, workers celebrated the creation of New York's first farmworker union, at Pindar Vineyards on Long Island.

“It's important to have laws that regulate basic labor standards,” says Yomaira Franqui, lead organizer for Local 338 RWDSU/UFCW, who supported the successful organizing campaign. “It's also crucial to have labor unions who represent workers so they have a voice in the conditions of their own work. This all goes hand in hand with the right to organize.”

As gains are made in farmworker organizing, new barriers are created. Along with the challenges of organizing a workforce composed significantly of undocumented people, a 2021 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court has made farmworker union organizing even harder

## LETTUCE CHANGE:

*New York farmworkers' overtime protections lag far behind those of California farm workers pictured.*

## FULL IMPLEMENTATION DELAYED UNTIL 2032.

decrease as overtime is expanded over five years.)

These subsidies are praised by industry groups. Legislation to add an employer subsidy to California's program was proposed in 2020, but it did not pass. That bill was supported by the California Farm Bureau, which said the credit would “encourage farm employers to increase the income of farm employees by relieving them of the financial burden of paying overtime wage premiums.”

### LESSONS FROM CALIFORNIA

The example of California suggests such a conservative approach is not necessary. After overtime was expanded, California actually saw a small increase in the number of

across the *nation*. That decision explicitly prohibits unions from entering farms during non-work hours to speak with workers, something the National Labor Relations Act permits for other unions. It is yet another example of how farmworkers are treated differently than others.

“We have been excluded. Please stop discriminating. ... It's been [over] two years since the [FLFLPA] law came into effect,” New York farmworker Crispin Hernandez testified at a wage board hearing. “We want the threshold to be after 40 hours.”



# WHEN GREAT-GRANDMA LED STRIKES AGAINST THE BOSSES & THE PATRIARCHY

*The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880-1917*

BY MEREDITH TAX, FOREWORD BY SARAH JAFFE  
VERSO BOOKS, THIRD REPRINT, APRIL 2022

By Eleanor J. Bader

In 1909, approximately 30,000 New York City-based garment workers, most of them young, white, immigrant women and teens, went on strike for better working conditions and higher wages. The spontaneous action followed a mass meeting at Cooper Union called by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). After two hours of listening to mostly male speakers, Clara Lemlich, a 21-year-old Ukrainian immigrant who had come to the United States in 1903, stood up and addressed the crowd.

Lemlich was already a seasoned activist — during an earlier strike she was jailed, and police broke her ribs — who had helped form Local 25 of the ILGWU three years earlier. As Meredith Tax writes in *The Rising of the Women*, “The oppressive conditions in the trade kept her at the boiling point.” Among the outrages: The bosses required workers to pay for the needles, thread and electricity used; pay envelopes were routinely short; and managers followed the women to the restroom, urging them to hurry.

At the time of the Cooper Union meeting, Lemlich was fired up and ready for action. She literally stormed the Cooper Union stage and, in Yiddish, put forward a motion for a general strike. To everyone’s amazement, it passed.

Lemlich’s *chutzpah* is, of course, thrilling, as were the initial weeks of the rebellion. “The strike was run out of twenty halls, each of which had a woman in charge,” Tax reports. “It was women who arranged picketing, schedules, made reports on scabs and police brutality, wrote leaflets, spoke at other unions, visited rich women to raise money, went to court to bail out strikers or act as witnesses, kept track of the shops that settled, gave strike benefits to needy workers, organized new women into the union, kept up spirits, and persuaded people not to go back to work.”

But despite this momentum, by the time the strike petered out three months later (individual shops were al-

lowed to settle one at a time), public support had withered, allowing the bosses to refuse to negotiate further. Fierce anti-labor backlash followed.

Tax provides an encyclopedic denouement that deconstructs the political and social factors that caused the backlash and explores the rifts that developed between workers as the attacks unfolded. To wit, she highlights redbaiting that was stoked by male unionists who refused to recognize the invaluable strike support provided by women in the Socialist Party. Chauvinist male leaders of the ILGWU whose overt sexism got a boost from the American Federation of Labor head Samuel Gompers treated the women with condescension and hostility.

At the same time, Tax includes reasons to celebrate the uprising, as higher wages and an elevated sense of self worth left the women strikers with a long-lasting psychological victory and inspired future organizing efforts.



GARY MARTIN

In fact, three years later, textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, went on strike to protest an announced 30-cent wage cut. Like their New York City comrades, the millworkers were largely young and female. This time, though, the strike was led by the anarchist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as the Wobblies, whose tactics included the sabotage of machinery and mass picketing to block replacement workers from entering the workplace. Wobbly leaders Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Bill Haywood coordinated the walkout and helped publicize the workers’ demands: a 15 percent pay hike and double pay for overtime.

They also held organizing workshops for women and children, focusing on stay-at-home wives. “As a result of the Wobblies’ encouragement, female leaders began to develop,” Tax writes, “and women were elected to the strike committee.”

Children, sensitized to the issues facing their caregivers, acted as emissaries and were sent by train to New York City, where they garnered publicity for the struggle. “The press had a field day,” Tax writes, “over the dreadful, starved, and sickly condition” of kids who had been sent to the city for temporary fostering. A second group, destined for Vermont, was greeted by a gaggle of police who threatened to send them to the poor farm; a third

contingent of children and adult chaperones was beaten upon arrival in Philadelphia. “The story of the ‘Cossacks’ beating defenseless women and children ... made headlines across the country,” reports Tax. “The tide of public opinion began to turn in favor of the strikers.”

After eight weeks, the mill owners met with the strike committee and eventually agreed to a 25% raise for the lowest-paid workers and time-and-a-quarter pay for overtime. The company also agreed not to retaliate against the strikers in a settlement that the workers accepted.

But, like the New York City strike, in the aftermath of the Lawrence job action, backlash developed. Divisions erupted between the IWW and the Socialist Party, groups that had collaborated during the strike, and a split occurred, weakening both groups. Then, the 1913 recession sent workers scurrying, catapulting the country into an economic freefall that lasted until the start of World War I. The upshot was the sidelining of women and the implosion of the IWW.

All told, while Tax’s evocation of the strikes is exciting and moving, the book is also depressing — so many of the same issues that galvanized the workers a century ago continue to vex us, from a lack of affordable childcare to wages too low to sustain a family. What’s more, sexism, male domination, sexual harassment and sexual violence still run rampant in organizations within, and apart from, the left. In a brief introduction to the 2022 edition of *The Rising of the Women*, Tax lays out a case for intersectional feminism, socialism and working-class solidarity in today’s political milieu.

“It is critical for progressives to fight attacks on trans people while strengthening the fight against patriarchy in general,” she concludes. “Only by doing both can we build a progressive movement that will fight for all of our rights, not play one group off against another. Everyone in the movement needs to understand patriarchy, racism, and class, and the specific ways they intersect and overlap. ... Unless we can do all these things, and fight climate change, we will fall short. And failure could mean the end of human life on earth.”

## STARBUCKS

Continued from page 10

say they’re afraid of similar retaliation, but the support they’ve been getting from the community has been overwhelming.

“People will come in and order a grande water and put \$20 in our tip jar and say, ‘We think what you’re doing is great.’ Even before

this, our customers always ask us about our lives. Some of them know I do jiu-jitsu and I compete in other states. I tell them about my wins and losses,” said Cruz.

The National Labor Relations Board will be sending ballots to the workers at the Astoria Boulevard store on May 6. They have until May 26 to vote.

The election for the Ditmars Boulevard store will be held in-person there on June 3.

On April 30, they posted a list of demands on Twitter, including a raise to \$25 an hour, the option to work full-time, free and full-coverage health care regardless of hours worked, more paid vacation and sick time, and expanded child care and maternity leave.

“Howard Schultz seems to think that if you’re for unions, you’re anti-Starbucks,” said the anonymous barista. “But we’re doing this because we actually enjoy working at

Starbucks. We don’t hate Starbucks, we just want a better work environment. We love the customers and I love my coworkers. We’re like family.”





# TICK, TICK, TICK... TICK...

## EXTINCTION REBELLION URGES REVOLT AGAINST CLIMATE INACTION

BY NANCY HOCH

On April 18 — day five of Extinction Rebellion’s Spring 2022 Uprising — I joined a group of about 100 peace and environmental activists marching down Broadway from the IRS offices near Foley Square to the Financial District. It’s Tax Day and chants like, “Taxes for climate! Not for war!” bounce off the buildings, amplified by bullhorns and a group of drummers. But when the march reaches the place where Broadway splits around the Charging Bull sculpture, the forward movement and the sounds propelling it come to an abrupt halt.

Making my way into the now quietly milling crowd, I get my first view of the climate activists risking arrest. Fifteen-foot wooden tripods lashed together with ropes block each branch of Broadway. At the apex of each, a figure wearing a mask and a bicycle helmet perches. Both “climbers” hold small flags imprinted with Extinction Rebellion’s logo — an hourglass within a circle, meant to signify that time is running out—which they wave ever so slowly. Otherwise, they’re silent and still. Below, two people are locked together in a “sleeping dragon” — PVC piping into which they’ve each inserted an arm. They will have to be sawed out before the climber can be brought down. A few other people are sitting in the roadway. One, a young man, is meditating.

After the rowdy march it’s a shock to encounter this calm, almost otherworldly tableau. Often Extinction Rebellion (XR) will use a boat as part of their protest actions, meant to signify that, as one arrestee later tells me, “The seas are rising and so are we.” According to Rev. Chelsea MacMillan, an organizer with XR’s New York City chapter, seeing a boat where it’s not supposed to be is also “a way to disrupt us, to stop business as usual.”

As I gaze at the scene, the man next to me — a musician who plays viola de gamba in chamber groups — says he’s never been arrested, but seeing the action today, he almost “jumped in.”

“There is no electoral way to address this problem; they’ve been bought by the corporations,” he tells me. “The only last chance we have is direct action.”

That, in a nutshell, is XR’s philosophy, too. The group supports groups working on other fronts, but believes those efforts by themselves are not enough, given the urgency of the climate crisis. The goal, says XR’s website, is “to persuade governments to act justly on the Climate and Ecological Emergency.” The tactic is non-violent direct action, also referred to as civil disobedience.

The idea is not for everyone to get arrested, but rather to get 3.5% of the population — about 400,000 people in New York City — visibly in motion, a threshold of mass dissent that the group believes will compel the government to take decisive climate action. “Obviously, it has to be sustained,” Mun Chong, XR NYC’s media coordinator, tells me. “It isn’t just about coming out for a march once a year, but something that is more akin to Black Lives Matter two years ago when people are out on the streets every single day.”

Extinction Rebellion, now a global movement with chapters in 84 countries, burst on the scene in Britain in October 2018 with a series of spectacular actions including the shutdown of five major bridges across the Thames River. Two months later, an XR chapter formed in New York City. In the United Kingdom, where demonstrators sometimes occupy a space for days, direct action seems to be having an impact. Since April 1, for example, a Just Stop Oil campaign resulting in over 1,200 arrests and aimed at disrupting the flow of oil to London has caused, according to one poll, the number of people in the United Kingdom who say they are likely to engage in some form of climate action to jump from 8.7% to 11.3%.

Whether similar tactics can help the U.S. climate movement overcome the loss of momentum that occurred during the first two years of the pandemic remains to be seen. XR’s Spring Uprising in New York City, which included a four-day festival in Washington Square Park, numerous demonstrations in coalition with other environmental and social justice groups, and five actions involving civil disobedience, is the group’s first attempt at a major public engagement since the pandemic began.





As the arrests in the Financial District begin, the crowd chants, “We see you! We love you! We will get justice for you!” A few of the arrestees later tell me that hearing the chant helped them remain calm. In fact, a hallmark of XR’s arrests is their calmness. It’s a carefully orchestrated dance. Protesters remain still and, except for delaying their arrests by locking or gluing themselves to various objects, never physically resist arrest. They also refrain from verbal interactions with the police except to give necessary information. In turn, the police, knowing what to expect from an XR action, also tend to remain calm.

I watch as members of the NYPD Strategic Response Group, an anti-terror group notorious for its brutality during Black Lives Matter protests, carefully cut one woman’s arm out of a sleeping dragon. When the climber on one of the tripods is brought down precipitously, numerous police reach out to guide him to a safe landing.

Most, though not all, of the XR arrestees I meet during Spring Uprising are white, and all of them are quick to say that the relationship XR has, so far, been able to carve out with the police stems from the privilege they are accorded as a predominantly white, middle-class organization.

After the arrests, Eric Arnum, who heads up XR NYC’s jail support operation, sets up “base camp” — a warm place with bathrooms where people can hang out for hours — at the Essex Market, a food hall on the Lower East Side about five blocks from the police station where the arrestees have been taken. Notified of the location, a fresh team of jail support volunteers arrives, replacing those who had assisted at the arrest site. Eric, 60, takes the first shift as “spotter,” placing a camp chair on the sidewalk within view of the precinct’s door. Several “runners” wait with him; their role is to bring the releasees back to Essex Market where the rest of us are waiting. “Getting arrested, it’s emotional,” Eric tells me. “No matter how bulletproof they are, when they get out, they really do need somebody to guide them back not only down Broome Street to their belongings, but back into civil society. I believe the way we treat them once they walk out that precinct door is going to determine whether or not they are willing to do it again.”

Arrestees and jail support members linger for hours around the Essex Market table. Everyone has an arrest story to tell. Lily, a Brooklyn College student who had been locked in a sleeping dragon earlier in the day, cut her activist teeth on civil disobedience 10 years ago at Occupy Wall Street when she was just 17. Fergus, part of the jail support team, was arrested for the first time in 1973 at an anti-war demonstration. As a vet in Vietnam, he watched Agent Orange kill trees. Now he fights to save forests in Western Massachusetts near his home. Many around the table have gone out to Minnesota to protest Line 3, a pipeline expansion that would carry nearly a million barrels of tar sands per day across indigenous lands. Others have been involved in NYC Black Lives Matter protests. At least one of the arrestees, a young woman of color, is celebrating her first arrest. Another arrestee had her first arrest at the Seabrook nuclear power plant in the 1970s.

As they talk, young and old, I’m struck by the intergenerational character of the group and the rich exchange of ideas and experience it makes for. Less prominent are people in their 40s and 50s, many of whom, I’m told, dropped out of the group during the pandemic.

#### AHEAD OF THE TIMES

The first sign that XR’s daring plan to blockade the New York Times’ printing facility in College Point, Queens has succeeded is an email I receive early on Earth Day announcing my paper “will be delivered tomorrow” due to a “transportation problem.”

When I arrive at the base camp — a deli near the 109th Precinct in Flushing — most people are sitting or standing around on the sidewalk, keeping an eye on the precinct door across the street. Among the jail support team are two 17-year-old students from LaGuardia High School

who will spend the day running errands. Mainly, though, they are all ears, listening and absorbing. Both are politically active at school, but because the pandemic severed their connection to the older students, they say they have had to figure a lot out on their own.

As arrestees are released, details of the action emerge. Around midnight 32 people willing to risk arrest and additional support members arrived at the facility en masse. They had with them a boat, the bed of a long trailer, six tripods and numerous cement and steel reinforced boxes and barrels, some weighing as much as 500 pounds. Within 10 minutes, around the time when the first squad car shows up to investigate, everything and everyone is locked into place.

The police set to work on the side-entrance blockade first since that is where delivery trucks depart from the facility. It takes two or three hours for the police to assemble their forces and another three to saw through the barrels and bring the tripods down. Police cover the demonstrators with blankets and spray them with water to keep sparks from catching fire. Even so, people report feeling heat and smelling smoke. Someone notices that the blade on one of the saws was changed five times. The 15 XR members taken from this entrance are arrested around dawn.

At the front entrance, another 17 people are locked down, four in tripods and the rest in and under the boat. A few hours into the blockade, an employee, frustrated at being unable to go home, drives rapidly toward the blockade. Several members of XR’s de-escalation team rush the car, one of them hurling herself onto the hood. The car is stopped and no one is injured, but it leaves people shaken. The driver is arrested.

Once delivery trucks begin to flow from the side entrance, demonstrators and police at the front entrance negotiate a deal: The 17 agree to unlock themselves, the police issue summonses but don’t arrest anyone and the

the gravity of what we are doing and also really moved by how committed everyone is and how brave,” she tells me.

A few days after the *Times* blockade, XR’s Regenerative Culture Working Group facilitates a “process circle” to help people deal with the difficult feelings the action has engendered. This meeting is in concert with XR’s generally mindful approach to both sustaining its members and growing its numbers. Regenerative culture, according to Chelsea, who helped head the working group for several years, is “resisting or cultivating something that is different than our go-go-go capitalistic growth at any cost mindset. ... It’s the understanding that a movement is only as healthy as its relationships and as its own members, so we need to engage in self care and communal care as well as planetary care.”

The group works on “meeting culture,” making sure there are always personal check-ins, has a conflict resilience team to help manage tensions as they arise and helps people build the skills that will help them work collaboratively. There are regular “embodied antiracism practice” trainings and “climate grief circles” listed on XR’s website and open to anyone.

These practices, Chelsea explains, are in place not just to foster personal change but for political reasons — specifically to keep the fear engendered by the existential crisis of climate change from causing more political harm: “Our instinct is going to be to try and control this liter-

## A HALLMARK OF XR’S ARRESTS IS THEIR CALMNESS.

demonstrators get to keep their equipment.

At 80, Dr. James Merewether, a physicist and former professor at CUNY, is the oldest of the arrestees. He recalls how growing up, “the Korean War was on the front page of the *New York Times*. Every day there was something about *they took this hill* or *they took this village*. ... Climate change is extremely more serious than a war, but it’s not on the front page of the *Times* every day and it should be.”

This is XR’s key complaint about the *Times*’ coverage of climate change. The other is that the *Times* takes money from fossil fuel companies to run their ads, which organizers say amount to greenwashing, on the *Times*’ online platforms. After XR’s action makes news here and abroad, the *Times* releases a statement extolling its climate coverage but avoiding any mention of its fossil fuel ads.

As the day wears on, it becomes clear that people are struggling with some intense feelings.

A woman named Dancing Leaf, 54, who lives in New Paltz, New York, tears up when she thinks about going home, where the level of climate activism has been low since the pandemic. “We’re in a dire situation. I’m always stressed by that,” she says. “The only place not to be stressed is in the fight. ... It’s great to be with people who care and are at least trying.”

James, who has been listening intently, agrees: “Yes. What am I going to be doing today? If I can be doing something that is promoting the welfare of the planet, I’d rather be doing that than anything else.”

Ward Ogden, 62, arrested at the side entrance, remembers hearing some truckers expressing support for the action, but the thought that many were inconvenienced weighs on him. “These are working people...it’s sincerely painful,” he says, even though “what we’re trying to do is avoid a bigger calamity.”

Chelsea, 34, was locked under the boat when the employee’s car came barreling towards the barricade. “It really rattled me. He could have crushed us.” Once she got home, she spent the afternoon crying. “I was struck by

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**FOLLOW THE MONEY:** A member of Extinction Rebellion sits atop a 15-foot-high tripod on Broadway near Wall Street.

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**NO MORE GREENWASHING:** Extinction Rebellion protests outside the Midtown office of the New York Times.

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**SPRUNG:** Seven XR arrestees celebrate their release from jail at a nearby diner.

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ally uncontrollable crisis, to control the people around us. So that’s when we start seeing each other as a means to an end as opposed to these people I am building a new world with.”

When I think about the future and the way the climate crisis will unfold, I worry most about how people and governments will react, how the knee-jerk reaction to hoard resources, build walls and blame others will plunge us into a horror from which it will be impossible to recover. We already live in a climate-changed world with millions of climate refugees fleeing resource wars, natural disasters and other calamities. Perhaps, if nothing else, XR’s experiments in regenerative culture can serve as a model for how to build resilient communities that will hold us together, and, at the same time, help us prepare for the unprecedented journey ahead.



# THE BRIEF, BRAVE LIFE OF LARRY CASUSE

*An Enemy Such as This: Larry Casuse and the Fight for Native Liberation in One Family on Two Continents over Three Centuries*  
By DAVID CORREIA, FOREWORD BY MELANIE K. YAZZIE  
HAYMARKET BOOKS, 2022, 240 PAGES

By Danny Katch

In today's struggles against oil pipelines and other environmental catastrophes, Native people are at the forefront of humanity's existential fight against climate change. This leadership hasn't come out of nowhere but is the product of decades of radical Indigenous struggle dating back to the Red Power era of the '60s and '70s. Some of this history is well known but far too much is hidden. David Correia, an abolitionist organizer and professor at the University of New Mexico, is helping to uncover some of this legacy with *An Enemy Such as This: Larry Casuse and the Fight for Native Liberation in One Family on Two Continents over Three Centuries*.

Correia's book is in part the story of Larry Casuse, a Navajo student activist killed in 1973 by police in Gallup, New Mexico after he had taken the town mayor hostage in a desperate attempt to close down a deadly bar. But it's also a multigenerational saga of Larry's family, a history of New Mexico, an analysis of Native exploitation in "bordertowns" like Gallup and a moving tribute to the spirit of a remarkable young man who has inspired some of today's leading forces in the movement for winning back Native land and a sustainable human economy. Correia spoke with *The Independent* about the importance of the Larry Casuse story.

**THE INDEPENDENT:** *Larry died trying to close down a bar called the Navajo Inn, which might seem odd for people unfamiliar with bordertowns. Why was this a crucial issue?*

**DAVID CORREIA:** This was about more than just a bar. The Navajo Inn became a symbol of everything that was ruthless and anti-Indian about Gallup.

Larry was really thoughtful about this. It wasn't about protecting Native people from alcohol, but protecting Native people from the owners of the bars and from the cops. It was illegal to possess or drink alcohol on most Native reservations. There's a complicated history to that, but what ends up happening is criminalization. The only way to drink was to go into the bordertown, but the only places they were welcome were the Indian bars, where they'd be beaten or robbed.

So most Native people would drink in alleys, or they would go to places like Navajo Inn, which was a horrifying place. It was in the middle of nowhere along a dark highway. People didn't want to drive because they would get arrested — the Gallup police arrested more people than anywhere else per capita in the U.S. at the time. So people [walking home] were getting hit by cars, and white teenagers were engaging in "Indian rolling" — violence against inebriated Native men and women — sometimes murdering them.

More people died in front of the Navajo Inn than any other place in the state of New Mexico. There was never a winter that didn't end with at least a dozen deaths, finding people in arroyos, frozen. The Navajo Inn was [also] the most profitable liquor store and bar in the entire state. And it was partly owned by the mayor of Gallup, Em-

mit Garcia, who named himself the director of the alcohol treatment center. Then the governor of New Mexico, Bruce King, nominated him to be a regent at the University of New Mexico, where Larry was a student.

When Larry was killed by police it was the beginning of an organizing campaign to culminate with the shutting down of Navajo Inn and holding all those people responsible for what they did. But Larry's activism had become very confrontational — I think it was a moment of desperation for him. After his death, thousands marched in streets for months, because they understood what the Navajo Inn was. Navajo folks understood he was sacrificing himself for them.



LYNNE FOSTER

**You explain how the Navajo Inn was part of a long history of violent exploitation of Natives in New Mexico, going back to the creation of the Santa Rita copper mine where Larry was born and his father worked. Can you talk a bit about Santa Rita's bloody story?**

What is today the Silver City area in southern New Mexico was [at the time] part of Mexico, but it was really Apache land. The Apache were too powerful, and their alliance with Navajo made it impossible for a durable Mexican claim to the area around the Santa Rita mine. So there were "scalp contracts" to entice soldiers of fortune, mostly Americans, into Mexico to make that war against the Apaches more efficient and affordable.

And this is part of Larry's origin story. He was born in a place that only exists because of the genocidal campaign of the scalp contracts. But it's also his dad's real moral center. Only one other Navajo man joined the [miners'] union.

Louis Casuse was willing to organize with people who quite honestly didn't care all that much about his interests.

**Larry's father was a Navajo who escaped from boarding school as a youth, survived some of the deadliest battles of World War II and faced discrimination at the mine. His mother was an Austrian girl who survived Allied bombings and occupation before becoming a white American in a bordertown. How was Larry impacted by these swirling dynamics of imperialism, settler colonialism and racism?**

War and occupation had really destroyed both of his parents' lives. His dad was a uranium miner and died of cancer. His mom was literally traded by her family [to marry Larry's GI father] for their safety and probably hers. The world historical events that upended his parents' lives upended his. Larry had to be the parent [to his siblings], because his dad had to work so much and his mom was basically a teenager.

Everyone I've ever talked to who knew Larry said he was remarkably intelligent, a deeply thoughtful young man. He was trying to make sense of it all for himself and his brothers and sisters. He always felt suspended between worlds. His dad used to take him to ceremonies in the Navajo Nation, but [Larry] didn't speak the language, and his mom aggressively denied their Native identities. But he didn't turn away from his mom's history: from a very young age he was learning German and interested in German history.

His thoughtfulness and the responsibility he felt for his family led him to take a very principled position: "We can't keep being tossed around by historical events." He refused to live in a world defined by colonial violence. He named it, and said "I'm fighting against it for the rest of my life."

**What is Larry Casuse's legacy almost 50 years after his death?**

Larry [remains] a contested figure in Gallup. You bring up Larry's name and the white non-Native establishment in Gallup loses their mind and wants to call him this terrorist. But he's become a sort of folk hero among Navajos, particularly if they're over 50.

Melanie Yazzie wrote the forward [to the book]. Melanie is one of the founders of the Red Nation [a Native liberation organization] and their offices are called the Larry Casuse Freedom Center. Larry is more than a symbol, he's an ancestor that they draw on to remind them of why they fight for what they fight for.

His family's history overlays like a map on world historic events. You can't make heads or tails of the decisions Larry made as a 19-year-old to give up his life for this cause, if you don't understand the history of colonialism. I was trying to capture the reader's imagination with what a remarkable family and worthwhile history this is, and maybe along the way we might learn something about how this country has really been organized.



# IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RESPOND TO A REFUGEE CRISIS

BY LINDSAY MYERS

**T**araclia is a rural village in the southeast of Moldova, near the border with Ukraine, about 160 miles by car from the port city of Odessa. Its official population is 3,700 people, though it is likely much less because many Moldovans work abroad.

There is one main road through the village. Coming in from the east, as Ukrainian refugees would do, it passes by houses with decorated gates and large gardens; in the spring, families are preparing the soil and planting potatoes and other crops. It then goes down a hill past the high school and primary school, with the golden dome of the church to the left and the bright blue crosses of the cemetery to the right. A sharp turn south at the store takes you past the library, the mayor's office and the kindergarten, and then out.

Moldova, a former Soviet republic with 3 million people, is one of the poorest nations in Europe. Its national language is Romanian, but television in Taraclia is mostly in Russian, and Moldovans are exposed to a significant amount of misinformation and disinformation via television and social media. People in Taraclia were not sure what to believe about the war in Ukraine until they heard the sounds of bombs exploding in Odessa and saw the refugees with their own eyes.

There are currently around 50 refugees in the village, primarily women and children, including one Korean family who had been living in Ukraine. The first ones to cross the Moldovan border had money and expensive cars, then came those with fewer resources. Refugees who can afford to travel further west stay for a few days, while those with less money remain. Others return to Ukraine to be with their husbands and fathers, fighting for their country.

## WAITING FOR FAMILY

Valentina Borzin, a retired schoolteacher living on the outskirts of Taraclia, grew up in Soviet Ukraine in a rural village near the town now known as Bashtanka, in the district of Mykolaiv. She studied foreign languages at a university in the Donbas region, then returned to her village after she graduated and married a Moldovan man. In 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Moldova gained independence, she and her husband moved to Moldova and settled in Taraclia. Valentina and I taught English there together.

Her mother, her sister Larisa, Larisa's daughter Oksana and Oksana's children still live in her childhood home. Over the past few weeks, Valentina has Facebook-messaged me over 30 voice memos. The Internet connection in her house is not strong enough to video-chat.

"Telling the truth, I couldn't believe that Russia bombed my village, but then I saw it on the Internet, and I began to believe," Valentina said, speak-

**SUNSET:** Locals in Taraclia can hear explosions at night coming from the direction of Ukraine.

**THE ROAD HOME:** The road to and from Ukraine.

**EXTENDED FAMILY:** Retired schoolteacher Valentina Borzin welcomed her niece, her niece's two children and three other Ukrainian refugees into her home after the war started.

ing in English, her voice shaking. "Now Oksana is coming, but I don't believe that she is coming. When I see them here, then they will be in safety, then I can believe."

She is especially worried about her 80-year-old mother, who is too feeble to make the journey — she needs to be carried down to the cellar in a blanket when the air-raid warning siren sounds. Valentina's sister Larisa stayed behind to care for their mother as well as their animals, including a cow and its newborn calf. Larisa's son, Seriozha, is currently defending the city of Mykolaiv.

Valentina copes with her fear and uncertainty by preparing for her guests: Oksana with her two children, Sergiu, 14, and Timosha, 3; along with Oksana's friend, Roslana, with her two children, all of whom Valentina now refers to as "my refugees." On the village's Sunday market day, Valentina bought multiple sets of shirts, pants and slippers so that they would have fresh clothes.

"Oksana said there were bombs, so she didn't take

**"IT'S FOR THE SOUL," SAID ONE MOLDOVAN WOMAN WHO TOOK A UKRAINIAN FAMILY WITH THREE CHILDREN INTO HER HOME.**

many things with her, just rubber boots on her feet and a jacket and took her child by his hand and got in the car and left the dangerous zone in my village," she said.

The two refugee families decided to come to Moldova, rather than Poland, where Oksana's husband works, because the large number of refugees entering Poland has made it nearly impossible to find a place to stay.

Valentina's home is heated by a soba, a wood-burning stove that is a common heating method in Moldova. She worries it won't be warm enough for her relatives, who are accustomed to central heating. But she seems pleased with the setup she created.

"I bought a bed and we put two beds together, and we will sleep together as in the hotel," Valentina said, almost a giggle in her voice.

On April 10, I received a message that Valentina's family had arrived in Chisinau, Moldova's capital, and were on their way to Taraclia. It was not until

Continued on page 21



LINDSAY MYERS



LINDSAY MYERS



LINDSAY MYERS



# A MOVIE ABOUT A MOVIE MADE DURING A WAR

*The Earth Is Blue as an Orange*  
DIRECTED BY IRYNA TSILYK  
2020

By Rosa Marín

When war erupts, the media landscape becomes saturated with images of cowering civilians, flattened cities and Manichaeic narratives underlined by latent jingoism and xenophobia.

As *The Independent* goes to press, the siege of Ukraine has been raging for nearly three months. Nightly news broadcasts inform us of Russian war crimes while pundits ruminate on the possibility of nuclear-missile blast offs in a way that eschews any analysis suggesting off ramps to violence. What can be lost within this obscene spectacle is the possibility of the human spirit to rise out of the ashes of conflict in a way that connotes universality and reminds us of our interconnectedness as a species. Iryna Tsilyk's 2020 documentary film, *The Earth is Blue as an Orange*, reminds us of this possibility. As war is waged in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatists and the Ukrainian army, the film introduces Hanna, a single mother, and her four children. Ardent lovers of cinema, the family breaks fear-ridden wartime norms as they craft a fictional film about their lives during the bloodshed.

This movie about the making of a movie opens ominously. One of the first shots features a silhouetted individual taping up a home's windows — in preparation for inevitable shelling — under the glare of a lightbulb. The composition of the frame, anonymizing the individual and centering the singular bulb, is reminiscent of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica," in which the artist utilized the imagery of a lightbulb to lament the horrors wrought by modern warfare. Guernica is the Basque city that in one of history's early air raids, Francisco Franco's fascist forces strategically bombed with the help of Hitler's Luftwaffe during the Spanish Civil War. The siege of the city, during which countless civilians were killed, was a precursor to World War II and warfare's pivot to the indiscriminate slaughtering of civilians. Guernica was followed by Dresden, Hiroshima, Sarajevo, Aleppo and now, in 2022, Mariupol.

Ominous imagery notwithstanding, the documentary normalizes a family in the midst of an extraordinary situation. An especially light scene early on features one of Hanna's children playfully saying, "some people would do anything for a good shot" as the family watches a silent film. This remark functions as metacommentary on an earlier scene in which the family rushed to a neighbor's home immediately after it had been shelled, cameras rolling.

These scenes and several others, along with the film's title (inspired by poet Paul Eluard), create a surreal backdrop for Hanna and her children. The family's home, sitting on the frontlines of conflict, functions as both a movie studio and a manger: There are several cats and a turtle going about their business as the family-turned-film crew debates the aspects of its script. The freewheeling animals connote a sanctity to this family as they gather around, much like the cattle and horses that were present for the birth of Christ. It also doesn't go unnoticed that

Hanna is a single mother (there is no discussion of the children's father). Filmmaking is positioned as a holy respite from the daily horrors of war.

*The Earth is Blue as an Orange* is brilliantly reticent about directly spotlighting the on-the-ground political situation. Much like the anonymous window-taper scene early on, Tsilyk's circumvention of the political situation in Eastern Europe grants the narrative a universal framework, for no corner of the world is spared from conflict.

In the film's 74-minute runtime, it is not until the 41-minute mark that we overhear a news broadcast reference "Russian security forces." Instead, viewers are treated to a dual-pronged portrait of the family: While the family works on *Living by the Rules*, their autobiographical film, Myrosia, Hanna's second-eldest child, is accepted on scholarship to study cinematography in a university. To celebrate receiving their "education certificates" (a parallel to a high school degree), Myrosia and a friend get their picture taken outside of a damaged building covered in scaffolding. As they pose for the photograph, donning regal dresses and holding bouquets of flowers, military vehicles slowly drive by in the background. With this shot, Tsilyk asks, Which future will

of several warring factions during the Bosnian and Yugoslav Wars. Already having visited the city at the onset of the conflict, Sontag returned to Sarajevo with the intent of making a solidarity statement with its population by putting on a production of Samuel Beckett's 1952 absurdist play *Waiting for Godot*. In a city crawling with snipers and subjected to constant shelling, Sontag described the play's production as a return of culture to Sarajevo. Detailing her experiences in "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo," an essay Sontag wrote for the *Performing Arts Journal* in 1994, she claims, "[C]ulture from anywhere is an expression of human dignity." This notion is what lives at the core of *The Earth is Blue as an Orange* — the insatiable desire to fill the emptiness of war with life.

*The Earth is Blue as an Orange* premiered in theaters and virtually on April 22 as a part of Film Movement's *Ukrainian Film Collection* series, highlighting films that focus on the political situation in eastern Ukraine.

**HOME MOVIE:** Hanna and her four children shot a documentary film about life in Ukraine's war-torn Donbas region.



emerge victorious? Myrosia and her friend remain static, smiling as their gaze forces us to consider what the next several years will hold for them and their loved ones. The rumbling of the military vehicles attempts to answer this question, as their kinetic movement foreshadows Ukraine and Russia's slow march toward all-out conflict.

Considering the current context, with much of the fighting now concentrated in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine, the war's thinly veiled absence from the film serves to amplify its presence in the viewer's thoughts. This amplification crescendos in the final act, when the family screens *Living by the Rules* for the community. Sitting in a dimly-lit room, the sun hesitantly making its way in, Hanna's family and their audience watches *Living by the Rules*, introduced as "a story about our city." Again the film uses the returned gaze of its characters to masterful effect. We watch Hanna, the children and their wider community processing the last several years of their lives in real time. This communal ritual centered around cinema solidifies the importance of the art medium in times of conflict and political tumult.

Film at its best mirrors our shared humanity, willing to show us who we have been and who we are, while urging us to consider who we want to be.

As the credits began to roll, I was reminded of another instance in which beauty emerged from the ruins of conflict. In the summer of 1993, renowned writer and critic Susan Sontag visited the city of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Once a bustling medium-sized European city, Sarajevo lived under siege for nearly four years between 1992 and 1996, caught in the crosshairs





## VOICES OF CHOICE

*Continued from Page 4*

[our] baby was not very good. And even if the baby was born she would have had to spend the rest of her life in a hospital. And so we decided to — for the sake of our daughter — to make that decision so that she wouldn't have to suffer. To have a late-term abortion was scary but we felt that it was in the best interest for the life our daughter because she wouldn't have had much of a life. We haven't really gotten into the concept of abortions with our little ones, but we've talked about how people should have the right to make decisions about their own bodies.

### WOMAN HOLDING A BAT

The reason why I decided to bring a bat today — even though I know that non-violent resistance is more effective — is that I wanted to express how

angry I am. I wanted to have a visual representation of how absolutely incensed I feel, because I feel like I really wanna fight! And I want people to know that women are going to fight, physically. We're pissed. They called down the thunder — well now they got it. I've had two abortions. It was legal and it saved my life. I would have ended up a very different person with many less options. I'll forever be thankful.

### ANONYMOUS MOTHER

I was pro-choice before I got pregnant and I'm even more pro-choice now. This is the hardest job in the world, and the idea of having to do it against your will — it's unconscionable.

*Amba Guerguerian contributed to this report.*

## MOLDOVA REFUGEES

*Continued from page 19*

they arrived at her home that she truly believed what she had been hearing about what was happening in Ukraine.

"Sergiu, my nephew, told us that, in our village where I was born, Russian armies marched through the village and there were many guns — they saw the tanks at four in the morning. It's real, it's real, it's real," she said, convinced at last.

### SERVING

Pavel Halicov, 15, a ninth-grade student at the high school in Taraclia, at first agreed with Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine. In his view, if Ukraine became a part of NATO, then Russia would be surrounded by NATO countries, so Putin had no choice. But he changed his mind after going to the border village of Palanca to hand out food to refugees.

"When I saw how bad it was and saw small children crying because they were cold and hungry, it broke my heart," Pavel said. "I understood then that nothing is more important than safety, at least for these babies, and war is not worth it at all, because the innocent people suffer, not the actual people who are causing the war."

Most of the volunteers at the border crossing in Palanca are women. Since the wait at customs is often long, they serve refugees food such as sarmale (stuffed cabbage) and sandwiches. When it is cold, they offer tea and a place to get warm inside tents. Fresh clothes are available for anyone who needs them. The volunteers help with child care while the parents are answering questions. Many refugees do not have any form of transportation, so Moldovans wait at the border crossing with cars to take refugees wherever they need to go locally and micro-buses to take larger groups farther distances, all for free.

Marinela Stambol, 19, who volunteers at the Palanca crossing every day, has had six Ukrainian families stay at her house. The one there now, with three children, does not have friends or relatives outside of Ukraine,

so they will be staying with her until the end of the war instead of going further west.

"They don't have anywhere to stay. They don't have anywhere to sleep. They don't have anything to eat. If I have the possibility, why not?" Marinela asked. She echoed the response that I had received when asking others this same question: "It's for the soul."

Lilia Ursu, vice director and a Romanian-language teacher at the Taraclia high school — and my host when I served in the Peace Corps in Moldova — volunteered in Palanca during the first days of the war, but soon realized she could help more by helping support refugees once they had arrived in Taraclia. She coordinates between the school and the mayor's office. The Moldovan diaspora working abroad sends money to help the refugees, which Lilia and the other teachers use to purchase food and clothing.

The refugees in Taraclia are placed with host families by the mayor posting notices in the village group chat about how many people are in a family of refugees, and residents sharing how much space they can offer. The group chat is also used for organizing donations.

The Eastern Orthodox church in Taraclia has also been an important place of organizing. "The church has always been an institution that unites and mobilizes people, and our most important role is to pray for world peace. We pray for the heads of state. We pray that everyone can go home," said the village priest, Eduard Betestean, known as Father Mihai, who is also the history teacher at the high school.

Many other Moldovan villages are helping the refugees, Father Mihai emphasized.

### MOVING FORWARD

As refugees settle in with their host families, the life and work of the village continues. But the bombing of Odessa is occasionally audible, sometimes loud enough to wake people up at night. The shelves of the store, bare for the first week of the war, are full again, but prices are rising.

The school is back to its normal routine of lessons and after-school programs, with attempts to incorporate promoting

peace in these activities, and a refugee boy enrolled in fifth grade.

"The first days, we could not have lessons," Lilia Ursu said. "We tried to explain what happened without making it political. We tried to explain that this conflict is not necessary and that it does not need to be this way, and that is all."

She does not watch television because she does not know what is right and what is wrong.

"We do not know how it actually is in Ukraine, but nevertheless, it is not good if [refugees] left. They come to Moldova — a poor country — yet they come here. Thus, we consider that it is not good in Ukraine," Lilia said.

The village library is the information center of Taraclia. Ana Bocancea, the librarian, puts on programs to promote digital literacy and combat misinformation. It does not have any books in Ukrainian, but Ana checks out Romanian children's books for refugee children. The Moldovan children ask her about the war.

"We talk about the war in Ukraine because the children are also disturbed. They hear from their parents, from television, from the Internet. They also want the war to finish quickly. And they are afraid because we are close," Ana said.

She says her 15-year-old daughter Corina is also disturbed.

"Corina is very sad, because she says her childhood is not nice," Lilia said. "There was the COVID pandemic, and she stayed at home. Now there is a war."

The refugees staying in Taraclia face a great deal of uncertainty, but they still manage to hold onto hope.

"They have hope that everything will finish soon, and they will return home. 'Maybe tomorrow, maybe tomorrow...' They do not unpack their luggage," Father Mihai said.

For some, Taraclia is a spot to rest before continuing on a longer journey. But for those who call Taraclia their home, it is a community that supports, comforts, and feeds its neighbors.

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# THIRST, THE NOVEL

*Thirst: The Rich Are Vampires*

BY NICHOLAS POWERS  
UPSET PRESS, MAY 2022

By Nicholas Powers

**H**ow do you handle a truth no one else knows? In the following excerpt from the newly released novel *Thirst*, Independent author Nicholas Powers, introduces us into the world that is a more truthful version of our own reality. Vampires conspire to get a real estate mogul named Ronald Balk to be elected president in order to start a nuclear war. Why? The vampires want to be free of their addiction to human beings. But Maz, an Afro-Latina hears them and has to find a way to stop them and Balk before he gets to the White House.

Taking a page from Bob Marley and Karl Marx, we see how vampires are a literary trope that makes visible the surplus profit extraction of the ruling class. They “thirst”. Our lives, are what they drink.

MAZ WIPED HER UNDERARMS with baby Wet Naps. Jesus did too. Naked at the window, they dried themselves in sunbeams. After they dressed, she put on earmuffs to muffle the “voices”. They were going to find a vampire.

On the subway, Jesus felt New York change. Its loud bang, clash, boom, yelling, honking, cursing, selling, begging, laughing, and grunting had previously comforted him. Now, he flinched at noise. Maz covered his ears as they rode the train to Wall Street.

Outside they ran past the iconic metal bull and slapped its ass. Maz was jumpy. Her head swiveled left and right. Jesus did not see a thing.

“Where I’m taking you,” she said. “There’s a lot of them. Try not to scream when you see them, okay, don’t announce us to the vamps. Last thing I need is to be disappeared, when I’m this close.” She pinched her fingers close together.

“Vampires!” Jesus said in a numb voice.

“Yes,” Maz said. “The undead, the blood suckers, the eternal watchers, the ones who don’t take holy water showers, who hate garlic, you know...vampires.”

“Like Twilight?” he asked.

“Like Twilight.” She slapped her knees. “Yes, like Twilight. Exactly. Like I want to fuck a vampire but cock-tease a werewolf because it’s hot to have them fight over me, I am Helen to the Ancient War between vampires and werewolves, all played by sexy, white teens snarling and speaking good, college, thespian English. Yes, I’ll have a vampire’s baby because they can go all night, Yes, you moron, this is Twilight.” Maz spread her arms and spun theatrically. “I am Bella, hoe of the undead.” She leaned in and whispered, “I know what vampire semen tastes like.”

Jesus shrank away. “What does it taste like Maz?”

“Kiss me and find out.”

He shook his head. “I can’t with you.”

Maz grabbed his sleeve. “Come on! We’ll see one.” She took out her cellphone, and pointed at the other side of the street. “Look,” she husked.

He did. He waited. He waited longer. A restaurant worker took a smoke break. Delivery men unloaded boxes. Business execs typed on cell phones.

“See it?” She nudged him. “See it?” Jesus shrugged.

“The shadow in the middle,” she said.

Jesus focused on the shadows moving against the wall. One was oddly tall. He rolled his eyes. Well goodbye to my self-respect. It’s gone. I vomited it up with the pills. The restaurant worker and delivery man left. Seconds slowly ticked by. Jesus got bored. He saw the tall shadow. But no one was on the sidewalk. Jesus shook his head like a swimmer clearing water from his ears. He looked again. The shadow climbed the doorframe and crawled inside. He leapt back.

“Ooh,” Jesus covered his mouth. “Ooh.” “Do you need to scream?”

She gently took his head. “Bring it in. Bring it in.”

He bit her coat sleeve. “Oh my God!” Jesus clutched

A schizo. Nothing to no one. But I was wrong. I could just hear them. But like which is worse? Being schizo or hearing vampires?”

“Oh hell,” Jesus joked. “Vampires? Give me schizophrenia any day— Fucking vampires?”

She mugged him, and he playfully bit her fingers. They lay on the bench and entwined their legs.

“So, what do we do?” he asked. “Move,” Maz said “Anywhere safe?” Jesus tenderly stroked her neck. “No,” she said. “Nowhere is safe.”

Straightening up, Maz looked at the ocean. “I took you to Wall Street for a reason. They love power. They use it to hide. Lately they have been noisy. They go through phases. When the moon is full, it’s a like a Pride March. Loud. Happy. But when it’s thin. They are silent. And desperate.”

“So what do we do?” Jesus sat up. “We can’t run. We can’t fight them.”

“Actually,” Maz threw the cup. “We can but it means doing something you won’t like.” He scrunched his eyes.

• • •

“WELL FOLKS, THEY FOUND THE SCUMBAGS,” Balk thrust The New York Post into the air. “Azmi. Fadi. Burger. Muslims. All of them.” The stadium shook as thousands booed. Curses rained down. Kill the ragheads. Kill the sand-niggers. Rage rose into the air like a giant, vaporous serpent that snapped at the newspaper

Balk shook above the podium. “Innocent human beings, kidnapped by jihadists.” He pointed at the headline. “And taken to an abandoned church where they burned to ash! These are sick people. Three Muslim teens. How many more of these terrorists do we let into the country?”

In the front row, fans leaned forward like shark teeth. American flags were waved. A woman in red, white and blue face paint tore off her shirt. “BUILD THE WALL! BUILD THE WALL! BUILD THE WALL!” They chanted.

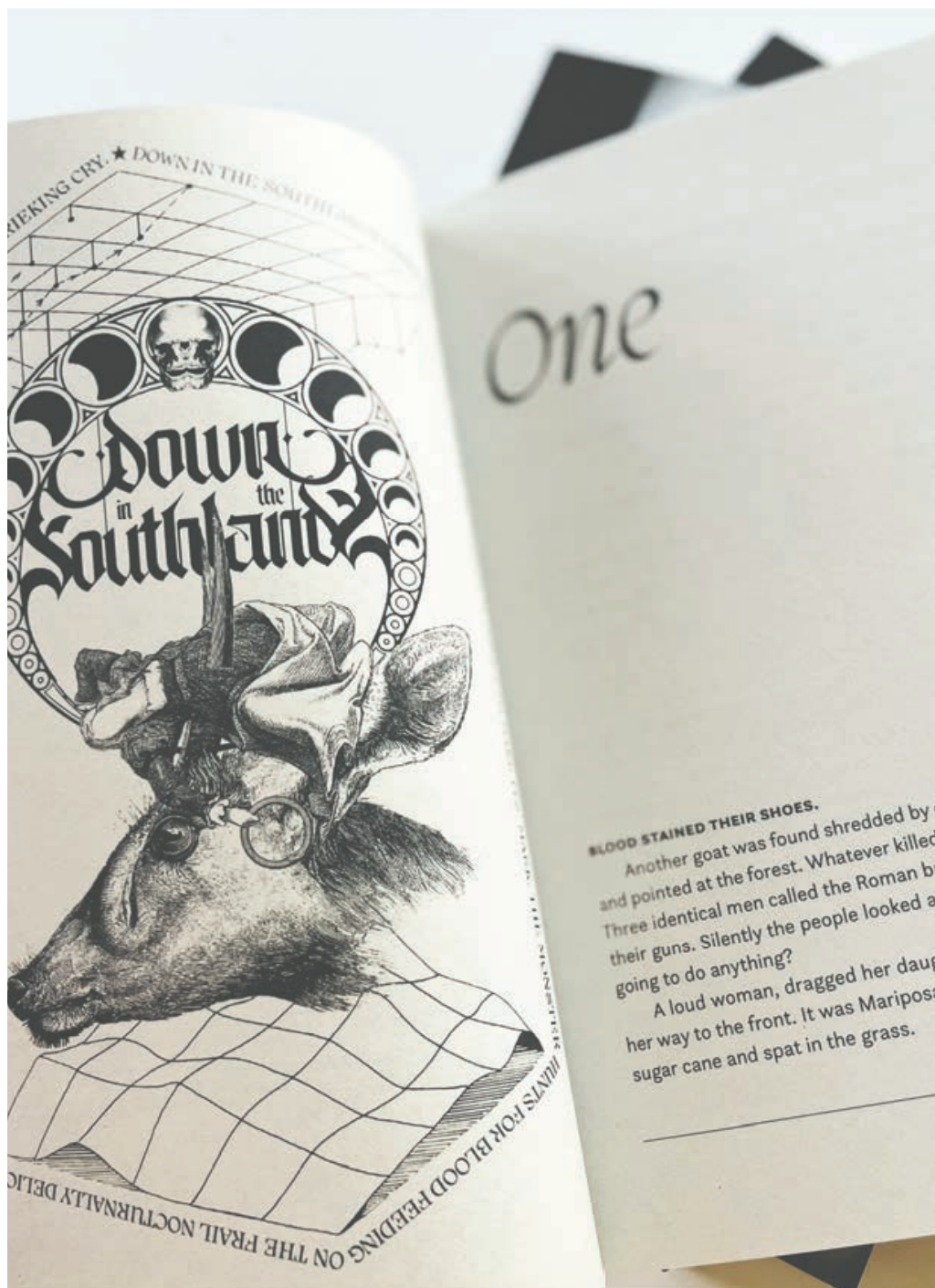
“Damn right!” Balk raised his arms. Stage lights crisscrossed the crowd and highlighted random faces like mini portraits. One light showed a man baring his canines. The child on his shoulders bared his too. Another light showed three friends ripping a Koran to pieces.

At the podium, Balk gazed lovingly at the near riot in the stadium. And then a flash blinded him. Was it a camera? Orange spots floated in his vision. Rubbing his eyes, he heard a vast silence. He blinked and could see again. Every person had been transformed into a statue of dust. It was like

a nightmare-mannequin store. The father with a child on his shoulders. Dust. The friends tearing at the Koran. Dust.

Balk felt wind blow into the stadium. The dust figurines crumbled. Heads fell and split on the floor. Clothes tumbled away like rags. The grains stung him. The storm churned into a dark, yellow fury.

Balk blinked again. The sound of the crowd rushed back. Fans shook signs. Fans yelled his name. Slowly he peeled his hands from the podium. Dark sweat-prints stained the wood. Quickly he waved and walked off stage. Balk reached for his throat. Water. I need water. He motioned for something to drink. Thirst. Thirst. Thirst



Maz. “Oh my God.”

On a bench at Chelsea Piers, Maz showed Jesus photos of vampire shadows. He leaned over the cellphone as she scrolled. In one image, two shadows danced over a crashed car in Midtown. In another, one choked a baby.

“I’m sorry.” Jesus gave the phone back. “A lot of times, in my head, I said you were crazy. Cute but crazy.” His hands trembled. “Why do you call them vampires?”

“I had a crush on Kiefer Sutherland in *The Lost Boys*.” Maz blew steam off her cup of tea. “You know what it is? In the movies, vampires always want blood. Well, I feel how thirsty they are. They drain anything, anyone they can. It’s like, like.” Motioning a hand to her mouth. “They thirst for something inside us.” She sipped the tea and looked at her wobbly reflection in the cup.

They sat in silence. The ocean sloshed grey waves. The tourists that walked by seemed on the other side of a one-way mirror. “I don’t blame you for thinking I was crazy.” Maz put an arm around Jesus. “I thought I was crazy too.



# REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

*Dear Reverend Billy,  
I'm furious about what's going on with the Supreme Court and Roe v. Wade. I can't believe we're going to have to fight all over again to defend the right to control our bodies. How is this possible?*

ALEXIS  
Park Slope

Dear Alexis

It turned out that *Roe v. Wade* wasn't as settled a law as we thought. This is a battle that Republicans will never abandon. It is made of male fear and hard religion. It is a powerful metal alloy with white supremacy and hatred and fear of the Earth. It's the Wild West all over again, complete with bounty hunters who track down women who flee to safe states for an abortion and all those who help them.

The attack on women's reproductive rights is a tremor across the lives of all of us struggling for justice. And while we are busy claiming rights for all, the fundamentalists are sitting in rooms with Bibles, reading ancient texts as if they provide the best advice for modern life.

As in: Eve was made of a rib-bone that Adam could spare and then she went and listened to a snake and ate the apple from the Tree of Knowledge. God and Adam were both hetero-normative types upset by the sensation of loss of control. God didn't believe in climate change, either; he thought he controlled the Earth.

The form that the "fight all over again" will take, Alexis — and it's already happening — might be like

this. It's clear from this *Roe* decision that there will be a widespread mobilization of reproductive mutual aid in all its forms on behalf of women and girls in need. With the wired world and the new medical discoveries, it's

possible that many women can outwit the abortion police and remain safe and in comfort. A new nation — informed to its core by egalitarian feminist values — is the answer to the brutal violence we see from hard right apocalyptic Christianity. This feminist nation would embody an interlacing of practical love throughout the land. No woman should be trapped in the Bible's false Eden.

Women's rights isn't just an issue, it is living life. Fearing the power of women, buying ghost guns, believing in abusive gods, teaching your children to reject difference — this is the fear of life itself. Then it's easy to not notice how much your life is changing. Hate makes it easy to believe that the future will accept your extraction and pollution. The Earth will evolve away from the poison — and the poisoner. Life is a brief time, our home for a while, and we protect each other as we share life.

— Rev Billy

**REVEREND BILLY TALEN IS THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND? EMAIL [REVBILLY@REVBILLY.COM](mailto:REVBILLY@REVBILLY.COM) AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.**



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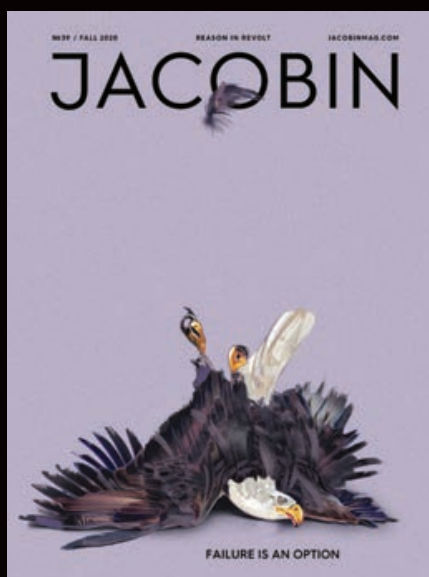


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