

LABOR SNOOZED, WORKERS ORGANIZED **P. 10**

DEAR DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION **P. 12**

WHEN AMY'S YOUR BOSS **P. 24**

EHRENREICH'S SOCIALIST FEMINISM **P. 40**

IN THESE TIMES

GUESS WHO?

You'll soon know their names—the progressives projected to join the Squad after surviving a brutal primary season

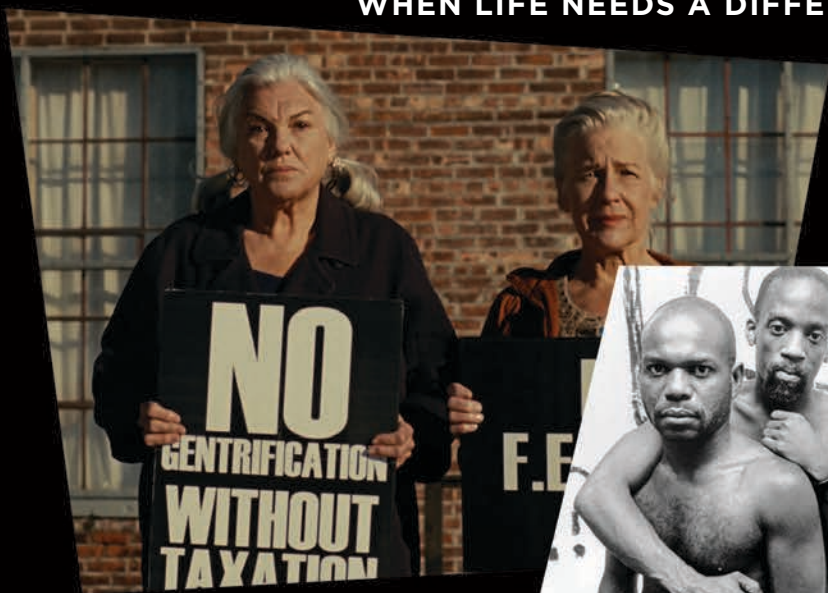
BY BRANKO MARCETIC



Golden on life and art-making as a Black, queer and trans Southerner

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“ No political movement can be healthy unless it has its own press to inform it, educate it and orient it. ”
 —IN THESE TIMES FOUNDER JAMES WEINSTEIN

IN THESE TIMES

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ON THE COVER

Art Direction by Rachel K. Dooley
Illustration by Annee Schwank

Public Safety Whiplash

AFTER THE COLD-BLOODED POLICE murder of George Floyd in 2020 sparked the largest outpouring of public protest in American history since the Civil Rights Movement, a brilliant set of Black organizers leveraged social media's virality and corporate media's thirst for sensational video to flip the traditional crime narrative. Police were recast as dangerous, and innocent Black people as victims of their racism. Shifts in resources from the carceral state to the most economically and racially marginalized communities, previously unthinkable, seemed possible.

What a difference two years makes. Massive propaganda—abetted by a still unexplained spike in homicide rates, and the media profits to be made in sensationalizing crime—gave the carceral state a golden opportunity to restore the previous order. Riding a wave of public fear, mayoral candidates in 2021 and 2022 won on platforms of more policing. The GOP continues to use crime as its leading racial dog whistle for the midterms.

The issue of crime draws on primal emotions. Once people feel personally unsafe, they can easily be induced to flee back to tough-on-crime narratives. In Wisconsin, a battleground state decisive in the national balance of power, every TV break brings an onslaught of racially coded, fear-mongering ads targeting progressive Senate candidate Mandela Barnes and the moderate incumbent Democratic governor, Tony Evers. The infamous Willy Horton ads look bland in comparison.

Seismic shifts inevitably prompt backlash, and social movements emboldened by success often overreach public consensus and provide openings for powerful defenders of the status quo. Witness the stubborn white resistance over the long attempt to implement *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Christian fundamentalist counteroffensive against the early gains of the gay rights movement, or the shocking failure of the Equal Rights Amendment. Movements in the social media age are even more vulnerable to this whiplash effect.

As Gal Beckerman observes in *The Quiet Before*, the social media complex, wired to promote engagement, is what made possible the breathtaking

achievements of #BlackLivesMatter—without first building a shared analysis and worldview. But this underdevelopment is why such an immense mobilization could seem to melt away.

Progressive candidates and organizers who leave the social media bubble to knock doors are often shocked to learn the multiracial working class remains largely conventional in its views on criminal justice. Building a revised common sense about public safety requires not only



The GOP continues to use crime as its leading racial dog whistle for the midterms. The issue of crime draws on primal emotions.

canvassing but face-to-face community organizing. We must draw people into locally rooted social justice organizations with a deeper unity of purpose. Winning stepping-stone campaigns can then build a strong base of activists with a shared analysis, shift power away from police in defensible stages, and expand a durable public understanding to withstand the inevitable backlash.

Alternative responder programs have already reduced the volume of police responses to 911 calls by as much as 20% in Eugene, Ore., and reduced low-level crimes (like disorderly conduct) by one-third in Denver, Colo. The idea of sending mental health professionals to nonviolent situations, instead of police, is already popular—and leads into campaigns to fund mental health and substance abuse services, which would dramatically reduce dangerous interactions with armed officers.

Liberation movements must change the public conditions in which they operate, because they can never depend on elected officials to do the right thing. Just as George Wallace responded to Southern reactionaries by reinventing himself as an arch segregationist, some Democrats today are already capitulating to the backlash, airing ads featuring cops and promising to increase police funding.

Our great task, then, is building a sustainable public awakening on what actually makes us safe.

—ROBERT KRAIG

GIFT SUBSCRIPTION GONE AWRY?



Or maybe price controls were a bridge too far for some readers? Regardless, the September/October issue prompted more than the usual share of angry returns. We welcome all constructive feedback.

GOUGED

This is required reading for anyone confused by “inflation” as a “natural” phenomenon of the economic system (“A Left Answer to Inflation,” September/October). What we’re experiencing is #ClassWarfare from above to maintain entrenched gains for the capitalist class. It is long past time to fight “through the pain” to a Newer Deal.

—JARED RANDALL
via Twitter

Part of what makes it so pernicious is that very little of the current inflation has anything to do with finance—it is the result of crop failures, electricity outages due to dry rivers, fires, floods and Covid-19-related

supply chain issues. But the rich keep price gouging.

—GREG GERRITT
via email

EAT THE RICH

While many nonprofits do good things for our world (“The Big Idea: Nonprofit Industrial Complex,” August), many are just distracting, feel-good organizations—distracting in a sense that they don’t challenge people to ask why we need a charity to fund basic needs.

It makes me angry when I see a food bank with a Walmart sponsorship logo, when Walmart does everything it can to avoid paying living wages and paying taxes on the billions of dollars it makes. The system is rotten.

Nonprofits don’t address this obvious disconnect. In a fair and just society, nonprofit organizations would not be needed because we would all seek to share and take care of each other. Unfortunately, with corporations and billionaires making law, the United States is the exact opposite of that.

The struggle continues.
—TIM MELIN
via email

WORSE THAN ERASED

The August “This Month in Late Capitalism” feature fell into the same deceptive pattern the mainstream media usually uses about wages and inflation. It noted that, in 2021, private

sector wages went up 4.4% while the inflation rate was 7%, then observed “the 7% inflation rate basically erased any gains workers made.” No. It’s effectively a 2.6% pay cut!

—JOHN FRALICK
Columbus, Ohio

COFFEE BREAKS

I was working at a Starbucks last year during Labor Day (“This Labor Day, Starbucks Workers Are Hosting Pro-Union ‘Sip-Ins’ Across the U.S.,” online) and we got robbed. When I told my district manager I didn’t feel safe, she made me feel silenced, transferred me to a store with fewer hours and didn’t give me any paid time to deal with all of the trauma.

—ELLIE GOLD
Los Angeles

Starbucks deserves this for their disgusting union-busting. Plus, it brings more business in and baristas get

better tips! My store did this after we won our union and our district manager kicked everyone out and closed our cafe in a real nasty way. It’s funny that when we have actual disrespectful customers abusing and berating us, it’s not an excuse to close—but when there are kind and respectful union supporters, we turned away business. Which is why we need the union.

—ASHLEY ROSE
East Windsor, Conn.

Remember when workers supported other workers, when people realized we deserve to be safe, treated fairly and able to survive on our wages? I see too many workers who have swallowed the propaganda of those trying to divide us against each other, siding with corporations that make money hand over fist from our labor. What happened?

—CHRISTINA WALKER
Idaho

TELL US HOW YOU REALLY FEEL

Tell us what you like, what you hate and what you’d like to see more of by emailing letters@inthesetimes.com or tweeting @inthesetimesmag, or reach us by post at 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.

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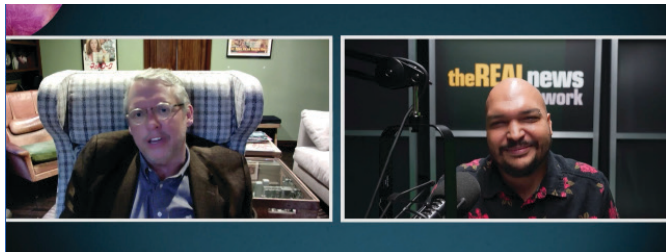
➤ **SARAH LAZARE SHIFTS HER “WORKDAY”**

Our brilliant web editor and reporter Sarah Lazare is moving into a new role as editor for *Workday!*



Sarah has been shaping our coverage of the labor movement, vaccines and foreign policy for five years—but don't worry,

she'll continue on in the broader ITT ecosystem as a contributing editor. “I learned a lot about rigorous and accountable journalism” at ITT, Sarah says, and we're proud to see her take on new challenges. Make sure to follow Sarah on Twitter @sarahlazare.



➤ **UP AND ADAM**

Thank you for joining our 46th anniversary event! The special online festivities on September 15 included a tribute to our former Editor & Publisher Joel Bleifuss. Chris Smalls and the JFK8 Amazon warehouse workers were presented with our 2022 Activism Award for their historic union victory, and we celebrated the lives of two pillars of the Left who recently passed away: David Moberg and Barbara Ehrenreich.

The event was keynoted with a conversation between host Maximillian Alvarez and Academy Award-winning filmmaker Adam McKay, whose most recent film is the climate-change parable *Don't Look Up*. “What I love about *In These Times*,” McKay says, “is the reporting on mass movements. ... You are important. We have to make you louder.” Watch a recording of the event at inthesetimes.com/46.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A 2021 tweet from poet José Olivarez has stuck with me. He notes “a conversation with a friend from college” and recalls “the particular experience of being in classes talking about poverty in the u.s. & realizing that everyone else was talking theoretically about a living wage & i was talking about family.”

When a topic in the news doesn't directly affect the people we know, the issues become easy to ignore. Transness, for example, is often only in the media as a wedge issue up for political debate. So on page 30, we introduce you to Golden, a queer, trans, Black poet and photographer who just wants to create art and build community. “There are these huge declarations that people expect from us, as Black people, as trans people, as queer people,” Golden says. “At the heart of it, I just want to wear my dress.”

Or, at a time when housing insecurity and related issues are pushing longtime locals into street camps, we meet Isabelle Wright on page 7. A woman who has been housing insecure since 2014, Wright is one of many houseless residents with deep roots in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. As upscale new developments drive up rental prices, some residents are working to figure out how to expand affordable housing. “Every city has done this,” Wright says. “They try to brush their houseless under the carpet.”

Our hope is you consider these topics with the face of someone real in mind.

Sherell Barbee
Print Editor

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CAROLYN COLE/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

Port Truckers at a Crossroads

LOS ANGELES—With his truck parked waiting for loads, Todd Ellis ambles up to other drivers—especially newcomers—to shoot the breeze and talk shop. He senses their panic.

Uncertainty is rife in these Long Beach and Los Angeles ports, a doorway for a full third of containerized goods coming into the country. The drivers Ellis reaches out to are independent operators who own or lease their trucks, and their fate has been shaken by California's new AB5 law, which took effect in June and makes it difficult for companies to continue (mis)classifying drivers as independent operators, rather than employees.

What's unclear, however, is when and how California will enforce AB5, which could affect as many as 70,000 truckers.

The trucking firms say AB5 erases these drivers' independence and could lower their earnings. Independent drivers are worried they'll be forced into becoming low-wage employees. They're reluctant to hear about how becoming a full-time hire and a Teamster changed the life of Ellis and his family: "I'll say, 'Hey bro, you'll realize what it is when you can take your kid [to the doctor.]'"

Ellis was an oil refinery worker and tank truck and long-haul driver until he wanted to be home for his wife and three daughters. Thinking he could make good money, he became an independent operator and leased a truck

from a small trucking outfit. It didn't work out.

"I had to pay for maintenance and fuel and I would have two good weeks and then two bad weeks and I couldn't get out of the red," he says. He also got slammed with exorbitant maintenance charges.

Now, as a union trucker, he works five days a week for \$29 an hour with an incentive.

A 2017 *USA Today* investigation confirmed that independent operators suffer inflated fees, wage theft and forced shifts—driving as many as 20 hours straight—at the hands of trucking companies that wield enormous power over an indebted immigrant workforce where many speak little English. According to the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)—a nonprofit started with union support—port trucking firms have been cited for more than \$60 million in "stolen wages and penalties" by state officials and millions in court cases for labor violations.

But many independent operators say they get "fairly large checks"—which blinds them to the costs of fuel, equipment, insurance and taxes, without healthcare or pensions, says Mike Muñoz, head of LAANE's clean and safe port campaign.

Surging fuel prices squeezed them even more, Muñoz says, but worse—they face a demand for lower freight costs, which trucking companies use as an excuse to trim their pay.

While increased shipping volume has showered prosperity on the ports, truckers have not shared in the bounty. Deregulation in 1980 led to the disappearance of union jobs

Above: Independent drivers demonstrate July 13 against California's new union-backed AB5 law, which some fear will cost the truckers their livelihoods as companies correctly reclassify them as employees—despite the potential for full-time benefits and other gains.

as smaller, nonunion companies rushed in. And the ports banned older trucks, forcing drivers to buy expensive rigs and take on debt, Muñoz says.

If these independent operators don't get hired full time, they'll never pay off the loans on their trucks, Ellis suggests. Three out of four drivers today are Latino, and 60% of drivers are the breadwinner in their families, according to a recent survey by LA port officials.

Ellis credits the union for a job that supports his family. Teamsters say their port trucking members earn about \$30 an hour, says Eric Tate, secretary-treasurer of Local 848. Meanwhile, independent operators earn a modest \$20.82 on average, the LAANE study showed, and can earn nothing when business is bad. Yet the drivers Ellis talks to "are so mentally anti-union," he says. "They say union people are lazy."

The lawyers for the California Trucking Association, which has fought AB5 in the courts, say the legal battle is not over. Independent operator drivers' reaction was more visceral. They demonstrated at ports in Oakland and southern California, tying up traffic for several days in July.

If independent drivers do become employees, many would be working at nonunion firms. But the wave of new employees could offer the Teamsters, who have about 600 port drivers, a fresh opening.

When Ellis quit the independent-operator game and signed with Universal Logistics, a large, Michigan-based firm, his Compton, Calif., shop was nonunion. In 2019, he and his

coworkers won an election with Teamsters Local 848. The company fired union backers in retaliation and closed the shop.

But with help from the Teamsters, Ellis was hired at unionized Pacific 9 in nearby Gardena. And in August, Universal reached a settlement with the Teamsters based on 2021 findings by the National Labor Relations Board that the firm violated labor laws. The company has to provide millions in back pay, recognize the union and sign a new contract.

Ellis is compelled to speak out because of what he says the union did for him. He is 54 with a home in Anaheim, Calif.

"I'm grateful," he says, "because uncertainty is really scary when you have a large family."

As he sits in his garage, talking on the phone, getting ready for the half-hour drive to his 5 p.m. to 3:30 a.m. shift, and with a very strong coffee on the way—"It's a great job," he says.

STEPHEN FRANKLIN is a longtime labor reporter in Chicago. This is the first in a series on worker-organizers.

Houseless Activists Resist Luxury High Rises

CHICAGO—Isabelle Wright, a resident of protest camp RiseUpTown, puts out a chair for me at the edge of a circle. It's 10 o'clock on a Friday in September, and people are chatting as their food grills. Occasionally a car pulls up and leaves cases of water, Covid tests or food on a folding table

THIS MONTH IN LATE CAPITALISM

🔥 **ENTER: HOLOGRAM CONFERENCING.** With endless online meetings causing "Zoom fatigue," many companies are looking for alternatives, and Cisco Systems is developing a remote work-friendly 3D chat



program complete with headsets and augmented reality goggles. Reviews are mixed, but one thing seems clear:

Everyone just absolutely loves long, totally worthwhile, distraction-free meetings that incorporate as much technology as possible.

🔥 **WISH MORE WOMEN WERE IN TECH—BUT ALSO WEAPONS?** Now you don't have to choose!

In late August, the nonprofit Girls Who Code, which helps train young women to enter the tech workforce, announced a partnership with defense contractor Raytheon—producer of Tomahawk missiles and Javelin weapons—to provide mentorship and networking. We like to call it the school-to-tech-to-war machine pipeline.

🔥 **HEALTH INSURERS FINALLY HAVE TO MAKE THEIR ELUSIVE PRICES PUBLIC!** Of course, they're doing it as one might expect—poorly, with little oversight, and in a way that's virtually incomprehensible. Since July, they've dumped something like a trillion price points into a database, more data than the Library of Congress and English Wikipedia combined. Of course, a private company is making it easily accessible—for a price.

🔥 **SHORT ON BODY POSITIVITY BUT TALL ON CASH?** The LimbplastX Institute promises to cure your Napoleon complex (by up to 6 inches!) by breaking your legs and then nailing them back together, just a bit farther apart. Tech workers at Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Meta are reportedly shrinking their wallets up to \$150,000 for the privilege, while we sit here and wonder if they'll ever actually grow up.



at the front of camp—donations to the over 25 members of this community of houseless people.

Many camped together on this stretch of grass next to the roaring DuSable Lake Shore Drive long before they began organizing collectively. When the adjacent Weiss Memorial Hospital parking lot was slated to become luxury apartments, the camp transformed into RiseUpTown. The unhoused residents partnered with local housing justice groups Northside Action for Justice (NA4J), Chicago Union of the Homeless (CUH) and others to protest the role of luxury housing in displacement and homelessness.

On August 21, a dozen people—housed and unhoused—moved into the hospital parking lot to block the construction. In an 11-day occupation, upward of 50 daily supporters came through. Anyone could sit in on clothing-mending workshops, listen to live music, or learn about the history of Puerto Ricans in Uptown.

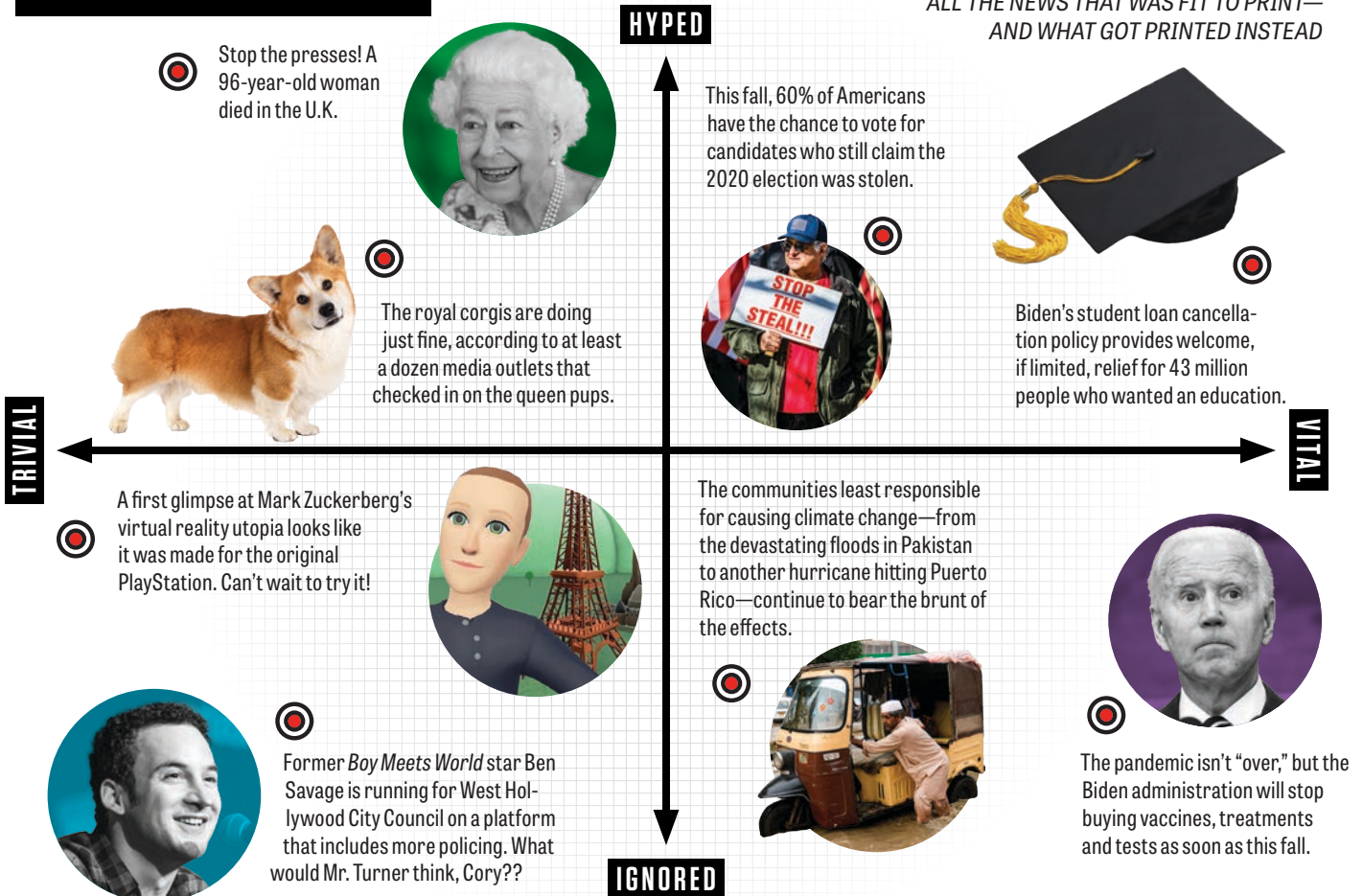
The broad coalition, which includes disability rights activist group Access Living, neighborhood associations, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago and healthcare workers' union SEIU HCII, shares the concern that the costly apartments will drive up rents and exacerbate housing insecurity.

They also worry that the much-needed community hospital will shut down. Dallas-based mega-landlord Lincoln Property Company bought the land from Weiss' previous owner, for-profit hedge fund Pipeline Health, in 2021, for \$12 million. "We've seen this pattern play out before when hospitals start selling off their assets," says Adam Gottlieb, an organizer with CUH and one of the parking lot occupiers. "It's often a sign that they'll close in the end ... because it's not profitable."

With the loss of Weiss, Uptown would also lose a nationally recognized gender-confirmation program. The coalition wants

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

ALL THE NEWS THAT WAS FIT TO PRINT—
AND WHAT GOT PRINTED INSTEAD



city officials to revoke Lincoln Property's permits and expand hospital services and affordable housing.

Chicago requires all new apartment buildings with more than 10 units to reserve at least 10% of them at "affordable" prices of \$900 to \$1,100 a month (with some caveats)—or pay an "in-lieu" fee toward affordable housing citywide. Lincoln Property reserved only 8 of 314 units (about 2.5%) and paid local women's nonprofit Sarah's Circle \$3.1 million in lieu of 24 more. One-bedroom apartments at the new building will start at a steep \$1,700 a month.

Uptown has seen substantial gentrification over the past few decades, with increased rents (from \$1,460 for an average two-bedroom in 2015 to over \$2,200 today), a whiter population and the disappearance of the single room occupancy buildings that provided last-ditch housing for poor, disabled and houseless people.

Locals have protested outside Lincoln Property buildings throughout the city, held public forums and collected close to 1,000 signatures, according to Marc Kaplan, from NA4J. Throughout the parking lot occupation, NA4J members brought in food, water and tents.

"They're our neighbors," Kaplan says. "I've lived in the Uptown area since the early '70s. Some of the current unhoused people over there I've known since they were young, literally children who lived with their families in buildings here. The city has more than enough resources [to house] all unhoused folks who want to be housed."

Wright, whose fading pink highlights are pulled back into a ponytail, tells me she's been living at RiseUpTown for almost two weeks,

but has struggled with housing since 2014. "Every city has done this," she says. "They try to brush their houseless under the carpet."

Wright is unimpressed with the solution offered by Uptown Alderman James Cappleman, who supports the luxury development: week-long hotel vouchers or placement in shelters to those displaced. Wright and others she knows have been sexually assaulted at women's shelters.

Gottlieb, meanwhile, notes that the shelter placement offered by the Department of Family and Support Services is in Pilsen—9 miles away.

The parking lot occupation ended August 31 after police forcibly evicted residents, but RiseUpTown is still demanding revocation of the building permits and conversations with officials about permanent, safe and affordable housing as a right for all.

"Encampments of communities of people experiencing homelessness have become really important sites of organized resistance against gentrification because there's a kind of solidarity that happens when we organize around the folks who are most vulnerable in our community," says Gottlieb. "Ultimately, by fighting for housing to become a human right, we are fighting for everyone."

Camp Maroon in Philadelphia, a houseless protest camp of more than 100 people, wrung major concessions from the city in 2020, including 50 houses and a pilot "tiny homes" program (although implementation has lagged).

"The decisions at this camp are made by people here," Wright says. "There's no hierarchy. ... We all just try to help each other out."

HANA URBAN is an *In These Times* intern and a freelance housing organizer in Chicago.

FOR THE WIN

TESLA CAN NO LONGER PROHIBIT EMPLOYEES FROM WEARING PRO-UNION SHIRTS, thanks to a ruling from the

National Labor Relations Board that overturned its 2019 decision. The burden now rests on employers to prove that special circumstances warrant any interference with this right.



CUBA NOW HAS THE WORLD'S MOST PROGRESSIVE FAMILY CODE. Passing with 67% approval, and

after tens of thousands of local meetings, the new law expands the rights of women, children and LGBTQ+ people, guarantees same-sex marriage and adoption, recognizes household labor and permits parental rights beyond the nuclear family.

HAWAII HAS SHUT DOWN ITS LAST COAL PLANT. The move does mean a temporary increase in oil power generation and already-high energy bills in the

state most reliant on petroleum—much of which is imported—but it pushes Hawaii further onto a path toward carbon neutrality, renewables and energy independence.

THE CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION WON A \$9.25 MILLION SETTLEMENT WITH CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, stemming

from a layoff policy that disproportionately affected Black educators. After a 10-year battle, more than 400 current and former members of the union will be eligible for compensation.

INDIGENOUS-LED WATER DEFENDERS WON A PROTECTIVE RULING AGAINST HUBBARD COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT. Camp

Namewag, the site of organized resistance to a tar sands pipeline in Minnesota, had been subject to an unlawful blockade and campaign of harassment by police who acted more like private corporate security than public servants.



HAMILTON NOLAN

Labor Slept on the Job, Workers Organized

THE MOST IMPORTANT labor trend of the past year has been the sudden rise of independent unions and their organizing drives at nonunion companies—led by the workers themselves and not affiliated with any existing major union. The Amazon Labor Union has been the loudest of those, and an endless stream of others seem determined to follow in its footsteps. An independent union drive succeeded at Trader Joe’s, and independent unions have popped up everywhere from Apple to Chipotle to Geico. Geico!

The rise of all of these independents is inspiring. If we are being honest, though, theirs is also a story about the brokenness of organized labor’s existing institutions.

And if we ignore half of the story, we won’t learn anything from this moment.

One thing that virtually every independent union that’s popped into being this year has in common is this: They are at places that should have been unionized a long time ago. I don’t just mean that in the generic sense of “all workplaces should have a union.” I mean that, if America had a union movement with even a modicum of ability to do strategic planning on a national level, the big unions that already sit in these respective industries

would have been working hard to build campaigns at many of these companies years ago.

Amazon? Apple? Chipotle? Trader Joe’s? All of these are premier employers in industries that have existing unions. In many cases, the existing unions have organizing drives at these companies



themselves too: Communications Workers of America is organizing Apple stores. One Chipotle location unionized with the Teamsters. The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union is still deeply engaged at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Ala. United Food and Commercial Workers is organizing Trader Joe’s. All of these are good examples of the ability of independent drives to energize moribund sectors, or to pick up excess demand where existing unions don’t.

But the problem here is not the failure of individual unions. It’s the failure of an entire union establishment

that has, for decades, accepted the proposition that it’s the responsibility of workers to come ask unions to organize them, not vice versa.

Let us imagine an American labor movement that had, first, a genuine belief that it is the responsibility of unions to offer every worker in their industry a true opportunity to unionize, and second, a rudimentary level of central organization and accountability that could exert some pressure on unions that weren’t organizing to do a better job. In this fairy tale world, it would still take bravery and hard work and idealism from workers at all of these places to undertake the daunting and uncertain prospect of organizing their workplace for the first time.

The difference is that they would have all had the card of a union organizer in their pocket—because the unions in their respective industries would have already made a strong effort to organize them.

Since the pandemic, there has been a widespread grassroots surge of interest in unionizing, and—surprise!—many workers have come to the conclusion that it makes a lot more sense to organize themselves than to spend forever making calls to existing unions that have never spoken to them before, and have not spent the money to build the organizing staff necessary to give them the time they need. This makes perfect sense.

The hard numbers tell us that America’s biggest unions have allowed their organizing muscles to atrophy, and now



HAMILTON NOLAN

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THE BIG IDEA

that game day has arrived, many are too weak to play.

Organizing must be a nonstop practice. You can't allow it to wilt for decades and then expect to flip it on like a switch when the national mood changes. A recent report found that organized labor in America employed 23,000 fewer people in 2020 than it did in 2010, even while its bank accounts swelled.

How many of those people could have been organizing all of these nonunion companies that whole time? A lot.

Philosophically, there is nothing wrong with having an independent union. Practically, there are many drawbacks: It can take a lot of time and money and expertise and lawyers to get a solid first union contract in place. Many of the independent unions that do manage to win a union election will inevitably migrate towards existing unions over time, or they will get crushed by their multi-billion-dollar employers willing to stall and litigate rather than bargain a fair contract.

But all of these independents have done the labor movement a great service, no matter their eventual fate: They have become big, flashing billboards for the need to invest in institutional organizing capacity, so that no working person is ever unable to find a union that would like to help them organize. If we don't say that out loud, the lesson will be ignored.

Strong unions knock on every door when times are hard. They don't wait for things to get easy, and then find that they're being left behind. ■

work • to • rule

noun

1. a disruption of operations in which workers intentionally do the precise bare minimum—down to the “rule”

→ Is work-to-rule the same as “quiet quitting”?

Yes and no. Quiet quitting entered the discourse this year as a successor to the Great Resignation, and both phrases respond to a deep anxiety that a strong labor market is actually allowing workers to—gasp—get paid more and refuse uncompensated work.

But work-to-rule is a de-liberate strategy unions have employed for decades to draw attention to grievances from protesting workers. Where strikes and walkouts can be risky (or unlawful), work-to-rule is theoretically unpunishable—because workers simply do exactly what they're paid for.

→ How can I work-to-rule at my

job? Much like declaring bankruptcy, it doesn't work if you just shout out your intentions.

It's best undertaken as part of an organizing campaign to increase leverage against your boss. Are you expected to

show up 20 minutes early to do unpaid prep? Your mornings are now for coffee and contemplation. Have unfinished work you usually take home? Get ready for an evening of Netflix and chill. Pesky paperwork getting you down? Start dotting your I's and crossing your T's.

→ **Is it effective?** Like any job action, there's no guarantee. But work-to-rule has been deployed successfully across industries throughout the decades, especially when traditional strikes aren't an option.



“Work-to-rule is not walking away from a fight, but a different way to fight.”

—LABOR ACTIVIST JERRY TUCKER

In 1938, French railway workers barred from striking instead seized on a law requiring train engineers to consult crew members if there was any doubt about a bridge's safety. Crew members began scrutinizing every bridge, incurring massive train delays and therefore gaining negotiating power.

In the 1980s, when United Auto Workers realized during contract negotiations that manufacturers were trying to provoke workers into striking—to permanently replace them with scabs—the union turned to work-to-rule, throwing production into chaos and winning a 36% wage bump over three years at one plant.

Teachers, including in Oakland, Calif., have repeatedly used work-to-rule to shine a light on the amount of unpaid labor required to keep schools running in an era of privatization and disinvestment.

There's nothing wrong with setting better boundaries at work and maybe even making a TikTok about it. But if you really want to change your workplace (to paraphrase an old labor adage): Don't quiet quit—organize.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TERRY LABAN

AUDREY WINN

Dear Dept of Ed: Union Organizing Is Public Service

THE PUBLIC SERVICE Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program began in 2007, under the W. Bush-era Congress, with a simple premise: Student loan borrowers who worked 10 years in public service while making loan payments would have their remaining debt forgiven.

Through PSLF, lawmakers and advocates intended to make public service a viable career option for borrowers. Unfortunately, this intention has not been realized for most PSLF participants. Rife with exclusions and plagued by a history of poor communication and logistical failures, PSLF has approved very few for loan forgiveness.

While many workers have endured the shortcomings of PSLF, union workers—and the labor movement by proxy—have been particularly harmed. The Department of Education has long held that employees who work for unions are excluded from PSLF as 501(c)(4) organizations; they are allowed to engage in more advocacy and lobbying activities than traditional 501(c)(3)s.

Because of this distinction, the Education Department sees 501(c)(3) groups as performing PSLF-eligible “public service,” while 501(c)(4) groups might appeal to some viewpoints but not others. This rationale, however, was not clearly communicated from the start of the program—and

after initially maintaining that 501(c)(4)s did qualify, in 2016, the PSLF approval was rescinded, even while some union workers had spent years believing their service counted toward forgiveness.

The ongoing impact on the labor movement is clear.



Lucas, who did not share their full name out of fear of reprisal, says: “As a first-generation, working-class Latino attorney, I interned at unions throughout law school. When I applied for jobs, however, I only chose government work because I have debt and needed the PSLF program.”

Other would-be union workers share similar stories:

“My first interview for a job post-law school was with a union, and I stopped including unions in my job search after finding out they aren’t eligible employers for PSLF,” says another public interest lawyer who prefers to be anonymous.

In many cases, large student loan debts are the main factor in workers’ career decisions.

“I am basically biding my time until I can be at a union,” says another government policy worker with six-figure debt.

Even for workers who choose employment with unions, despite the PSLF exclusion, the situation is challenging.

“Union jobs not being eligible for PSLF has not stopped me from pursuing this line of work,” says a current union leader who did not feel comfortable sharing their name. “But it is definitely a huge burden and means that things like having kids and home ownership have to be deferred.”

Some union leaders have called for the expansion of PSLF. Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association, says that, as a baseline, her union wants the Biden administration to extend the program to provide debt cancellation for members with 10 or more years experience. “Our public service workers have held us together during the pandemic,” she tells Politico. “Now it’s time for the federal government to keep its promise to them.”

The current configuration of the PSLF program forces aspiring labor leaders to choose between debt or labor advocacy, while shielding anti-union activists from the same difficult decision. To explore this distinction is to see its glaring flaws: Even ignoring the many studies showing that collective bargaining improves the compensation and work lives of both unionized and non-unionized workers, the idea that 501(c)(4) organizations engage in polarizing advocacy while 501(c)(3) organizations do not—instead serving a



AUDREY WINN

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COLUMBUS, OHIO—Demonstrators rally outside the Columbus Division of Police headquarters September 2 in protest of the police killing of Donovan Lewis, shot while in his bed August 30 after police barged into his bedroom. After the protest, Columbus police put restrictions on serving overnight misdemeanor warrants, but the demands of Lewis' family and their supporters—such as firing and arresting the officer who shot Lewis—have so far gone unaddressed. (Photo by Gaelen Morse/Getty Images)

neutral public—crumbles when a light shines on labor-related 501(c)(3) nonprofits.

The anti-union National Right to Work Foundation and the Freedom Foundation are two of the most prominent examples of labor-related 501(c)(3) organizations whose workers are eligible for PSLF debt forgiveness. Other examples of such 501(c)(3) nonprofits that frequently involve themselves in labor battles include the Koch-backed Heritage Foundation, which has published such articles as “The argument that most workers are better off without unions,” and the right-wing Federalist Society, which counts Mark Janus (of the Supreme Court’s *Janus v. AFSCME* case) as a senior fellow.

PSLF disadvantages the labor movement by excluding unions while including anti-union nonprofits. As the White House takes steps to ease the burden on student borrowers through its recently announced debt relief plan, Biden could fix this unfair imbalance and reform PSLF to include union workers. Although Biden likely could not make this change through executive action, the Education Department could through new regulations.

While the Education Department cannot issue new regulations that directly conflict with the statute, it is allowed to issue new regulations that vary. Here, the statutory language of PSLF states only that unions are not qualifying employers—but does not completely

exclude labor unions from PSLF. The Education Department should be able to issue new regulations, potentially using the pending Negotiated Rulemaking effort that began in October 2021 to consider regulatory changes. This process typically takes a year, but the Education Department could shortcut the process.

Although this approach risks Congress using the Congressional Review Act to overturn new regulations (it has a 60-day window), such a move is unlikely to occur under a Democratic Congress and president.

Time is of the essence to reform the PSLF program and fortify the U.S. labor movement by extending PSLF to union workers. ■

THE PROGRESSIVES

They conquered a brutal primary season and are expected to grow the Squad

BY BRANKO MARCETIC

It's been a rough year for progressives, or so the headlines tell us. Pundits have been quick to eulogize the left electoral movement after several high-profile primary defeats in New York, Illinois and Texas. "Left loses momentum." "Progressives are in danger of losing influence." Pundits are "seeing limits on the political support for their reformist vision of the country"

with this year's "spate of losses" only the "latest blow to progressive power," as the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party struggles "to find a winning formula."

The jubilant mood at the Vermont senator's September roundtable with a group of progressive House primary winners, then, might come as a surprise. "The Squad"—the moniker claimed by the troupe of progressive and democratic-socialist insurgents who started elbowing their way into the House in 2018—is expected to number in the double digits in 2023, with at least four likely inductees poised to safely win blue districts in November. All in all, progressives are set to claim at least six Congressional seats opened up by redistricting and a record number of retirements.

"I was elected to the House and took office in 1991, and I can tell you there was nothing—nothing—like what we will be seeing in Congress next year," Sanders said.

If that's the case, it will not only be thanks to the political talents of the candidates themselves, but to the work of groups like Justice Democrats and the Working Families Party (WFP), among the most prominent of the multiplying constellation of organizations devoted to overturning the Democratic establishment. For this faction, the fight is bigger than any one election cycle, whether defined by shock progressive upsets as in 2018 or this year's handful of undeniably bitter losses. And they measure success as much by the lengths their opponents are going to stop them as by the number of congressional seats they control.

ATTACKS AND PARRIES

FEW WOULD DENY THE LEFT ELECTORAL movement has suffered major setbacks since Sanders' 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns.

WHO WITHSTOOD THE DARK MONEY FLOOD



Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) joins a February 13, campaign rally for democratic socialist Greg Casar, now the Democratic Party's House candidate for the 35th District in Texas.

COURTESY OF GREG CASAR FOR CONGRESS

Sanders' brutal 2020 primary losses—after the Democratic establishment belatedly rallied around Joe Biden—were intertwined with a powerful Republican ground game that torpedoed many progressive campaigns alongside establishment Democrats that November. Sanders ally Nina Turner lost her bid for Ohio's 11th District seat in 2021, and her campaign failed again nine months later. The Democrats' 2021 electoral setback was widely spun as a repudiation of the Left.

This year's primary season also saw painful progressive losses. Despite holding an anti-choice record in a post-*Dobbs* moment, Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas) narrowly fended off a second primary challenge from immigration lawyer Jessica Cisneros in the 28th District. Progressive first-term Rep. Marie Newman (D-Ill.) fell to centrist Rep. Sean Casten, while Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chair Sean Patrick Maloney (D-N.Y.) prevailed over his progressive challenger, state Sen. Alessandra Biaggi, in what Maloney called a win for the "mainstream." In all, centrist Democrats challenged by progressives ended up winning 14 of 22 primaries this cycle—roughly two-thirds.

"The main problem was corporate PAC dark money," says Alexandra Rojas, executive director of Justice Democrats. "The scale of it," says Maurice Mitchell, National Director of the WFP, "I can't overstate."

The pro-Israel group Democratic Majority for Israel infamously intervened in Turner's 2021 race, rapidly dissolving her massive polling lead with a blitz of negative advertising that painted the longtime Democrat as insufficiently loyal to the party, part of the pro-Israel lobby's emerging strategy to make criticism of Israel a congressional nonstarter. After that, the floodgates opened.

By May of this year, Super PACs and outside spending organizations had poured more than \$53 million into House Democratic primaries, according to an analysis by Politico. Venture capitalist and LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman's Super PAC dropped more than three-quarters of a million dollars in the last three weeks of the race to defeat Cisneros. Opportunity for All Action Fund, a dark money group run by Democratic operatives, spent more than \$125,000 on digital ads and production to successfully stave off gun control activist Kina Collins' bid to defeat 13-term incumbent Rep. Danny Davis (D-Ill.)

"You could be a great candidate, have a legislative record that shows you can be effective, but money in politics is what kept me and my team up [at night]," says Delia Ramirez, who ran and won the primary for the newly drawn 3rd District in Illinois.

Incumbent Squad members Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.), Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) and Cori Bush (D-Mo.) each faced primary challengers backed by dark money. Billionaire hedge fund manager Dan Loeb and other pro-Israel interests targeted Tlaib; Trump backers and Minnesota business tycoons tried to oust Omar; and Bush faced a flood of attacks from entrepreneur

Above right: Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia (D-Ill.) shares a meal with progressive Delia Ramirez, running for the 3rd District House seat in Illinois, on February 15. Right: Greg Casar, running for the 35th District House seat in Texas, has said he wants to be the "most pro-labor member of Congress."



PHOTOS BY RAUL JUAREZ, GERRI HERNANDEZ



Steven C. Roberts, head of a sprawling business empire who also happens to be the father of Bush's challenger.

Then there was the cryptocurrency industry, something of a wildcard. Cryptocurrency billionaire Samuel Bankman-Fried, 30, bought nearly \$700,000 in TV airtime for ads backing the ultimately victorious insurgent progressive Maxwell Frost in Florida's 10th, but Crypto PAC Protect Our Future put up \$1 million for Turner's opponent.

"The main attack point was that these candidates were insufficiently loyal to the Democratic Party and Biden," says Waleed Shahid, communications director for Justice Democrats.

"Strong, Democratic, progressive Black women" were particularly questioned on their credentials, Rojas says. Issues the Right has weaponized—such as defunding the police—were less important as individual attacks than as part of a tapestry of negative messaging telling loyal Democratic voters that insurgents were inexperienced, unserious and out of step with the party, according to those involved in the campaigns. "They tested those attacks early on and poured lots of money to make sure the message they went with was salient enough with a large swath of voters," Rojas adds.

It's not just progressives who stand to lose. Former Congresswoman Donna Edwards, too, fell to a hailstorm of money from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), despite her endorsement from both establishment figures like Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi and the Sanders-affiliated Our Revolution.

The dark money spigot won't shut off anytime soon. In September, the Democratic National Committee blocked a resolution to ban outside spending in primaries.

FULL STEAM

BUT IF THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT IS ON THE ropes, no one's told its leaders.

"I think it's been mis-portrayed as a bad year for progressives by the media," says Greg Casar, a democratic socialist candidate who won his primary for an open House seat in Texas, and who (like other winning candidates) had the crucial backing of groups like WFP and Justice Democrats. "We'll have a historic number of progressives, true progressives, in Congress."

According to the Brookings Institution, 50% of all candidates endorsed by Justice for All, Our Revolution, Indivisible, or by Sanders or members of the Squad, won their primaries. Justice Democrats saw three of its five carefully chosen challengers win their primaries, its highest success rate ever. The WFP, meanwhile, saw what it calls its best-ever winning streak, with victories in eight of the 14 non-incumbent House bids it prioritized, a number that doesn't include incumbent Reps. Omar, Bush and Jamaal Bowman (D-N.Y.), who won despite stiff challenges.

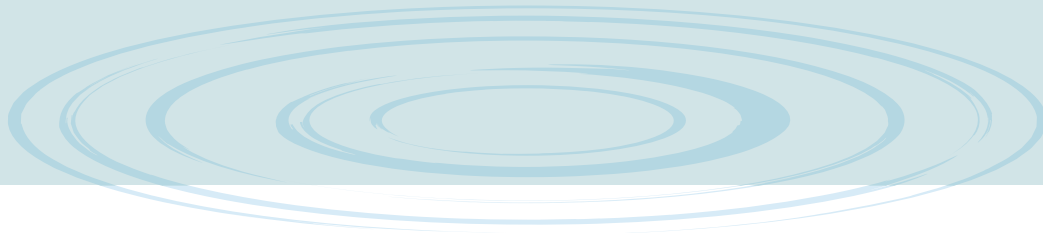
And while the WFP's overall win rate in House primaries might be lower this year (57% for non-incumbents vs. 77% in 2020), the group is on track for its best year ever in terms of a more important metric: winning seats in Congress. Rob Duffey says the group invested more heavily in federal primaries in



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blue districts, rather than winning primaries in red seats that are long shots in the general elections.

In a blow to centrist Democrats, WFP endorsee Jamie McLeod-Skinner ousted Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-Ore.), the Blue Dog who led the corporate-backed effort in the House to derail the Build Back Better Act, the omnibus climate and social policy bill that was a priority for progressives. Another WFP candidate, Sanders-endorsed Vermont state Sen. Becca Balint, won her primary against Vermont's lieutenant governor for Vermont's only House seat, making her a shoo-in for the seat that, 30 years ago, catapulted Sanders to national prominence.

But four winning primary candidates in particular have excited those involved: Casar (Texas-35th), Ramirez (Ill.-4th), Summer Lee (Pa.-12th) and Maxwell Frost (Fla.-10th)—young, nonwhite and largely working-class candidates with bold progressive platforms. All were backed by the WFP, and Casar and Lee also had support from Justice Democrats. Should they win in November, as expected, their cohort's entry into Congress would match the size of the original Squad that sent shockwaves through the political landscape in 2018—something overshadowed by the media's disproportionate attention to losses.

TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

THOSE INVOLVED IN THESE WINNING CAMPAIGNS credit a number of factors in fending off big money. One was starting early, sometimes 14 months before voting.

“It was important to firm up as much support as possible early, so that when lies or mischaracterizations hit, they don't stick,” says Casar. “And we worked really hard to pay for early polling to show how much broad support we had, which can help keep that right-wing money from coming in.”

Casar also distanced himself from the BDS movement, which cost him the Austin DSA's endorsement but spared him from AIPAC attacks. One AIPAC donor cited his race as “a very good example of how [our strategy] is working.” (Casar's campaign says he stayed true to his original position despite pressure “by many groups” and opposes letting U.S. aid violate human rights in the Middle East.)

Another factor was the candidates themselves. “The quality of the candidate matters so much,” says Waleed Shahid. “You can have the math on paper that the demographics and the path to victory are such and such, but if the candidate's not an authentic messenger or grounded in good values, it's going to be hard to make that case.”

The candidates' years of involvement in organizing gave them pre-established public profiles, plus deep connections to local leaders, activists and potential allies—as did their time in elected office. Casar, at 33, was a three-term Austin City Council member who worked as policy director for the Austin-based Workers Defense Project, lobbying for workers' rights and helping mobile home residents organize against rent hikes and evictions. That work helped him secure the crucial backing of local unions, who mobilized what Texas AFL-CIO President Rick Levy

Maxwell Frost, 25, (center) stands to become the youngest member of Congress if he wins Florida's 10th District House seat.

PHOTO BY GERRI HERNANDEZ





Summer Lee, 34, running for Pennsylvania's 12th District House seat, has garnered support from the Working Families Party and Justice Democrats.

calls “the whole toolkit,” including block-walking, phone calls, joint events and mail to local members.

“The fact that so many unions were engaged there was very unusual,” Levy says.

Illinois state Rep. Delia Ramirez, 39, is a daughter of Guatemalan immigrants who spent her childhood talking with unhoused Chicagoans who gathered at the church soup kitchen her family lived above. She had no plans to run for the new, majority-Latino 3rd District in Illinois until friends and colleagues urged her—including some who put aside their own ambitions. Ramirez says the experiences of her mother, a homecare worker with diabetes, and father, who worked in a bakery for 20 years until a cancer diagnosis forced him to retire, were key to her decision.

“When [Dad] retired, he got a frozen pie—not retirement benefits,” Ramirez says.

Ramirez came up through Illinois progressive political networks as the campaign manager for progressive watchdog Common Cause Illinois and, later, co-chair of the Elected Officials Chapter of United Working Families, the Illinois WFP affiliate. “We were with Greg [Casar] from day one, and that’s true with Delia as well,” says Mitchell. “This is a story about leadership development and candidate pipelines.”

State Rep. Summer Lee, 34, one of four candidates

backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) to enter the Pennsylvania state House in 2018, has said she only ran for office because she saw it as an “organizing opportunity.” Having worked as an organizer for a \$15 minimum wage, she brought her activist roots to the statehouse, joining protests that erupted after the 2019 acquittal of a Pittsburgh cop who killed an unarmed Black teenager, and giving a famously critical keynote address to a 2020 Women’s March gathering.

“I hope that you will get up, that you will take your pink pussy hat off,” Summer told the Vermont crowd, “and go up to your sister of color and tell her that, ‘I am here. What do you need?’”

Lee’s organizing roots and legislative record on labor rights also won her the support of three large SEIU locals and the United Electrical Workers union.

Maxwell Frost, who rounds out the group, worked on the Florida ACLU’s successful felon re-enfranchisement campaign and was national organizing director for the gun control group started by Parkland shooting survivors. At 25, Maxwell stands to be the youngest member of Congress, a Generation Z Uber driver shaped by the era-defining anxieties around climate, economic precarity and gun violence.

Frost, too, says he had no plans to run until prodded by local organizers. A month before he announced, he connected by phone with the mother he’d been separated from at birth, who he learned had spent her life “in a cycle of poverty.”

“She never had healthcare, she wasn’t in a financial position to have another child,” Frost says. “I was number eight, which is why she put me up for adoption. Hearing that from her really changed everything for me.”

Apart from Frost, each candidate climbed the ladder of elected office starting at the local or state levels. Their impressive legislative records were “undeniably a benefit,” Mitchell says. “There’s an advantage of demonstrating, as a progressive, that you know how to run and win, that it leads to concrete victories for working people they can feel and see in their lives.” Typical centrist attack lines about pie-in-the-sky ideas that can never come to pass “ring hollow when your constituents have seen you govern,” Mitchell adds.

On the Austin City Council, Casar pushed through affordable housing measures and a 60-day eviction moratorium at the start of the pandemic. Even his legislative

defeats helped burnish his public standing, as when he ended up the lone council vote against restoring the city's ban on homeless camping, or when his measure mandating paid sick leave for workers was struck down by the state Supreme Court.

In Illinois, Ramirez authored an emergency housing assistance bill, signed into law in May 2021, that temporarily stayed some foreclosures and allocated money for struggling renters and homeowners during the pandemic.

Lee, who had to work within a long GOP-controlled Pennsylvania legislature, drew on her activist roots to jumpstart action on police reform during the 2020 George Floyd protests, leading the effort to commandeer the House podium at the start of voting. She successfully forced foot-dragging Republican leadership to move, and she did so with more establishment-friendly Democrats. The result was a state law creating a landmark (if flawed) misconduct database for police hires.

These records made charges of party disloyalty a tough sell. "To accuse them of being Republicans didn't really work," Shahid says. Their legislation had been publicized as victories by local Democratic branches in party press releases, such as the paid sick leave ordinance passed by Casar, who calls himself "a proud member" of the Democratic Party. When Ramirez spearheaded the codification of abortion rights in Illinois in 2019 and successfully passed a provision—inserted at the end of a 465-page budget bill in 2020—to expand Medicaid to undocumented immigrants, Democratic Gov. JB Pritzker touted both as major accomplishments.

This history was especially useful given the timing of this round of primaries, which happened to land in the period of Democratic despondency between the death of Build Back Better and the August passage of the Inflation Reduction Act.

"We stressed that we are the people who really want to deliver on the Democratic agenda that's been promised," says Rob Duffey, WFP national communications director. For candidates without a large legislative record, like Kina Collins, that timing may have hurt. She fell in a low-turnout election in Chicago, where doorknockers in typically blue-voting African-American neighborhoods met voters complaining the president wasn't doing anything for them, Alexandra Rojas says.

Through it all, the winning campaigns continued the strategies progressive challengers have become known for, namely the blister-inducing doorknocking and phonebanking that's been the bedrock of left-wing upsets going back to Sanders' first mayoral victory in 1981. Central as these tactics are, however, they're clearly no longer enough.

"That can't make up for the imbalance in paid communications," Shahid says. "Our adversaries are spending six, seven figures on mailers and ads, and we can't abandon that terrain to them. For older voters, it's the main way they get information."

One clear trend is that progressive candidates who are outspent 2-to-1 can win, while those with steeper ratios

aren't as lucky. "When our candidates were outspent to that level, our opponents could shape the narrative in ways that became overwhelming for us to reshape, even with all the advantages we had," Mitchell says. WFP-backed Durham County Commissioner Nida Allam was outspent 14-to-1 and lost her bid for North Carolina's 4th District.

Lee saw a 25-point lead wither in only a month to less than 1% under a blizzard of dark money-financed negative advertising. But Justice Democrats and others were able to put together their own resources to stay within that 2-to-1 ratio and help Lee eke out a win.

"Summer's race was one we knew we could win, but it required us to go all in," says Rojas. "After that, we didn't have the money to spend in the same way on others."

In the end, Justice Democrats and other outside groups came up with \$1.7 million to offset the nearly \$3 million spent against Lee. Only \$22,000 separated Ramirez and the runner-up in her race, while Casar faced no serious outside spending in his four-way primary. Frost, as a dark horse political novice, did not draw much resistance in his race—but as time has proven, such out-of-nowhere upsets hardly make for reliable left-wing victories.

"A big part of what I'm thinking about is what I can do between now and the next cycle to build that war chest," Rojas says. "In the same way that progressives care about organizing people, we have to start caring about organizing money."

That predicament may require finding progressive counterparts to legendary establishment fundraisers like Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Rojas says endorsements from Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez were "incredibly impactful" for this year's challengers, providing a fundraising boost and local media attention, which brought volunteers and resources.

"They're a big part of this question," Rojas says.

SINK OR SWIM

AS COUNTERINTUITIVE AS IT SEEMS, THE GROUPS challenging the corporate establishment view the flood of dark money as a marker of success.

"Their money is a response to our victories," Mitchell says. "They wouldn't be spending this much if our strategies weren't working, or on candidates who have no path to victory."

These victories defied a number of pernicious narratives. Republicans have claimed since 2020, with some evidence, that Latino voters are a conservative constituency drifting steadily away from the Democratic Party. Yet Casar and Ramirez won big in majority Latino districts running on unabashedly progressive platforms. Casar, in March, romped to victory over his three opponents with more than 60% of the vote. Ramirez trounced her nearest rival, a two-term alderman who racked up major endorsements, by more than 40 points; her undocumented husband wasn't even able to vote.

"Latinos are overwhelmingly working class in Texas,"

Dear Reader,

I hope you were able to tune in to the *In These Times* 46th anniversary celebration last month. If you were there, you saw our featured speaker, Adam McKay, do something completely unexpected. The Academy Award-winning filmmaker made a surprise proposition: **He announced on the live program that he would match up to \$10,000 in donations from *In These Times* readers, dollar for dollar.**

That means if you make a donation to support *In These Times* today, your gift will be matched—doubling your impact.

That may sound like a gimmick, but the truth is Adam McKay has spent the last decade finding new ways to tell the big stories that corporate media typically doesn't dare touch, in films like "The Big Short" and "Don't Look Up." While he always has one eye on making people laugh, his first priority is to make an impact, to expose his audience to truths that others won't tell them. As an *In These Times* reader, I'm sure that philosophy sounds familiar to you.

We need more media that isn't afraid to tell hard truths. **But that type of journalism, including publications like *In These Times*, can't exist without support from readers.** This is a unique opportunity to celebrate 46 years of truth-telling, while helping ensure the 47th year gets off to a strong start.

Make a donation right now, and Adam McKay will match it dollar for dollar, doubling your impact.

In solidarity,



Christopher Hass
Publisher

P.S. To have your tax-deductible gift matched, use the postage-paid envelope found within this issue to mail your gift, or make a safe and secure online donation at InTheseTimes.com/Match.

Casar says. “We need to make sure we don’t just say we’re the party of the working class, but show we are.” Casar is the son of a doctor and grew up in an affluent neighborhood, but spent his pre-political career and time in elected office waging high-profile fights for working-class issues.

“I want to continue to be an organizer inside Congress,” Casar says. “My goal is to be the most pro-labor congressperson from the South.”

Despite a bipartisan effort to turn “defund the police” and reform efforts into a political liability—partly based on the claim that minority voters are most concerned with law and order—Casar, Ramirez, Frost and Lee all backed Black Lives Matter protests (Frost was arrested) or even supported the defunding demand.

“Defund the police, socialism—all those big slogans have come up on the campaign trail,” Rojas says. The difference, she says, was the candidates’ long-term approach to politics that saw them campaign for 12 to 14 months and spend even longer organizing and building public profiles, giving them the public trust and infrastructure to weather such attacks.

“The tactic that all of our candidates have taken is to bring together broad coalitions by going out, knocking on doors, meeting people, having honest conversations,” Rojas says, whether about Medicare for All, about what “defunding” really entails, or what democratic socialism actually means.

More than anything, this round of successful insurgencies proves—if the Midwest victories of Tlaib, Omar and Bush hadn’t already—that the Left has a constituency broader than what the establishment claims. “There’s a neoliberal narrative that benefits the opposition that suggests progressives can only win in coastal urban centers,” Mitchell says. “But what we know is that a progressive, pro-people platform is attractive to people of all persuasions.”

THE LONG DETOUR

EVEN A 10-MEMBER SQUAD WILL BE A TINY minority in a Democratic caucus made up of hundreds of congresspeople, let alone the full 435-member House. And there’s every likelihood the House will be GOP-controlled in 2023. While those involved caution it’s early, discussions about the road ahead have already begun, starting with staffing and connecting incoming members to the existing Squad so “we can start working together as early as possible,” Rojas says.

Groups like the WFP and Justice Democrats don’t merely come to the aid of challengers when they run for federal office, but are part of a network of outside groups working with and supporting them through their time in office, a fact particularly instrumental in a House with a narrow majority.

For an electoral Left that is still maturing, “the next frontier is learning how to wield our leverage and power inside the halls of Congress and other legislative bodies,” Shahid says. “If these members of Congress have a clear organizing program on the inside and the outside, they can really make

“My goal is to be the most pro-labor congressperson from the South.”

—GREG CASAR

a difference, because the margins will probably be slim.”

For now, that may mean simply mitigating harm, whatever side of the aisle it comes from. Duffey believes “there’ll be opportunities for progressives to hold the line” and halt collaboration with the GOP, “which other factions within the Democratic Party will be inclined to do”—to cut programs like Medicare, for instance, a long-cherished bipartisan goal.

But maybe they won’t have to settle for pure defense. “No matter what, we’ll still have a Democratic president,” Casar notes, pointing to the sometimes confrontational public advocacy from progressives like Bush and Ocasio-Cortez that led to executive orders extending the eviction pause and canceling some student debt. “I’ve been starting to have discussions about how to work to grow the labor movement or bring abortion care to states like Texas through executive action,” Casar says.

Meanwhile, progressives will keep their eyes on the long game, continuing to grow their numbers in Congress, building out the progressive bench that will feed future Squad expansions, and putting the pieces in place for the next Democratic majority.

“Many of the candidates we’ve elected are in their 30s—or 20s, in the case of Maxwell,” Duffey says. “They’ll be in their seats for a decade, probably. Even if they’re not in the majority next year, there will be a future majority.”

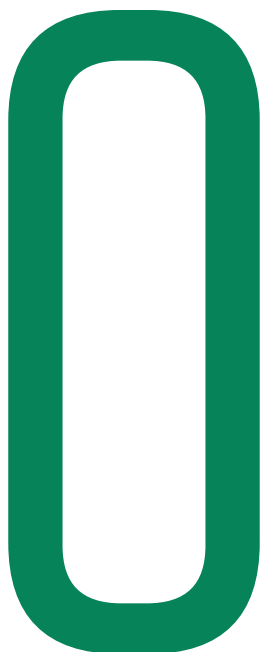
Ramirez agrees: “We have to prepare ourselves strategically to move the needle, to get the folks we need at the table, to get sponsors for bills, so that when we regain the majority, we’ll be ready.” ■

Michael Veronda Hazou provided research assistance.

BRANKO MARCETIC is a staff writer at *Jacobin* magazine and regular contributor to *In These Times*. He is the author of *Yesterday’s Man: The Case Against Joe Biden*.

AMY'S KITCHEN FREEZES UNION DRIVE

BY EMILY JANAKIRAM



ORGANIC CONVENIENCE FOODS brand Amy's Kitchen maintains a carefully constructed image of ethical consumption and saving the planet, one vegan frozen burrito at a time. The company is owned by the Berliner family, and its website makes much out of being a small, family-owned business, with pictures of the founders joyfully making pot pies and surfing.

"We choose what's best for our customers, our farmers, our employees and our planet," the website reads. "It's a tall order, but we wouldn't have it any other way."

But Amy's has been under fire the past year as startling labor practices have come to light.

On July 18, the California-based manufacturer of organic convenience foods

closed its new San Jose plant—less than a year and a half after it opened its doors; workers had been in the process of organizing with Unite Here Local 19, which represents food service and hospitality workers in the Silicon Valley.

More than 300 workers lost their jobs.

Workers at another Amy's plant—this one in Santa Rosa—organized with Teamsters Local 665. They went public in January with allegations of dangerously fast lines, lack of access to restrooms and drinking water, locked fire exits and managers who were unresponsive to safety concerns. A subsequent inspection by the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) found 10 minor and three major violations, including loose safety guards, resulting in \$25,000 in fines. Amy's denies the workers' allegations and says it plans to contest the Cal/OSHA findings.



Workers at the San Jose plant had also been organizing over concerns about low wages and prohibitively expensive health insurance. After the Santa Rosa workers went public with their complaints, Amy's management began an aggressive anti-union campaign in San Jose.

Amy's denies that the abrupt closure of the San Jose plant in July is related to labor issues, instead citing inflation and supply chain issues. The workers themselves, however, tell a different story.

"The closure of this facility is part of the company's overall campaign orchestrated against its workers," said Tho Do, the organizing director for Unite Here Local 19, in a press release.

Above: Jose-Luis Zagado Santos and Erica Maralگو, former workers at the shuttered Amy's Kitchen facility in San Jose, Calif., look on outside the former worksite.

WHEN AMY'S ARRIVED IN SAN JOSE IN 2021, the area had been hit badly by pandemic layoffs in the hospitality and food service industries. The company was easily able to attract workers, mostly Latina, to the plant.

One of these workers was Erica Naranjo, a 43-year-old mother of five who worked at the plant for a little over a year. Naranjo had lost her job during the pandemic after the restaurant where she worked closed, but she found work at the San Jose plant as a sanitation worker. The six employees on the sanitation crew are responsible for cleaning the whole plant.

"[It's] terrible work over there," Naranjo says through a translator.

Naranjo says she worked nine to 10 hours a night, five nights a week, with no overtime pay, cleaning machines, floors, garbage buckets, restrooms and offices—with little to no safety gear, despite the extremely hot water and harsh chemicals the workers



were required to use. Eventually, Naranjo says she sustained burns on her hands.

The company's family health insurance, touted in its PR materials, cost workers \$9,731 a year. Naranjo, who could not afford the plan, says she instead paid hundreds of dollars for doctors' visits out of her own pocket to treat the burns. She also called out sick for two days to recover, for which she received no pay. After those two days, Naranjo says, the company informed her that she would be fired if she didn't return immediately. She felt she had no choice but to work through the pain of her injury.

Naranjo also describes a culture of aggressive, bullying behavior by supervisors. "Every day the managers make [me] cry," says Naranjo. "Every day." Employees, she says, were routinely denied bathroom breaks. (Amy's says it gives production line workers two bathroom breaks each shift and accommodates those who need more frequent breaks.)

In one reported incident, an employee in charge of overseeing the production line—a role that is close to management—screamed at and openly struck her boyfriend, a mechanic, in front of other workers. One machine worker who witnessed the incident is a survivor

of domestic violence and was shaken. Some workers filed an internal written complaint with Amy's but say they received no response.

Another employee, Hector Guardado, also speaks of job-site bullying. One day, Guardado found another worker, Marisela, crying. When Guardado expressed concern, he says, Marisela (who also wanted only her first name printed) told him her supervisor wouldn't allow her to go to the bathroom, that she wasn't allowed water breaks, and that she was severely reprimanded, bewilderingly, for wearing deodorant.

Guardado says he brought a delegation to management on Marisela's behalf, only to be fired in response—ostensibly for leaving his post during working hours, although he says he was clocked out on his lunch break.

According to Guardado, Marisela was then given

Above: Former Amy's Kitchen workers Antonia Domingues Santiago and her husband Jose-Luis Zagado Santos say they were injured because of poor working conditions, then mocked and mistreated by management. Right: After former Amy's Kitchen worker Hector Guardado helped a coworker who had been denied a water break and bullied by management, he says he was fired on the pretext of leaving his post.

PHOTOS BY AMANDA J. CAIN

a piece of paper to sign that she didn't understand; it turned out to be her own resignation letter.

"They don't care about you, how you feel, about your opinions, how you think, if you're injured, they don't care," Erica Naranjo agrees. "They just want you to work. Everyone there who has a little power, they treat you like you're nothing. Like cockroaches.

"They don't care about us."

Amy's Kitchen did not respond to requests for comment.

ANTONIA DOMINGUES SANTIAGO and her husband, Luis Zagado Santos, say they were both injured while working at Amy's. Santiago says she witnessed her husband, who worked on the pizza assembly line, slip and fall on piles of cheese scattered around the floor. Instead of asking if he was okay, or helping him up, his supervisors



The Amy's Kitchen brand is built around an organic, family-friendly image, but workers say the company's labor practices tell a different story.

laughed at him, Santiago says. Santos was unable to get off the floor and had to take an Uber to a for-profit urgent care center, Concentra—he would have had to pay out of pocket for an expensive ambulance—where he was diagnosed with injuries to his spine and head.

Santos says he had to return to the clinic five times for follow-ups, but no accommodations were made for him at work.

Santiago herself was injured while lifting a heavy pallet of enchiladas onto a rack in April, she says, but was not given an appointment with Concentra until June 2022, during which time she worked without any accommodations or time off. The doctor at Concentra informed her she had an injury to a ligament and assigned a two-week limit on the weight she'd be permitted to lift—but the plant closed before the accommodation went into effect.



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By this spring, the union drive at the San Jose plant was gaining momentum and many workers were interested in joining. The week of May Day, owner and CEO Andy Berliner brought a mariachi band to the plant and held a dance party, repeating that old favorite line of union-busting companies: “We’re a family.” He tried to impress upon workers the importance of “keeping things in the family.” According to Tho Do, workers were promised an upcoming raise and a bonus.

On June 1, Unite Here Local 19 filed nine complaints with the National Labor Relations Board alleging illegal retaliation against workers for organizing.

The plant was closed for two weeks in July—ostensibly for cleaning and renovation—with the reopening date set for July 18. On June 4, the company held a job fair. About a half-dozen new workers were slated to start after the reopening.

On July 18, workers came in for the evening shift at 2 p.m.; within an hour, they were told the plant was closing and they were losing their jobs. The laid-off workers received severance pay through September.

Tho Do, with Unite Here Local 19, believes the closure “sends a message to the rest of the plants.”

While Naranjo has since been able to find work as a cleaner at a hotel, she still feels distressed and discriminated against by the loss of her job.

On July 18, workers came in for the evening shift at 2 p.m.; within an hour, they were told the plant was closing and they were losing their jobs.

CEO Andy Berliner says on the company website: “The truth is that the happiness of people at Amy’s keeps me going.” But for workers like Naranjo, that happiness has been elusive. ■

Meggie Gates and Eloise Goldsmith provided fact-checking assistance for this article.

EMILY JANAKIRAM is a writer based in New York City.

“We make media that gives a platform to the voices that you won’t hear anywhere else, that treats you not as a passive consumer but as an active participant in a shared struggle for democracy.”

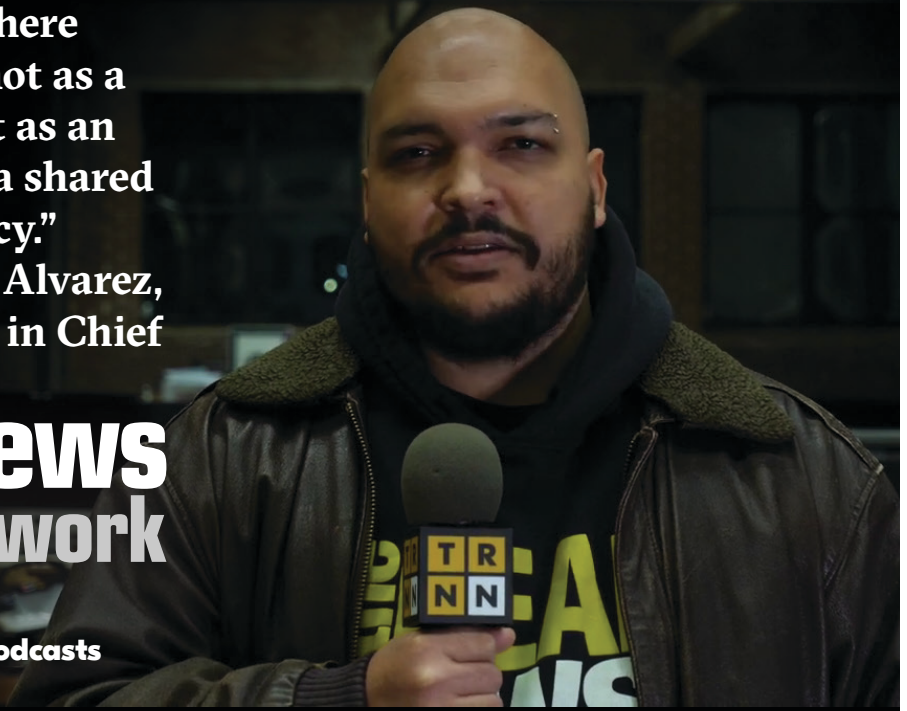
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Editor in Chief**

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“Something in Our Spirit”

Photographer and poet Golden on their life as a Black queer and trans artist from the South

BY SHERELL BARBEE

IN 1985, POET AND ESSAYIST June Jordan wrote this ode to Phillis Wheatley:

Come to this country a slave and how should you sing? After the flogging the lynch rope the general terror and weariness what should you know of a lyrical life? ...belonging to no one, but property to those despising the smiles of your soul, how could you dare to create yourself: a poet?

Around age 7, Wheatley was taken from her home in West Africa and trafficked to Boston, where she was sold into slavery. At a time when it was illegal for many Black people to read and write in the United States, Wheatley became the first Black American to publish a book of poetry. Her work touched on topics from abolition and religion to family life.

Black poets in Boston continue Wheatley’s legacy today by bringing a raw vibrancy to the reality of life in the city. Because the Boston arts community is small and tight knit (I lived in Boston from 2018 to 2021), it isn’t unusual to hear about a poet by word of mouth.

I first heard about Golden—a friend of a friend’s friend whose name was

sprinkled in conversation every now and then—with words like *sweet* to describe their personality, *talented* to describe their poetry and photography, and *passionate* to describe their stage presence at local slam poetry events. “Of course,” people said, when the city announced Golden would take one of its few, coveted 2020-2021 artists-in-residence spots.

I finally got the chance to meet Golden via Zoom this year, where we discussed their debut poetry collection, *A Dead Name That Learned How to Live*, their experience as a trans and queer Black artist from the South, and their photography. Golden uses portraits of their self, family and friends to posit Black subjects at the forefront of intriguing backdrops. Following our Q&A is a poem from Golden’s book, which touches on how Golden’s mother grappled with her child redefining their gender.

Try to imagine: one’s mere existence a topic up for political debate, one’s selfhood granted or denied by the opinions of lawmakers. What nerve of Wheatley, what nerve of Golden, to declare their humanity at all—and so eloquently at that.



"I Just Want to Wear My Orange Dress to the Tennis Courts & Come Back Home Unbothered," 2020, Jamaica Plain, MA.

Poetry serves as a way to challenge audiences to stretch themselves to consider place and perspective. Our hometown experiences are influenced by our identities, like race, class, gender, sexuality, religion. I'm thinking about W.B. Yeats' Ireland, Eve Ewing's Chicago, Hanif Abdurraqib's Ohio. How does place and identity inform your work?

GOLDEN: It's the heartbeat, it's the tether, it's everything in between. I'm obsessed with being from Hampton, Va. I'm obsessed with my family being from Pocomoke City, Md. I feel like this debut is an ode to the Black South. It informs everything about me, and even as I move away, I feel like it grounds me back. I feel like I have more language for gender and identity differences that are not necessarily hyper-present where I'm from. I always say my gender is informed—everything is informed—by being Black from the South.

I feel that tension whenever I go back home too. There's definitely this feeling, after college, where you have all the theory, all the words that folks in your family don't have. Can you talk a little bit more just about your experience with gendered language when you visit home?

Absolutely. The first couple of years after college were the most difficult years of my life. It was hard to come back and be my full self because there were so many people questioning who I was and if I was being authentic, wondering, "Is this something that you just discovered in school? Is this a Northern phenomenon?" There's always these barriers to talk about transness, especially being Black. That's where the book begins, in the middle of that.

I feel like a lot of things in Black households are kind of unspoken. I was already out, I was wearing makeup,

like there was no mystery to me. But coming back home, people had this silence about it, and I just got tired of it. I told my family, “I’m not going to come home if you’re not gonna respect me.” I had a really hard sit-down conversation with my Grannie, mom, dad and siblings where I just told them, “I’m trans. My pronouns are they and them. I really don’t care how uncomfortable it makes you. I need you to move beyond this because I’m tired of living in the silence.” Obviously that was the first of many conversations, but I think the growth really happened after that because they could tell how serious I was and that I was fighting to have a relationship with them.

That’s what the book is also grappling with: How do you choose yourself amongst the transphobia in the home? In the Black South? At the end of the day, we all love each other, right? How do we fight for family and home while honoring who we are and where we can be?

When many trans youth come out they are estranged from their families, often living in shelters. For me, the most exciting part of your work is how your experience as a Black trans person is one of acceptance and love. Can you speak about your family as a support system and how they have become creative muses for you?

I love my family very dearly. My mom always instilled in me that if you have no one else in the world, you got your family. This book is about finding forgiveness and shows the nuance with family as a support system. There are moments when I can’t stand my family, and there are moments when I will go to war for them.

I’m also a mama’s girl. Me and my mom are very similar and very close. When I wrote the poem “And I Will Always Be Your Mother” (page 36), we didn’t have the relationship we have now. I feel like that poem was trying to fill a gap in the things she would say to me and the things I wished she would have said to me. The poem actually spans a year of time where she’s grappling with the process of her child transitioning. She was so used to calling me “boy,” calling me her son. What does it mean for her to accept that this is who I am?

Are you pleased to see more representation of trans people in the media? Any examples that particularly excite you? And what are the benefits and limits of this representation?

Absolutely. At first there wasn’t much media out about transness. *Pose* wasn’t out. *RuPaul’s Drag Race* was known, but the show wasn’t accepting trans people at that time. My mom watched *Pose* when it aired. Without some of these representations, some of our conversations would not have even been able to begin. Those are the things I’m really grateful for. Obviously, there’s a specific version of transness that we get in the media: people who are in some type of post-operation, on hormones, with lighter or fair skin. Those are the things that I still feel like need to grow and change, because I don’t see people who look like me in these roles that identify as trans. I very rarely see trans-femmes or nonbinary people who have facial hair and wear makeup, or people who don’t wear wigs and still identify as trans-femme.

I hate seeing trans roles where the person needs a man or a white cis person to save or validate them. I wish to see more roles that aren’t wrapped up in our transness. Like, I just want to see a trans superhero





PHOTOS BY GOLDEN

and not have to deal with them being trans—I just want to hear about their hopes and dreams. There’s so many things that are beyond gender that are just about you being a person.

How does your work engage with the totality of life as a trans person in the United States?

It always carries both joy and hardships, they are on different sides of the same coin. Where representation of trans people in the media falls flat at times is when it is only one or the other. I want to show the nuance, the ebbs and flows. I feel like the journey of living is that one moment you could be mourning and then literally the same day you can be having the time of your life. That’s also what the book is about—the beautiful totality of being a Black trans person also touches on the totality of being human. There’s so much beauty in being yourself.

Can you speak about what makes the Boston art scene so special?

The Boston art scene does not get as wide of coverage as other cities, but I have so much love for it. I chose to be based in both New York City and Boston, even though I could have just picked New York.

Boston has this widespread reputation of being very white. Many people don’t realize there’s a lot of Black communities here: a lot of Haitians, Jamaicans and Cape Verdeans. Most of my connections with people here are by doing slam poetry and eventually doing collaborations with the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. I found a community in Boston that I was missing in New York. I really can count on these amazing people.

Yeah, I’d argue that the DIY scene in Boston is unmatched. I think it also has to do with the architecture. People are living in these beautiful Victorian houses with like 10 roommates and then they throw huge poetry nights in their living rooms.

Yes, the way the houses are built. Like in my last home, my room felt like a palace, I had 10-foot-tall ceilings. Using that as my backdrop for some photoshoots, it felt unreal. There’s so many organic things that people pull from in the arts to make their own. Like last year, I collaborated with Un-Bound Bodies Collective on this photoshoot project called *Roots + Futures*. These are mostly Black and POC trans folks who built these living altars for different trans people in the city. They literally built this archway, installed it on the beach, and put all these flowers around it. I had never seen someone do this. I was so blown away. Like, how did they even dream that up?

Definitely. So you shot “I just want to wear my orange dress to the tennis courts and come back home unbothered” (page 31) while living in Boston?

Yes, that is such an important image for me. I was living in Jamaica Plain in Boston during the pandemic. I was tired of being in the house and I wanted to go outside and wear what I wanted to wear out, but I didn’t feel like dealing with transphobic people.

Left top: “We proud we is what we is,” 2022, Hampton, VA. Left bottom: “O womb warrior,” 2022, Boston, MA for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.



For readers who are unfamiliar, Dominican, Puerto Rican and Cuban immigrants have flocked to Jamaica Plain for decades, but its Frederick Olmsted-designed greenspaces, easy public transportation and proximity to downtown has caused a recent wave of gentrification. I'd consider it one of Boston's most queer friendly neighborhoods. Did you still feel like you needed to put on a facade in order to get through the day?

Half of it was my own anxiety around dealing with people. When I lived in JP, I mainly lived in areas that were highly Black or POC. I really don't care what people say about me, but people carry a lot of transphobia that shows up in hyper-violent ways. I'm thinking about the statistics around Black trans women who are murdered, mostly by Black male partners. That is another layer of anxiety for me, because I feel like in Black areas there's this idea of what you're supposed to wear and anything against that is hyper-visible.

There are these huge declarations that people expect from us, as Black people, as trans people, as queer people. Obviously what I do is political. But there's some times where I literally am just trying to exist today, to make it to tomorrow. There's so much politicizing of trans lives and at the heart of it, I just want to wear my dress.

Tell us a little bit more about your collaboration with the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

I was selected for a program called the Neighborhood Salon Luminaries, where artists come together once a month to discuss art making, showcase work and complete different projects. After that, I was asked to do a commission for the Gardner in response to an artwork in the collection. I was inspired by the "Boston's Apollo" exhibit on John Singer Sargent and Thomas McKeller. McKeller was a Black man who posed for most figures—both male and female—in Sargent's paintings and sculptures, but the final art pieces were of white subjects. So obviously there's conversation around censorship, on who gets to be present in art and who doesn't. I was really inspired and said, "I'm going to put Black people in the museum, and we're going to stand in front of the artwork, and we're actually going to use that as our backdrop."

How do you stay inspired and keep moving forward with your art making?

My work is very much in conversation with living life. Creating art is just something that's innately within me. I

Left: "A fulfilled heaven," 2022, Boston, MA for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

I literally am just trying to exist today, to make it to tomorrow. There's so much politicizing of trans lives and at the heart of it, I just want to wear my dress.

think that it's actually harder to not create art than it is to create art. It's just something that is who I am. Like, I'll just be like sitting with my friends and I'll hear a line of poetry. I feel like art is the space where I try to understand what I'm feeling.

I feel that too, as a writer myself.

Right, we can't just not be writers. You know, there's just something in our spirit. I feel like my writing process is really organic. It helps me to take breaks, to process through huge emotions so I can figure out how to write them.

What's your next project?

I actually just got an Ongoing Platform grant from the Collective Futures Fund with Tufts University Art Galleries to build an exhibition for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, to go up sometime in the next year. And the funny thing is, *A Dead Name That Learned How to Live* wasn't supposed to be my debut. I actually have a whole other manuscript ready, a book about the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings, the Trump presidency and America. I'm editing it now and looking to publish that in 2023. ■

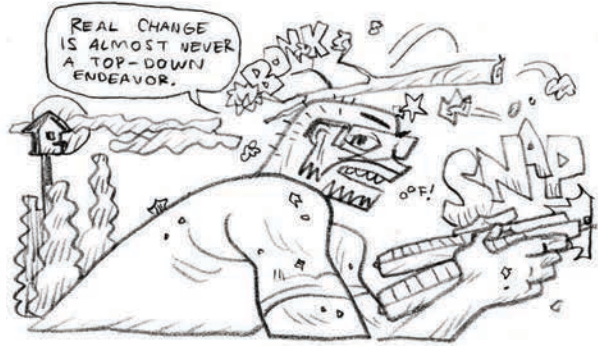
SHERELL BARBEE is the print editor at *In These Times* and was a 2021 residence fellow at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. She is based in Chicago.

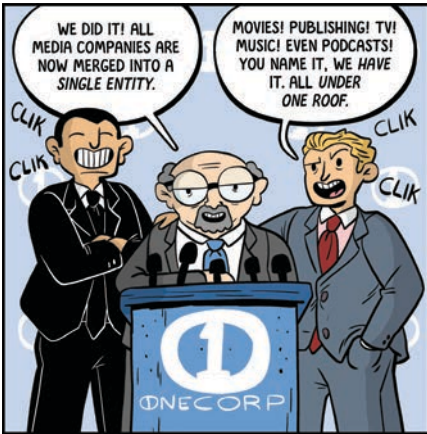
AND I WILL ALWAYS BE YOUR MOTHER

for mom

BY GOLDEN

Head up Shoulders strong Pallbearer
at your brother's funeral strong You forgot to die
today strong Grandmother's skeleton key strong you my hip
& my neck strong Don't forget that you my boy
when everyone else is watching *You can't scrub the son* out
of my child You already lived 20 years without a halo
You must absorb all the boy you can until they turn you in-
to a prayer *How are you* *going to try to kill my child?*
You remember suicide is never the answer, right? I brought you
in this world & I wish *a bitch would try and kill what is mine—*
even if it is you. Don't forget my fist is stronger
than any bullet Peroxide cannot clean a body like communion
My hands have never stopped repenting for you Didn't I say
Keep yo' head up boy? If ya' mind is stuck in the cotton clouds,
how are you going to hear the barrel ringing your name?
I still talk to God about you, still hold your baby picture





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Barbara Ehrenreich's Call for Socialist Feminism

Barbara Ehrenreich, that giant of American feminism and leftist thought, passed away September 1. She leaves us with a canon of work that sheds an unrelenting light on the way social class shapes American life. Writing for *In These Times* in 1984, Ehrenreich argued that, while American women

voters were moving to the left of men, it might not be because of feminism—it was because of the attacks on the welfare state. As female voters increasingly joined the working class, Ehrenreich offered, liberal feminism would never be enough; only a socialist-feminism could accommodate and respond to this shift.



IN 1984, BARBARA EHRENRICH WROTE: The potential strength and the current weakness of American feminism seemed encapsulated in an event I attended last February in New Hampshire. The occasion was a Susan B. Anthony award dinner hosted by the YWCA, which has become, as it has in many regions, something of a feminist front group in the state. Five hundred women filled the ballroom of a fading, roadside motel, up from 350 last year.

They were young and old (many, in fact, mother-daughter pairs); some dressed in the professional woman's standard suit-and-silk-blouse, others in their cocktail party best, and a sprinkling in country-feminist blue jeans and sweaters. There were rousing anti-Reagan speeches, moving personal testimonials, standing ovations, songs and much embracing and moist-eyed appreciation all around. It was down-home American feminism at its best—a movement that has succeeded in developing a broad oppositional culture without getting side-tracked into a subculture.

Afterwards, a few of us looked in at a Walter Mondale rally that had been tacked on, somewhat opportunistically, to the main event. The draw here was three nationally known feminists: a vice president of NOW, which had recently endorsed Mondale; New York City Council President Carol Bellamy; and Betty Friedan. They

spoke briefly, hammering away on the theme of Mondale's electability—but they could not fully distract all of the 75 assembled women from the cash bar on one side of the room. It was a lackluster event in which everyone seemed to accept the premise that the women's movement was now captive to the Democratic Party's center and its front-running candidate—a curiously resigned attitude, given that women's political power has never been greater.

For the first time since American women achieved suffrage in 1920, women are a recognized political force—feared by Republicans and courted assiduously by Democrats. Political commentators from Kevin Phillips to Bella Abzug agree that women could decide the presidential election of 1984, and that their decision will go resoundingly against Ronald Reagan.

The key to their new power is the gender gap. In 1980, and again in the congressional elections of 1982, women's vote diverged from men's by approximately 10 percentage points in favor of the Democrats. Opinion polls showed a parallel divergence in political attitudes: Women are more pacifist than men, more concerned about the environment, and more supportive of government social welfare programs. Now peace, social welfare and environment are described as the "gender gap issues." Disconcertingly, neither the Equal Rights Amendment nor abortion make that list. To judge from poll data alone, American women have not on the whole become more feminist than men; they have moved to the left of men.

An American exception

THIS DEVELOPMENT IS NOT ONLY HISTORICALLY unique for the U.S. It is unique internationally. In the United Kingdom and Europe, there has traditionally been what we could label a “reverse gender gap”—women have voted more conservatively than men, especially where there is a Christian Democratic Party to vote for. In Europe women have become more liberal in recent years, so that the “reverse gender gap” is closing. But nowhere except in the U.S., as far as I can discover, have women actually moved to the left of men. Here we seem to have a genuine case of American exceptionalism; and if no one has so far noted this in the volumes of commentary on the gender gap, it is because of our equally exceptional provincialism.

Explanations for the gender gap usually contain the following ingredients, in varying proportions: “feminine values,” such as nurturance and compassion, which are believed to predispose women to a peaceable and welfare-statism political stance; the rapid influx of women into the workforce, especially in the ‘70s; the rise in the number of women who are single heads of households; Ronald Reagan; and feminism itself. Obviously, feminine values do not explain much by themselves, since they should have been just as strong in 1960 as in 1980 and should be as compelling in Italy as in the U.S. So the usual line of reasoning is that feminine values have somehow been activated or de-repressed as women have gained a measure of independence from men.

The transition from the supermarket to the labor market has, unquestionably, been an eye-opening one. Most working women are concentrated in stereotypically female occupations that do not pay enough to support a family or even a fairly ascetic individual. Meanwhile, more than nine million American women are the sole support of their families (up by 100 percent since 1970), and under conditions that have been made all the more difficult by Reaganomics. The American welfare state, which was always shamefully inadequate by European standards, has been savaged by cutbacks. The capital offensive against labor in the workplace is in full swing—and these are surely radicalizing conditions for anyone who must go home at night to feed her children. To emphasize these

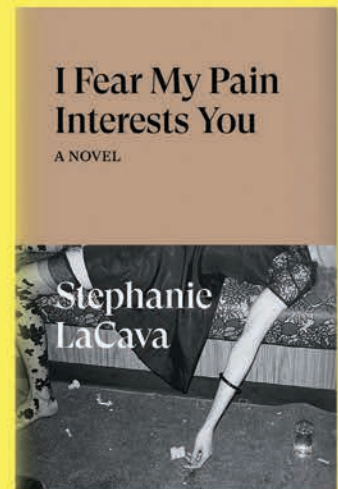
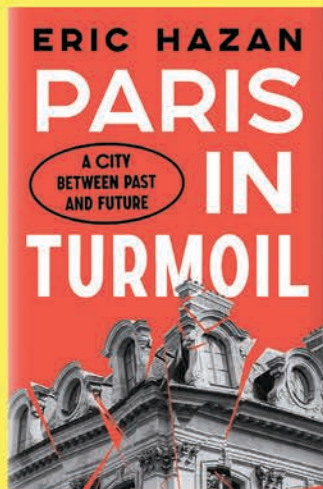
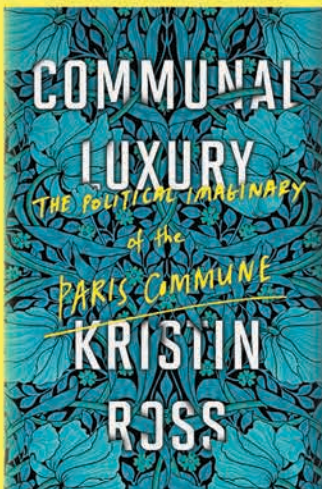
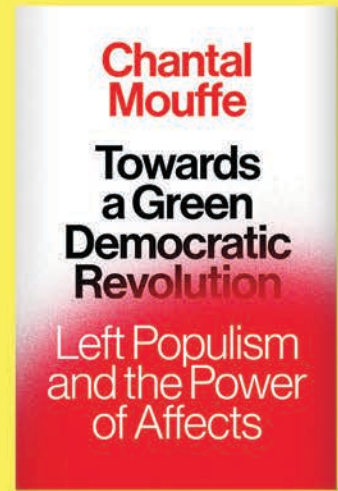
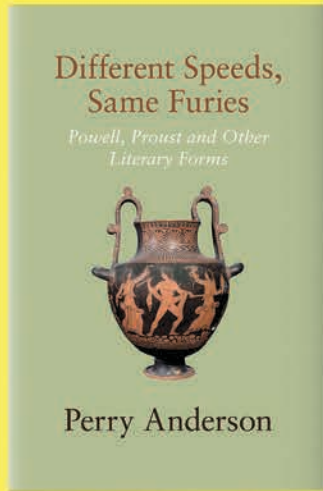
Most working women are concentrated in stereotypically female occupations that do not pay enough to support a family or even a fairly ascetic individual.

developments’ importance, polls find the most “liberal” women, statistically speaking, are unmarried, employed and/or Black or Hispanic.

How much feminism itself has had to do with the creation of the gender gap is hard to say. Naturally, we would like to take credit for it, and the threat of the gender gap has been used by feminists to bludgeon Congress into voting for child support enforcement legislation and a modicum of public sector job creation for women, among other worthy things. ...

The best hope, it seems to me, is for the re-emergence of socialist-feminism, not as an organizationally separate tendency, but as a political spirit infusing—and bringing together—the women’s movement and the various pieces of the left. Liberal feminism, to use Juliet Mitchell’s old categories, has been the defining core of American feminism. It gave feminism legitimacy in a country that lacks a sturdy radical tradition, and it has been able to involve and unite women across class and party lines. But it can no longer keep up with its own constituency, potential and actual. When women move to the left, so must feminism. ■

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