

Photo by Steve Capri Michael John Voss, co-founder, and Blake Strode, executive director of the ArchCity Defenders, with the 2018 Thomas Merton Award. Photo by Steve Capri

ARCHCITY DEFENDERS PROVE WORTHY OF MERTON AWARD

BY NEIL COSGROVE

When Blake Strode, Executive Director of 2018 Merton Award winner ArchCity Defenders (ACD), saw the list of the 45 previous awardees, he felt something like “impostor syndrome.” Did his organization belong on a roster with the likes of Dick Gregory or Angela Davis or last year’s winner, the Center For Constitutional Rights?

The way he and ACD co-founder Michael John Voss were received by those gathered for the Award Dinner on November 28th suggested that “impostor” was the word furthest from attendees’ thoughts. That the two ACD representatives spent much of the day leading up to the dinner ensconced in their hotel room, working on various cases and campaigns, only reinforced the unanimity of support for what ArchCity does.

Strode and Voss told the NewPeople that, for one thing, they were waiting on a decision from the 8th U.S. Circuit Court on whether Ferguson, like the city of Jennings beforehand, must accept that the city has been operating a debtors’ prison and make whole the multitudes who have been jailed there primarily because they are poor. ACD is leading a campaign, based on the 14th and 8th amendments of the U.S. constitution, to close down St. Louis’ notorious Workhouse jail, and has filed a dozen lawsuits on behalf of campaign protestors badly treated by that city’s police.



Michael John Voss, co-founder, and Blake Strode, executive director of the ArchCity Defenders, with the 2018 Thomas Merton Award. Photo by Steve Capri.

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Odignimil eniet et

PAGE 4

Um cones simus, et

PAGE 4

Cabor aut pedicto

UPDATE ON COUNTY CITIZENS POLICE REVIEW BOARD

BY CHERYL BAUER

Voting 8-6 on July 10, the Allegheny County Council narrowly approved an initiative sponsored by Councilmen Paul Klein and DeWitt Walton to explore the possibility of establishing a countywide citizens police review board. Approval of this measure resulted in a series of public hearings to evaluate the feasibility and need for such a review board, held from August-October throughout the county.

Over 100 municipal police departments currently exist in Allegheny County. Only the City of Pittsburgh police are subject to citizen review, authorized by referendum in 1997 in response to the killings of Jerry Jackson in April of 1995 by Pittsburgh police and Jonny Gammage in October that same year by Brentwood officers. With

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JOHN BOLTON AND THE “TROIKA OF TYRANNY”

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

In his 2002 State of the Union Address on January 29, George W. Bush called North Korea “A regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens.” He also stated Iran “aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom.” Of the three nations Bush cited, however, he gave the most criticism to Iraq. He stated “Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror.” These were the fighting words of George W. Bush and gave an insight on how his presidency would unfold as he undertook the invasion of Iraq and the virtual destruction of that country. The evil genius behind this proclamation was John Bolton, who has spent a lifetime in conjuring up demons around the world who supposedly endanger the US and civilization.

Now in the age of Trump, John Bolton is in the saddle again as National Security Advisor to the President. He was appointed to this position in April 2018, an appointment which does not demand Congressional approval. And so on November 1, 2018 John Bolton identified a new threat to the civilized world, what he called a ‘Troika of Tyranny’. The countries that he has now focused his sights on are Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. On the day he announced the new ‘troika of tyranny’, he also announced economic sanctions that would be imposed on Venezuela. The sanctions were specifically imposed on Venezuela’s export of gold, a lifeline of the embattled economy of that country. It has to be kept in mind that such sanctions on a coun-

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Thomas Merton Center
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www.thomasmertoncenter.org

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Saturday: Noon to 4PM

Office Phone: 412-361-3022

Fax: 412-361-0540

Website: www.thomasmertoncenter.org

The NewPeople Editorial Collective

Cheryl Bauer, Neil Cosgrove, Michael Drohan, Russ Fedorka, Bette McDevitt, Marianne Novy, Joyce Rothermel, Molly Rush, Jo Tavener, and Maggie Weaver.

TMC Staff & Volunteers

Executive Director: Gabriel McMorland

Finance Director / Project Liaison: Roslyn Maholland

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TMC PROJECTS

Human Rights

Book'Em: Books to Prisoners Project
bookempgh@gmail.com
www.bookempgh.org

Cities for CEDAW
pgh4CEDAW@gmail.com

Fight for Lifers West
fightforliferswest@gmail.com
412-607-1804
Fightforliferswest.org

Greater Pittsburgh Interfaith Coalition
Anne Wirth 412-716-9750

Human Rights Coalition / Fed Up
(prisoner support and advocacy)
412-802-8575, hrcfedup@gmail.com
www.prisonerstories.blogspot.com

Pittsburghers for Public Transit
412-216-9659
info@pittsburghforpublictransit.org

Steel Smiling
info@steelsmilingpgh.org
www.steelsmilingpgh.org
412-251-7793

Stop Sexual Assault in the Military
412-361-3022
hildebrew@aol.com

Anti-War/Anti-Imperialism

Anti-War Committee
awc@thomasmertoncenter.org

Pittsburgh Darfur Emergency Coalition
jumphook@gmail.com; www.pittsburgh-darfur.org

Environmental Justice

Marcellus Shale Protest Group
melpacker@aol.com 412-243-4545
marcellusprotest.org

Pittsburgh 350
350pittsburgh@gmail.com
World.350.org/Pittsburgh

Shalefield Stories
(Friends of the Harmed)
412-422-0272
brigetshields@gmail.com

Westmoreland Marcellus Citizens Group
724-837-0540
lfpochet@verizon.net

Economic Justice

Harambee Ujima/Diversity Footprint
Twitter @HomewoodNation

TMC PARTNERS

(Partners are independent organizations who support the nonviolent peace and justice mission of TMC. - Articles may not necessarily represent the views of Partners)

Abolitionist Law Center
412-654-9070 abolitionist-lawcenter.org

Amnesty International
info@amnestypgh.org
www.amnestypgh.org

Association of Pittsburgh Priests
Sr. Barbara Finch 412-716-9750
www.associationofpittsburghpriests.com

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www.thebigideapgh.org

The Black Political Empowerment Project
Tim Stevens 412-758-7898

CeaseFire PA
www.ceasefirepa.org—info@ceasefirepa.org

Citizens for Social Responsibility
of Greater Johnstown
Larry Blalock, evolve@atlantibb.net
The Global Switchboard Pittsburgh
412-471-7852
admin@globalswitchboard.org
www.theglobalswitchboard.org

North Hills Anti-Racism Coalition
412-369-3961
email: info@arc.northpgh.org
www.arc.northpgh.org

PA United for Single-Payer Health Care
www.healthcare4allPA.org
www.PUSH-HC4allPa.blogspot.com
412-421-4242

Pittsburgh Area Pax Christi
412-761-4319

Pittsburgh Cuba Coalition
412-303-1247 lisacubasi@aol.com

Pittsburgh BDS Coalition
bdspittsburgh@gmail.com

Pittsburgh North People for Peace
412-760-9390 info@pnpp.northpgh.org
www.pnpp.northpgh.org

Pittsburgh Palestine Solidarity Committee
info@pittsburgh-psc.org
www.pittsburgh-psc.org

Raging Grannies
412-963-7163 eva.havlicsek@gmail.com
www.pittsburghraginggrannies.homestead.com

Religion and Labor Coalition
412-361-4793 ojomal@aol.com

SW PA Bread for the World
Joyce Rothermel 412-780-5118
rothermeljoyce@gmail.com

United Electrical, Radio and Machine

Workers of America (UE)
412-471-8919 www.ueunion.org

Veterans for Peace
Paul Dordal 412-999-6913
vfp47wp@yahoo.com

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
Edith Bell 412-661-7149
granbell412@gmail.com

TMC is a Member of

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network
412-621-9230
office@piin.org

Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty
Martha Conley 412-361-7872,
osterdm@earthlink.net

TMC supports these organizations' missions.

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DECEMBER STAFF UPDATES

WELCOME TO NEW AND RETURNING BOARD MEMBERS!

After the Thomas Merton Center members voted in the 2018 election for our board of directors, we're honored to welcome new and returning board members.

Newly joining the board:

Darnika Reed
Peggy Ward
Daniel Sun
Symone Saul

Re-elected to the board:

Mark Dixon
M. Shernell Smith
Neil Cosgrove
Jordan Malloy



TMC Fundraising Dinner with Pittsburgh actor Wali Jamal on October 30, 2018 hosted and prepared by TMC member Howard Aikens and Christine Wolfe. Dinners continue in December and January with Jules Lobel and Tony Norman respectively. To find out more about future TMC dinner fundraisers, contact the Merton Center. Seating for each dinner is limited.



Thousands of marchers proceeded up Forbes Avenue in Squirrel Hill on October 30th, to mourn the victims of the October 27th mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue and to protest President Trump's anti-immigrant policies and inflammatory rhetoric. Trump was visiting the site of the shooting at approximately the same time as the march, organized by the activist group Bend the Arc. Photographer, Neil Cosgrove.



Members of Bend the Arc led the October 30th march as it proceeded down Shady Avenue. Photographer, Neil Cosgrove.



Rally held on Armistice Day, November 11, 2018 by the Anti-War Committee of Pittsburgh, a project of the Thomas Merton Center, marking the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice ending World War One. Leaflets were distributed to churchgoers and passersby protesting the recent US withdrawal by Donald Trump of the nuclear weapons treaty of 1987 made with the former Soviet Union increasing the danger of nuclear war.

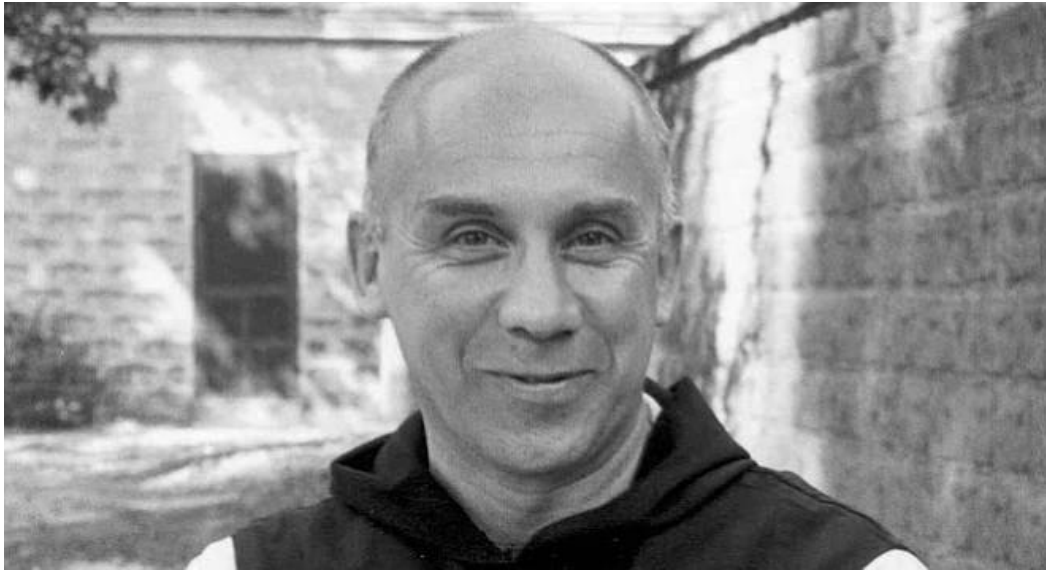


Have you seen this billboard on Washington Boulevard? The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Pittsburgh raised the funds for this billboard. A second billboard is going up on Sawmill Run Road, but more contributions are needed. If you can help, send check to WILPF/PITTSBURGH, 311 Field Cub Ridge, Pittsburgh, PA 15238



AN ENORMOUS LOSS, BUT A GREAT LEGACY

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSING OF THOMAS MERTON



It was December 10, 1968 when Thomas Merton was found dead in his lodgings at a conference center in Bangkok, Thailand. Fr. Louis, his religious name, had just completed a talk on “Christianity and Marxism” and had gone to his room for a break. He was only 53 years of age, already a world-read author and contemplative voice for many spiritual seekers around the globe.

In addition to many spiritual articles and books, Thomas Merton had written on many social topics, including racism, nuclear weapons and non-violence. He had become an outspoken critic of the US war in Vietnam. It was ironic that his body came home to the Abbey in Gethsemane in a US Army plane along with those of soldiers killed in that war.

It was not hard to understand why Molly Rush and the others who founded the Thomas Merton Center in 1972 chose Thomas Merton for the name of the newly formed Pittsburgh-based peace and justice center. The Center’s origin flowed out of its first members’ opposition to the Vietnam War (CEASE – Citizens to End Asian Slaughter and Exploitation).

While the circumstances of Thomas Merton’s death remain somewhat mysterious (there was no autopsy performed), all will agree that his life was far too short! From his book, The Asian Journal, telling of his travels to southeast Asia, one can witness Merton’s exploration into the eastern religions and the connections he was

making between them and Christianity in his spiritual journey, a journey that many who were following him were also pursuing.

When Pope Francis I made his visit to the United States in 2015 and addressed a joint session of Congress, he noted four great Americans who have left great legacies to the United States and the world: Abraham Lincoln, Dorothy Day, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thomas Merton.

Merton accompanied two other historic leaders who were taken from us or lost to us in 1968: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. How fortunate many of us have been in our lifetimes to be inspired by the lives of these three self-sacrificing American leaders!

Thank you, Thomas Merton, for a life well lived and that continues to reach beyond the grave!

The Merton Center has a very rich library of the writings of Thomas Merton, along with two DVD’s on his life that are available on loan. I invite you to get to know Thomas Merton, his life and his writings. His wisdom endures, and his life continues to inspire.

“You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.”

-- Thomas Merton

Jan. 31, 1915: born in Prades, France to Owen Merton and Ruth Jenkins

1916: Moved to USA, lived in Douglaston, Long Island

1921: His mother dies from cancer

1928: Moves to Oakham, England

1931: His father dies of a brain tumor

1933: He enters Cambridge in the fall - study of modern languages (French and Italian)

1934: He leaves Cambridge and returns to USA

1935: He enters Columbia University

1938: He graduates from Columbia, began work on M.A.

November 16, 1938: He is received into the Catholic Church at Corpus Christi Church

1940: He teaches English at St. Bonaventure College

December 10, 1941: He enters the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemane, Trappist, Kentucky.

March 19, 1944: He makes simple vows, publishes first work, Thirty Poems

1946: He publishes A Man in the Divided Sea

1947: He makes solemn vows, publishes Exile Ends in Glory

1948: Publication of his best-selling autobiography, The Seven Storey Mountain

May 26, 1949: He is ordained a priest

1953: He publishes The Sign of Jonas; Bread in the Wilderness

1955: He is named Master of Scholastics (students for priesthood)

1956: He publishes The Living Bread

1958: He publishes Thoughts in Solitude

1961: He publishes Emblems of a Season of Fury; Life and Holiness

1964: He publishes Seeds of Destruction

1965: He begins to live as a hermit on the grounds of the monastery

He is named Master of Novices

1967: He publishes Mystics and Zen Masters

December 10, 1968: He dies in Bangkok, Thailand

(Many books by and about Thomas Merton have been published since his death. Documentaries have also been made about his life.)



UPDATE ON COUNTY CITIZENS POLICE REVIEW BOARD CONT'D BY CHERYL BAUER

renewed fervor following the June 19, 2018 murder of Antwon Rose by part-time officer Michael Rosfeld in East Pittsburgh, citizens and activists urged the county council to take firm action to increase accountability of police departments across the county.

Since the public hearings concluded, the response has been mixed as local governing bodies consider the proposition. A number of municipalities remain undecided about their participation while others, such as Harmar and Springdale, have emphatically opted-out, citing an unnecessary bureaucratic burden on an ostensibly functioning system. Concerns have also centered around funding and function, specifically interference in local police operations. On the other hand, Eliz-

abeth Pittinger, Executive Director of the city of Pittsburgh's Citizen Police Review Board, has noted that some elected officials in other municipalities have already reached out to her for guidance establishing similar citizen review entities in their localities.

During a press conference held November 15, 2018, community advocates proposed a general structure for the county review board, modeled after the City board. The City's review board includes two retired city officers, ensuring representation of the law enforcement perspective. The advocates' proposal comprised 15 members: one representative from each of the 13 districts within the county and two retired law enforcement officers. Council members have not confirmed

any specifics to date, but have discussed a seven to nine member panel and acknowledged that the perspective of law enforcement would be welcome on the board.

Community organizers continue to encourage the council to endow the county citizens review board with authority to investigate with subpoena power, essential in order to provide effective oversight of police activities. The power of subpoena would legitimize the accountability of the police to the communities and help to ensure dispensation of the law fairly – to all citizens including law enforcement officers. Councilman Walton has expressed intent to work with state legislators to propose legislation that would reform hiring and training practices

and establish statewide standards for police conduct. Councilmen Klein and Walton are presently drafting legislation to create the board, hoping to submit it to the council for a vote by the end of the year. If the measure passes council vote, County Executive Rich Fitzgerald will be charged with final approval.

*Now is the time to encourage our county council members to vote in favor the initiative to establish the county citizens review board. County Executive Fitzgerald's office can be contacted at 412-350-6500. Calls can be placed to county council at 412-350-6490.

Cheryl Bauer is a member of the New People editorial collective.

THE PEOPLE VS THE PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SYSTEM BY JO TAVERNER

In early September the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) announced a number of initiatives to eliminate drug smuggling into state prisons. The DOC prohibited inmate access to mail-order books and publications as well as free volunteer book donation programs, among them the long-standing TMC project known as Book 'Em. In their place, tablets for the exorbitant price of \$149 would be made available -- an option beyond the means of most inmates, who make as little as \$.19 an hour.

Ensnconced in the basement of TMC, a number of volunteers organized by Jodi Lincoln have come together twice a month to fulfill inmates book requests. Individual prisoners can request around three pounds of books every 3 months. Annually, around 2700 packages of books are sent. Unfortunately, Book 'Em has neither the funds nor a donated book collection great enough to fulfill multiple monthly individual requests. Still, as more books enter the prison, an ad-hoc circulation system enables each requested book to be read by numerous inmates, showing their preference for donated books over the small prison libraries that have neither the range nor type of books requested by inmates. A late return of a library book can also lead to punishment. Prisoners in restrictive housing have no access to such libraries.

Soon after the policies were announced, Jodi Lincoln wrote to inmates, expressing her dismay. Calling the policies "extremely dehumanizing and a violation of prisoner rights," Jodi wanted inmates to know that Book 'Em, along with other donation programs, were fighting to get

the policies rescinded. She asked them to write back with thoughts about the new policies. "Let us know your story..., why free books are important to you, what your library is like; and what you think about Ebooks..." She ended her letter sending Book 'Em's "support," with the encouragement that prisoners "stay strong," as she promised to stay in touch.

One prisoner wrote, "I have been receiving books for 4 years...and I've greatly appreciated it...Now in solitary we are only allowed one book a week from the prison library, which has a small selection of books mainly donated by other inmates. We have no access to the institutional library at all...Now I'm screwed. No family to look out for me and because of solitary I can't work so I can't afford ebooks or the tablet...Free book donations like Book 'Em kept me sane...I foresee my mental health slipping in the future...I look forward to hearing from you...I haven't had correspondence with anyone for years..." And another said that he "was blessed to get donated books." "I can't afford to buy any and I don't have anyone sending me money to do so...Below is my information...I would truly love to keep correspondence with you if you are willing....please write back."

Clearly many prisoners need the donated books; they also need the human connection created by their interaction with organizations that supported and cared for them.

It is still not entirely clear why such policies were put in place. DOC advanced the notion that drug smuggling was

sickening their prison guards. In a three month period, however, few who were tested showed the presence of synthetic cannabinoids. Some critics of the new security measures, along with medical toxicologist experts, thought it unlikely that guards fell ill from incidental exposure. They advanced the notion that the symptoms experienced by guards more often than not arose from a "mass psychogenic illness -- a contagious anxiety response."

Jodi Lincoln believes that the calls to Gov. Wolf, the letters and the stories shared on social media were central to the DOC's recent rescinding of the free book ban on November 1st. All donated books will now be processed at a centralized secure processing location. Concerns abound. How will the DOC insure that inmates receive their packages of books with all the supplemental material? What about the non-bound materials sent like magazines and resource guides?

The ACLU also got involved. It has sued the DOC for its new legal mail policy -- to open and digitally copy all inmate mail, including that coming from their lawyers, thereby violating the attorney-client privilege. Smart Communications, which recently received a \$4 million contract to scan and digitally forward inmate mail, notes on its website that "converting inmate postal mail to electronic media allows for a searchable database of all inmate mail and opens a whole new field of intelligence" for law enforcement agencies. Some wonder if the drug scare was little more than a cover to introduce more stringent, and perhaps unconstitutional, surveillance measures, removing the last of inmate

privacy rights.

Jodi Lincoln believes that the calls to Gov. Wolf, the letters and the stories shared on social media were central to the DOC's recent rescinding of the free book ban on November 1st. All donated books will now be processed at a security processing center. Concerns abound. How will the DOC insure that inmates receive their packages of books with all the supplemental material? What about the non-bound materials sent like zines and resource guides or, etc.

Aside from the \$15 million worth of security measures enacted, funds will need to be found for distributing the packages once they are checked at the Florida-based center. As a state budget line items, it is more easily cut when the legislature needs to balance its budget. What choice might you make if it came down to funding either prisoner mail or anti-global warming protections?

Editor's Note: If you would like to help by donating books or subscriptions, you can find the Book 'Em Amazon Wish List at [bookempa/books-we-need](#). You can also find categories of suggested books and other information.

Jo Taverner is a member of the New-People collective with concentration on the relationship between culture and political economy.

BRAZIL IN THE GRIP OF FASCISM

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

The new president elect of Brazil is a man named Jair Bolsonaro, a frightening prospect for all who believe in democracy. In the first ballot for the Presidency of Brazil on October 7 he received 46% of the votes and in the runoff on October 28, 2018 he received 56%, making him the new President of Brazil beginning January 1, 2019. He is the candidate of a small ultra-right party in Brazil called the Social Liberal Party (PSL) which has few representatives in the Brazilian Congress. He defeated the candidate of the Workers Party (PT), Fernando Haddad, who had been the Mayor of Sao Paolo.

Bolsonaro's ascendancy to the Presidency of Brazil is an amazing story. He succeeds Michel Temer, who essentially came to power by a series of coups in which the former President, Dilma Rouseff, of the Workers Party of Brazil, was ousted. The Workers Party (PT) had come to power in Brazil in 2002 after a few decades of organizing at the grassroots level with an agenda of progressive reform in Brazil. I have fond memories of visiting a city in the State of Rio de Janeiro named Angra dos Reis in 1991-- the leadership of the city had been taken over by a dentist with a platform of universal health care and free education. Their organizing and democratic guidelines would be the envy of any democracy. The leader of the Workers Party at that time, Luis Ignacio Lula de Silva, a man of humble and poor origins, was elected to the Presidency of Brazil in 2002 and brought a level of economic and social justice to Brazil that it had never seen before. He was succeeded by Dilma Rouseff, who had fought the Brazilian military dictatorship in the 1970s. A series of trumped up charges of corruption and a corrupt judiciary ended with her impeachment in 2014.

The new President elect of Brazil is a kind of Trump on steroids. Ample statements confirm his misogyny, racism, homophobia, xenophobia and Islamophobia. He has called people from Haiti and the Middle East the "scum of humanity." He described a woman who opposed and criticized him as "too ugly to care to rape." On the economic front, he favors the total privatization of all public assets such as airlines, railroads and infrastructure, with the consequent decreasing of regulation of corporations and private enterprise. He despises welfare programs to help poor and underprivileged sectors. Above all, and this seems to set him apart from Donald Trump, he has a great detestation of communism/socialism and the threat that it supposedly presents to the Brazilian society and economy. He was a member of the Brazilian military from 1977 to 1998, some of the years of the the military's reign of terror in Brazil. The years of the Brazilian military dictatorship went from 1964 to 1985. They imprisoned and tortured millions of Brazilians, including the former President Dilma Rouseff. Bolsonaro's comment on the military reign of terror is that they were too lenient: "they should have killed the protestors and opponents" he asserts. He is absolutely against all women's rights such as abortion, contraception and equality with men.

Taken together with the victory of Trump in the United States and the Conservative Brexiteers in Britain, the coming to power of Bolsonaro in Brazil is extremely dangerous. Bolsonaro looks to be even more extreme than Trump in his unabashed hateful views although his xenophobic outlook is made less dangerous by the relative lack of influence and control that Brazil exerts on the rest of the world by con-

trast by the United States. If we describe a fascist as one who is wedded to dictatorial authoritarian rule and seeks scapegoats such as immigrants, minorities, poor workers and Muslims as the cause of society's ills, then Bolsonaro fits the bill.

Brazil has not been known for being a country with fascist tendencies, so why the victory to the Presidency of a man who to all appearances seems a full-blown fascist? Some commentators, such as Glenn Greenwald, suggest that the Bolsonaro and Trump phenomena are a result of the ineptitude of the political elite in the US, Brazil and elsewhere. These elites are inattentive to the plight of the great majority of their populations. Why did 56% of the Brazilian voting population vote for a character such as Bolsonaro? Only about 7% of Brazilians are what we might call affluent, so Bolsonaro got elected from the votes of disaffected women, blacks, indigenous and other minorities. Their vote was saying "A pox on both your houses!" to the traditional parties, including PT, but the voters did not understand the full malevolence of the ogre to whom they were giving power. Similarly in the US, Trump was not elected by the powerful corporate tycoons although they cheered his election. He was elected by a large swathe of the so-called middle classes, searching for a scapegoat for their perceived lack of wellbeing. Bolsonaro provided them scapegoats-- immigrants, minorities, welfare recipients, and Muslims. In the US, many people are pushing back against Trump. Will Brazil do the same to Bolsonaro?

Member of the Editorial Collective and the Board of TMC.

JOHN BOLTON AND THE "TROIKA OF TYRANNY" CONT'D

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

try which has in no way injured or attacked the US is an act of war, war by economic strangulation.

Bolton has been explicit in his reasons for targeting the countries of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. In the case of Cuba, he accuses it of sending medical personnel to Venezuela. In fact, Cuba has supplied doctors to tens of poor countries throughout the world dating back to the 1960s. It is one of the most extraordinary acts of solidarity with poor countries, unparalleled by any other nation. In addition, Cuba has opened a medical University to train doctors from all over the poorer parts of the world called Escuela Latino Americano de Medicina (ELAM). This University has also trained hundreds of medical doctors from the minority and poorer communities in the US. I attended the graduation of many of these young professionals several years ago in Havana. What John Bolton finds repugnant is solidarity between the nations

of the world where the better off help the poor and the needy. Not that Cuba is a rich country. Largely because of the total economic embargo imposed by the US on Cuba, it is barely surviving. But that does not prevent it from helping the worse off. The rhetoric that Bolton uses is that Cuba is supposedly exporting "terror" to countries such as Nicaragua, Venezuela, Haiti and a host of others.

Nicaragua and Venezuela are very different from Cuba, but what they have in common is that they overthrew a very corrupt ruling class which was supported by the US, especially with military assistance. In the case of Nicaragua, the Sandanistas overthrew the dictator Anastasio Somoza on July 17, 1979. The US opposed the new regime and organized a war against them by arming and funding a group that became known as the "Contras". For their efforts at liberation from tyranny, the US has never forgiven the Nicaraguan Sandanistas. Today

the high principles that guided the Sandanista movement have largely evaporated and been undermined by corrupt bureaucrats but US enmity remains.

Venezuela is a more tragic example of a revolution upended. Hugo Chavez came to power in that country through a democratic transition in 1999 without any guerilla or civil war. He instituted massive social programs to uplift the poor and redistribute wealth. He spoke vehemently against US influence and interference in his country. The wealthy elite in Venezuela, however, never accepted these progressive reforms and have largely succeeded in undermining Chavez's successor, Nicolas Maduro. US official policy has been to undermine and destroy the Chavez Revolution by economic embargoes and other means.

John Bolton demonizes these three countries with the accusation of being 'socialist' and spreading socialism

around the world. This is the boogymen he uses to frighten people. In practice, what socialism in these countries means is increasing equality and providing universal healthcare and free education. In Bolton's book these policies are crimes. Bolton's worldview is perhaps best described in the statement he made in 1994 on the United Nations: "There is no United Nations. There is an international community that occasionally can be led by the only real power left in the world, and that's the United States, when it suits our interests and when we can get others to go along."

This is the person who is defining US foreign policy today for the Trump regime. His guiding maxim is all for ourselves and to hell with others. What a specter.

Michael Drohan is a member of the Editorial Collective and of the Board of the Thomas Merton Center.



A PITTSBURGH-AREA RESOURCE AND THE WOMAN LEADING IT: AN INTERVIEW WITH MILA SANINA, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PUBLICSOURCE

BY JOYCE ROTHERMEL

Do you care about facts and find it hard to know when the media is presenting the truth? Well, you are very fortunate if you know about and are a current subscriber to PublicSource, the Pittsburgh-investigative reporting website.

I recently had the privilege of witnessing the award presentation by the Johnston Leadership Institute at the Graduate School for Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh for an Emerging Leader to Mila Sanina, the Executive Director of PublicSource. Both her story and her work inspire. She agreed to an interview for The New People.

Question: Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

Mila: I came to Pittsburgh in 2008 to pursue a master’s degree at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh. I had a few jobs outside of Pittsburgh, lived in Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, Ga., and then settled in Pittsburgh.

Question: What is your background in journalism?

It’s to my grandmother that I, in a way, owe my passion for journalism. She never finished high school, but she loved reading and was phenomenal at Morse code. She interpreted and transcribed messages coming from the battlefields of World War II. She wasn’t really a reporter, but she knew the value of knowledge and information and she instilled that in me. I was born in the Soviet Union, in the time of Gorbachev, known as “perestroika.” Many great writers lived in the Soviet Union back then, but not many journalists survived in the world built on propaganda. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a lot of things have changed. In the independent country of Kazakhstan, my home, just being a journalist remains a dangerous profession. It is remarkable that there are still people with courage who continue doing good work, they know what’s important - it’s facts, not what you think about them.

I worked in Central Asia as a freelance journalist for a short period of time, but the stakes of reporting were way too high there, so I decided to go into policy and that’s how I ended up at Pitt. While at Pitt, I co-founded a graduate student journal and my passion for writing, editing, discovering through interviews and learning somehow refused to be stifled. I ended up, first, interning and then, freelancing as an international

assignment editor at CNN International, then I became a desk assistant at PBS NewsHour and shortly after came back to Pittsburgh where I joined the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. I was there for 5 years. My last job at the PG deputy managing editor.

Question: When did PublicSource begin?

Mila: PublicSource began in 2011 as a program of Pittsburgh Filmmakers. It was defined as an investigative news organization to provide Pennsylvania citizens with in-depth information. At the end of 2015, PublicSource became an independent nonprofit. I joined PublicSource in 2016 and together with my supportive board, at the time a small but mighty team, we refocused our mission and expanded our programming. In this short period of time, we tripled our audience. There are now hundreds of people supporting PublicSource with donations and our team includes ten people who work hard, who have an incredible drive, and keep meaningful local journalism alive here in the Pittsburgh region.

We are lucky to be working in a community that has a lot of media outlets, some of which still manage to produce good work under dwindling resources, so we have a luxury of not duplicating stories but rather doing the type of journalism that is unique. When you read PublicSource, hopefully you see the value of it and the direct impact on your life. We focus on local journalism that drives change, sometimes makes people uncomfortable and invites them to understand their neighbors better. We approach local journalism as a public service.

Question: What do you believe are the three main issues facing the Pittsburgh community?

Mila: Education is number one. It’s a question about how we, as a community, ensure that we are preparing our kids for the future that will be hotter, more complex and more diverse. We write about how we are supporting parents, especially mothers in making sure they have resources to realize their own potential and equip their kids, independent of their race or background.

Development: The how and why of economic development is definitely the biggest issue we have been grappling with as a community and it will be a hot topic for many years to come. This big question is what kind of a community does Pittsburgh want to

be? Do we, as a city, have a unified vision for urban design, transportation and economic opportunities that Pittsburgh would like to sustain and maybe attract? These are difficult questions. We have a lot of stakeholders and somehow as a city and, specifically, we as journalists need to do a better job in informing people how development is happening, what models have been working elsewhere.

Infrastructure and climate change: I know these are two but these are interlinked, just think about seismic shifts that are happening in this country right now... fires, floods, hurricanes....

Question: What are your plans for the growth of PublicSource in terms of readership?

Mila: We hope to reach more people and become a destination for serious local reporting and analysis in the Pittsburgh region. We are also hoping to become a financially sustainable newsroom that is 100 % community supported. Trust should be the number one priority in journalism, and membership is a great way to sustain trust. It’s important to differentiate between subscription and membership. Subscribers pay money to get a product (i.e. access to a website or getting a paper for example). Members join our (journalistic) cause. Good content is still the key, with experienced and hard-working journalists who cover stories that no one else touches. with passion, context and rigor so they make you care. PublicSource always welcomes contribution from readers, stories, their tips, their expertise.

Please tell our readers how they can subscribe to PublicSource.

We are an online only publication, although we have more than a dozen print partners across Pennsylvania who are welcome to republish our content. The best way to follow our work is to sign up for our newsletter at <https://www.publicsource.org/newsletter-signup/> and develop a habit of visiting our website at publicsource.org. We now publish a new story every day. If you have a story to share, you should pitch it to us. If you believe in local journalism and would like to support PublicSource’s mission, now is the time to do it.

Joyce Rothermel is on the Advisory Board of the Johnson Leadership Institute.

PublicSource is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, digital-first media organization dedicated to serving Pittsburgh and the region. We provide public-service reporting and analysis, convene communities of shared interests and connect civically engaged citizens with local decision makers.

We listen. We investigate. We tell in-depth stories for a better Pittsburgh.

Our principles

1. PublicSource presents a bold vision for local journalism in the Pittsburgh region.

Fearless. Truth-seeking. Responsible. Inclusive. The news you consume does not have to be just traffic, weather, shootings or sports. We deliver nuanced local coverage through our website, our weekly digest, social media accounts and through partners’ platforms.

2. PublicSource’s agenda is to engage and inform residents of the Pittsburgh region on the most pressing issues that are having a real impact on people’s lives.

We present facts and narratives that are informed by those facts. We analyze issues with a mind toward the future, toward successful models and solutions; we look to the history to find root causes for present-day problems and write with outcomes and impact in mind.

3. PublicSource believes journalism is public service,

and readers’ trust is the most valuable asset we have.

Our fact-checking system is robust and thorough. We seek readers’ input because we cannot know everything and we don’t pretend to.

4. We are not liberal or conservative.

We are independent and abide by ethics principles adopted by the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN).

5. PublicSource does not churn out clickbait.

It delivers thoughtful journalism, which works for regular people who may not have resources to investigate things on their own.

6. PublicSource does not only inform, it also engages with communities of shared interests through events.

You can keep up with our latest events here.

7. PublicSource is committed to being the platform for the community, easy to access and proactive rather than reactive.

There is no paywall or exclusivity. We make our journalism available to you, and to media partners, because we believe informed and engaged citizens will make decisions that improve our region.

8. PublicSource stands for evidence-based, accountable local journalism. PublicSource believes that thoughtful

local journalism is essential to a smarter, better Pittsburgh region.

9. PublicSource invites people to share their narratives on publicsource.org.

It works with people in an effort to provide a platform for people who typically aren’t being heard, people who are not just ‘newsmakers’ or ‘trend-setters’ but those who do not always get a microphone to share their experiences.

10. PublicSource advocates for government transparency and serves as a watchdog to hold those in power to account.

We seek to spread knowledge and truth.

11. PublicSource retains full authority over editorial content to protect the best journalistic interests of our organization.

Acceptance of financial support does not constitute implied or actual endorsement of donors or their products, services or opinions. We don’t sell out.

12. PublicSource is innovation-driven and experimental in its work and spirit.

We are a digital-first newsroom and we want our journalism not only to be relevant to you, but also user-friendly, appealing and surprising.



THE TREE OF LIFE TRAGEDY AND ITS CONTOURS

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

On Saturday October 27 a great tragedy took place in Pittsburgh when a gunman entered the Tree of Life Synagogue and massacred 11 religious worshippers with an AR-15 rifle. It was the greatest act of anti-Semitism to occur in all US history. A great shroud of sadness envelopes our entire community as our hearts go out to the families of those slain, to all the members of the Tree of Life synagogue, and to all the Jewish community in Pittsburgh and all over the country. At the Merton Center we join the throngs of mourners and grievors, especially given the long history of connection between the Center and the Jewish community.

The man who committed this heinous crime, Robert Bowers from Brentwood, gave us some insight into what motivated him to commit this crime. Just before entering the Synagogue he put a message up on the internet platform called “Gab,” a site visited by white nationalists and neo-Nazis. On this site he wrote “HIAS likes to bring invaders in who kill our people. I can’t sit by and let my people be slaughtered. Screw your optics; I’m going in”. As he opened fire in the Synagogue, Bowers is reported to have said “All Jews must die.”

HIAS is an acronym for Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, an organization which has worked with poor immigrants to the US from all backgrounds. It was formed in the early 1880s when Jews

were under attack in Czarist Russia, and it helped to resettle many Jewish refugees in the United States.

The massacre in Squirrel Hill did not take place in a vacuum so to speak. It capped a week in which many hated-filled acts of violence and threats of violence took place. On Wednesday of the same week as the Tree of Life shooting a white man in Kentucky shot two African Americans in a grocery store after he had attempted to enter and shoot up an African-American Church. On Friday, the day prior to the Pittsburgh attack, a man named Cesar Sayoc, an apparently hate-filled Trump supporter; was arrested in Florida and accused of mailing bombs to George Soros, a Jewish philanthropist and entrepreneur, former President Obama, the Clintons, CNN, Senators Kamala Harris and Corey Booker (both African-Americans) and Tom Steyer, who has been trying to organize the impeachment of President Trump.

The bigger context of the Tree of Life massacre is the hysteria built around the caravan of several thousands of poor, oppressed and impoverished Central Americans who are marching towards the US. President Trump has labeled these unfortunate human beings as invaders, criminals and rapists. He claims that they are infiltrated with dangerous Muslims from the Middle East.

One of the ironies of this situation is that the people who are attempting to emigrate are all from countries where the US has intervened for several decades, upending attempts at democracy, civil rights and a more equitable distribution of wealth and income. Most of them are coming from Honduras, where the US helped to overthrow a progressive democratic President, Manuel Zelaya, in 2009, replacing him with a conservative neoliberal who has further advanced inequality, violence and repression. Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees constitute the other participants in the caravan, both countries having suffered from decades of US intervention on behalf of United Fruit Company and other US interests. The message is: we destroy your country, but it is up to you to pick up the pieces as we declare innocence of any crime.

It would appear that Robert Bowers drank the Kool-Aid of President Trump’s xenophobia and took action. Trump’s rhetoric of disparagement and belittlement of the poor of the earth struggling to survive has consequences and the fruit of this is the tragedy of The Tree of Life Synagogue.

There is an interesting connection between the Merton Center and the tragedy of The Tree of Life. A man named Nathaniel Glosser, a member of the Center, recently and tragically deceased, was a cousin of Stephen

Miller, who is the advisor of President Trump on many of his hateful policies in regard to immigrants. Nathaniel’s uncle is Dr. David Glosser, a retired neuropsychologist, who now lives in Philadelphia.

Dr Glosser has gone on record on the Tree of Life killings, stating, “Mr. Trump has made it his policy to vilify and dehumanize Hispanics, Muslims, and nonwhites, calling them subhuman animals that are infesting our country like so many insects or rats. Make no mistake about it: This is the same kind of propaganda that is identical to the racist rants at Nazi Party rallies in Germany in the 1930s. Now Trump spews the same poisonous messages to his supporters and claims innocence when this inflammatory vitriol is sprayed over society. He claims innocence now that this political gasoline catches fire and people get hurt and killed.” Dr. Glosser decries the complicity of his nephew Stephen Miller in being the architect of many of the hateful policies of Mr. Trump. The irony here is that the Glossers, Stephen Miller’s family, escaped as refugees from Antopol, Belarus in the early 1900s, as refugees from Czarist anti-Semitism and cruelty.

Michael Drohan is a member of the Editorial Collective and the Board of the Merton Center.

IF NOT NOW, WHEN? BY NEIL COSGROVE

The anti-Semitism made manifest in Pittsburgh on October 27th was, like all hate crimes, a denial of both the humanity and the uniqueness of each person under attack, a reduction of each individual to some twisted perception of that person’s religion, or ethnicity, or national origin, or some other “threatening” identity marker.

IfNotNow is a national movement of young American Jews seeking to counter the hateful tendencies found within their own religious communities and directed toward the Palestinians. IfNotNow regards the long-term occupation of Palestinian lands by the state of Israel as a “moral disaster” for Jews everywhere; the movement first gained a clear identity during the 2014 Gaza War. Across the country IfNotNow “hives” have been forming, including one in Pittsburgh about a year-and-a-half ago. (IfNotNow adheres to a theory of organizing social movements through “swarms,” Pittsburgh “hive” member Moriah Ella Mason tells us, “based on flexibility and decentralization.”)

Three days after the Tree of Life shootings, IfNotNow helped organize a Jewish ritual of mourning, a teach-in about anti-Semitism, and a protest against President Trump’s visit to the city at the corner of Darlington and Murray in Squirrel Hill that

drew hundreds of participants. (See accompanying photo.)

“We ... recognize that Jewish trauma is regularly used as justification for the Occupation. But the Occupation is not making us safer. Demolishing Palestinian homes and shooting protestors in Gaza is not making us safer. We need to ... confront the real purveyors of anti-Semitism in the U.S.—white nationalists and the politicians who have brought their beliefs back into the mainstream,” says Ms. Mason.

IfNotNow members are troubled by Jewish organizations that have failed to criticize Trump’s encouragement of white nationalism because of the President’s support of “Israeli militant segregation,” Ms. Mason adds. “This is an unacceptable political partnership and it’s dangerous for American Jews and for people of color, Muslims, and other marginalized groups. Ultimately our safety lies in solidarity.”

Just as Merton Center members are still motivated to struggle for peace and social justice by the writings of Thomas Merton, IfNotNow members are guided by the moral and religious teachings of Hillel the Elder, a rabbi who lived during the last century before the Common Era. The movement’s name derives from Hillel’s three questions: “If I am not for myself, who am I? But if I

am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?”

“We are asked to check our Jewish values at the door when it comes to Palestine,” says Ms. Mason. “As a result, young Jews have been pushed out of our own heritage.” Like all great moral teaching, however, Hillel’s packs a powerfully universal punch. When a Gentile asked Hillel if he could explain the Torah to him while he stood on one foot, the teacher offered this formulation of the “golden rule.” “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.”

IfNotNow seeks to provide “a deep need for community and ritual” that Ms. Mason says many young Jews are not finding in “our institutions.” The Pittsburgh “hive” organizes “regular Shabbat dinners to build community and educate our growing hive about the Occupation and ways we can take action. We’ve held protests and actions in opposition to speakers and events that support the occupation.”

The local movement has also joined the Pittsburgh Coalition to End the Deadly Exchange, a campaign seeking to halt exchanges with units of the Israeli military designed to introduce



militarized policing practices to the city’s police force. In addition to these ongoing activities, the Pittsburgh “hive” plans to offer “trainings about anti-Semitism and white nationalism” during the coming year.

IfNotNow now reports it has over 1,800 members nationwide, and chapters in 13 American cities, plus Toronto. Its web site (ifnotnowmovement.org) is quite informative and its local chapter can be contacted via Facebook or e-mail (ifnotnowpgh@gmail.com).

Neil Cosgrove is a member of The NewPeople editorial collective and the Merton Center board.



COLLEGIATE FOOD INSECURITY

BY ELISA OGOT

When most people think of food insecurity, their minds may conjure up images of either younger children who rely on school food programs or older individuals living in shelters or relying on the SNAP program to be fed.

A 2018 survey conducted by researchers at Temple University and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab indicated that 36 percent of college students say they are food insecure. While the assumption often is that the majority of college students have meal plans at their colleges or universities, there are a great many students who are supporting themselves and can't afford meal plans as well as tuition, lodging, and textbooks.

Unfortunately, the renowned California university system has become something of a poster child for collegiate food insecurity: "Over 100 thousand of students in the UC system ... are considered food insecure - meaning they can't afford nutritious food or have to skip meals. A 2016 survey

by the University of California found that across the system, almost half of undergraduate students and a quarter of graduate students were food insecure," reports Sara Harrison of KALW in San Francisco. To add some perspective, consider that "in-state tuition at the UCs has tripled since 1998." Combine that fact with rising housing costs across California, and it begins to make a lot more sense why it's getting harder and harder for low-income students to afford all that they need.

So how to combat this problem? "In 2014, the University of California started the Basic Needs Committee. The Committee works with students to help them figure out solutions to housing, mental health, and food security. If a student is coming to the pantry every month, the Basic Needs Committee will reach out to see if they need extra support," writes Harrison of efforts at UC Berkeley.

In 2017, Ruben Canedo, who lead the

formation of the Basic Needs Committee at Berkeley, visited Pittsburgh and was the keynote speaker at the University of Pittsburgh's Collegiate Basic Needs Dialogue. During the conference, workshops included student panels and action clusters, each focused on specific aspects of basic needs security, including Collegiate Food Pantries, Food Insecurity and Food Rescue/Recovery on Campus, Collegiate Housing Insecurity, Attacking Financial Wellness, and Mental and Emotional Health.

These conversations represent plans that institutions of higher education in Pittsburgh are making to help their students meet basic needs, so they can focus on doing well in school. Both the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University now house food pantries on their respective campuses. CMU's pantry specifically lists that it is a resource for undergraduate and graduate students only, while Pitt's description of whom has access to its pantry services are a bit broader--their

website says that "All members of the Pitt community are welcome to use the pantry."

As someone who recently graduated from college and had financial assistance only when it came to paying my tuition, there have definitely been some times when I didn't feel like I had enough money to pay for food as well as my other living expenses. If I had learned about the Pitt Pantry while I still attended the University of Pittsburgh, I think that knowing their services were accessible to me would have eased my financial burden, and I could have focused on other things like schoolwork or extracurricular activities, instead of where my next meal was coming from.

Elisa Ogot is a NewPeople fellow.

FIGHTING FOR 15 AT PITT

BY ISABELLE OUYONG

The cost of being a student increases year by year, but student wages haven't kept up with expenses at the University of Pittsburgh. Workers across the nation have pressured institutions (the Democratic National Committee), governments (the city of Seattle) and corporations (Amazon) to prioritize a living wage of \$15 an hour. Now, the pressure is on the University of Pittsburgh to follow suit.

Currently, student and campus workers are struggling to get by on \$7.25/hr. At that rate, a student would have to work at least 48 hours a week, every week, just to pay for in-state tuition. Moreover, campus work is capped at 20 hours per week during the academic year. Low wages force students to take out loans, and only exacerbate the looming issue of student debt. When the country's total estimated student debt amounts to about \$1.4 trillion, how can students be expected to foot the bill while making \$7.25/hr? For students who need more than a poorly paid part-time job, working additional off-campus jobs is the only option.

As the most essential component of our University, students should not need to scrape by on low wages. Instead of worrying about making enough money for rent or food, higher wages would allow students to spend more time on academic work, on enriching their community and on leading meaningful personal lives.

Some might argue that doubling the

current wage is excessive. The cost of living in Pittsburgh does fall short of \$15--that is, without the invisible costs. According to the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Living Wage Calculator, at least \$10.32/hr is enough to support yourself, given you have a year-round full time job. However, the number doesn't account for student-specific costs, like textbooks or saving up for inevitable loan payments.

Additionally, a higher wage is essential to accessibility for nontraditional students. The US Department of Education defines a nontraditional student as one affected by one or more of circumstances such as financial independence from parents, having a dependent, being a single caregiver, or being employed full time. Studies show that approximately 74 percent of undergrads can consequently be considered "nontraditional."

Part-time employment paying \$7.25/hr is simply not workable for student parents, for example. In fact, for an adult with a single dependent, the cost of living rises drastically to \$22.32. It is essential that we make educational opportunities accessible to student parents and other nontraditional students.

Additionally, the University's exorbitant housing options add an additional burden to families paying for college. On paper, the newest on-campus dorm, Nordenberg, costs about \$600 a month. Tack on a couple of thousand dollars

per semester for board, since there's no kitchen. Off campus, South Oakland buildings are often run-down, with unmonitored damage.

Instead of building overpriced housing, Pitt could expand accessibility by providing childcare, extended tutoring hours, free parking, and viable on-campus employment opportunities. The University is investing little money in rebuilding the community or local economy, and a lot into what amounts to... glossy, expensive advertising material. The 50-Year Campus Master Plan replaces a community vegetable garden with "residential" proposals.

Last year, the University quietly opened a volunteer food pantry on campus to address food insecurity, although it is hosted by the Bellefield Presbyterian Church, rather than an on-campus entity. After objecting to Oakland's status as a food desert, and a lack of affordable produce, students led a protest that successfully urged the University to transparently communicate the timeline of a grocery store project, which was also prompted by student demand following the closing of an IGA and a 7-11. The movement to raise wages to \$15 isn't just a way of putting money back into the pockets of students and local businesses; this initiative is just one part of creating a much larger power shift that acknowledges student realities.

The University has a moral obligation to both students and the surrounding

residents to take part in the national dialogue to raise wages. As one of the largest employers in Pittsburgh, and as an institution of higher learning, the University of Pittsburgh should be a leader in social responsibility. Since PA law prevents the city from legislating a wage higher than the state minimum, individual institutions must make the first move. There are precedents, too: This year, in line with his consistent support of \$15/hr, Mayor Bill Peduto signed an executive order to raise city worker wages to that amount by 2021. Even UPMC agreed to raise wages to \$15 by 2021, after extensive pressure and a one-day strike.

However, by 2021, \$15 may not suffice anymore. Community advocacy groups like Hospital Workers United, Pittsburgh United, and the fast food workers of Fight for \$15 have been pushing change for years. Through petitions and campaigns, student groups like USAS (United Students Against Sweatshops) Local #31 and PA Student Power Network have also been working for increased wages. It is time for the University of Pittsburgh to step up.

Isabelle Ouyong is a NewPeople fellow, a student at the University of Pittsburgh, and a member of USAS #31.

THE PLOT TO CONTROL THE WORLD

BY MIKE STOUT

When it comes to hypocrisy, The US military and National Security Establishments know no bounds. And once again, USW labor and human rights lawyer and author, Dan Kovalik, has come out with another important work to call them out on it. His newest book, *The Plot to Control the World*, his third book in as many years, pulls no punches in reviewing and dissecting the US Government's history since World War II interfering covertly and overtly in the elections and affairs of numerous countries around the globe, including Italy, Greece, Russia, Iran, Guatemala, Brazil, Honduras, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Ukraine and dozens of others. With the precision of a medical doctor on the operating table, he not only details these decades-long interventions, but gives a cogent analysis of what's behind all the saber-rattling with Russia, Iran and a number of others.

A case in point: The US press reported recently, that US National Security Adviser John Bolton has announced his support for Brazil's far-right president-elect Jair Bolsonaro in the battle against what Bolton has termed the "troika of tyranny" in Latin America – namely, Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. The irony and bald-faced hypocrisy of such a statement will not be lost upon the reader. As *The Plot* details, the US intervened in Cuba and Nicaragua to ensure rule by right-wing despots, and has never stopped intervening in these countries in retaliation for their overthrowing these despots. In Venezuela, the US supported the 2002 coup against democratically-

elected President Hugo Chavez and was one of the only countries in the world to recognize the short-lived coup government despite its disbanding of the Supreme Court and National Assembly and its tearing up of the Venezuelan Constitution

Contrary to the US's self-proclaimed role as protector of democracy and freedom around the world, the US has invariably intervened in these countries to subvert and even destroy democracy and to impose harsh, right-wing dictatorships. They are supporting 73 percent of the world's dictatorships. In the case of Brazil, for example, *The Plot* details the US's role in overthrowing a democratically-elected President in 1964 and in installing a military dictatorship which ruled Brazil with an iron hand until 1985. Jair Bolsonaro, the just elected President of Brazil, whom Bolton openly praises, has made it clear that he views the military coup of 1964 as a good thing and that he views torture, which the military dictatorship carried out systematically, as a "legitimate practice."

If there is a force for tyranny in Latin America, it is not the "troika" that Bolton points to, but it is the US itself which has worked with calculated and cruel resolve to prevent democratic rule in the region. And, as President Trump sends thousands of troops to the US/Mexican border to confront the migrant caravan from Central America, *The Plot* reminds us how the US undermined democratic governments in the countries from which these migrants are fleeing (Honduras and Guatemala) and how the US went so far as to create and support brutal

death squads to enforce dictatorial rule in these countries. That is, the US made these countries unlivable through its interventionist policies and now threatens those who are fleeing from the disastrous conditions which the US created for them.

For those attempting to both understand and educate others about the destructive US role around the world, *The Plot to Control the World* is an important read. Dan's book is scholarly, but written from a deeply personal perspective and easy to understand. With heartfelt passion, he exposes the deep-seated history and roots of the American capitalist 'exceptionalist' ideology and belief in our own superiority over others as the source and justification for this continuing interference, plundering resulting in disastrous human consequences. As Dan explained in his concluding chapter, if we are to find a different, more positive way to interact with the world, we must first understand and learn about what we have already done and continue to do. We, the people, must force our government to find a way that does not seek to control, dominate, destabilize and destroy. He ends the book with, "If I have inspired people to

at least start asking questions, then I have done my job."

Folks can pick up the book at any Barnes & Noble, on Amazon or they can order it from indiebound.org

Mike Stout is an Anti-war activist, Labor and environmental organizer, singer-songwriter

NOT STRONGER THAN HATE

BY YAZMIN BENNETT-KELLY

We live in a world where if people love, look, and/or pray differently they are treated differently. While it may seem that our country is becoming more divided, I argue that it has been divided. However, now we have the media to display it. Currently, the reality is that anyone who is not white, male, and Christian, may struggle significantly more than one who is.

Two African-American individuals were killed while shopping in a Kentucky grocery store. This same shooter attempted to enter a predominantly black church as well. However, the doors were locked so he could not enter. That same church is now permitting members to carry firearms. A few days later, on October 27th, 11 individuals' lives were taken at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Unfortunately, the list continues to grow. In the United States there have been nearly as many mass shootings as there have been days in 2018. People cannot be black in peace, as black people are constantly profiled and brutalized by the police. People cannot be gay in peace, as they also face discrimination. People cannot be non-white in peace as non-whiteness deems one as less than. People cannot be Jewish in peace. People cannot be Muslim in peace. While such prejudice is nothing new, the city of Pittsburgh has suddenly adopted the slogan "Pittsburgh: Stronger than Hate." This phrase represents unity and support for the victims, their families, and the entire Jewish community affected by this senseless act of violence.

Unfortunately, the slogan is also untrue. Pittsburgh is not stronger than hate. The United States is not stronger than hate. According to The Global Livability Index 2018, Pittsburgh is the 2nd most livable city, but for whom? The confederate flags, racial disparities in education, gentrification, and police brutality tell a different story.

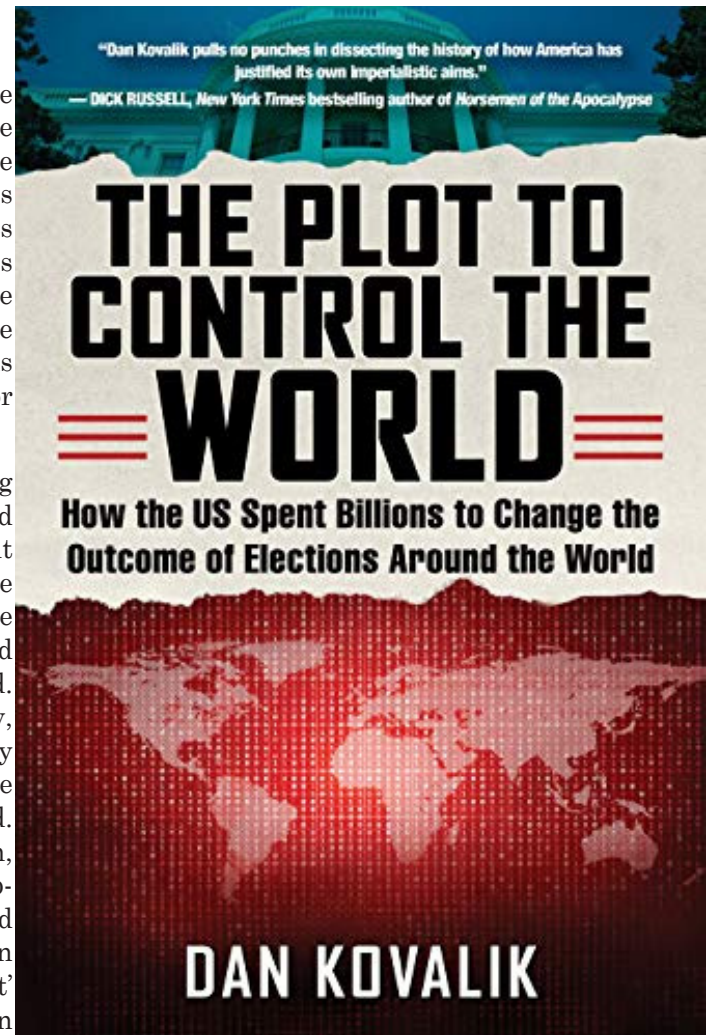
The truth is, Pittsburgh is not a livable city for many. However, now that a mass shooting has occurred in this city, we act as if we are stronger than hate. Honestly, Pittsburgh and the entire United States is a representation of hate.

When people discuss the incident of a mass shooting, they speak of the shooter as if they were an individual. However, it's not one man who kills two African-Americans in a grocery store just because he felt he had the right to do so. It was not just one man who attempted to break into a predominantly black church. It was not just one man who was responsible for the 16th Street Church bombing. It is time to examine our culture, and the ways in which we socialize men, specifically white men. What does happen is the terrorists who commit these acts are humanized and portrayed to be troubled, mentally ill men. The most recent mass shooters have looked the same and have had similar views. These acts of violence are the results of seeds that have been planted in our society.

What can be done in order for us to be stronger than hate? What can be done to eradicate racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, and all other forms of oppression that harm others? I am personally starting to feel hopeless. We have been having these hard conversations. We have discussed the multiple forms of oppression. These topics are being discussed on multiple platforms. I wish I had the answers but, unfortunately, I have the hurt and pain. I hurt for each and every victim who has been harmed as a result of hate. My only hope is that things do change.

People deserve to live regardless of their race, class, gender, or religion.

Jazmin Bennett-Kelly is a NewPeople Fellow.





CLIMATE ACTIVISTS LEARNING FROM THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT BY MARIANNE NOVY

Since at least the early 1980s, anti-war activists, such as the Merton Center’s own Molly Rush and Sister Megan Rice, who visited Pittsburgh last summer, have tried to use the necessity defense--when vandalizing nuclear warheads, they were damaging property to prevent a greater harm. Usually they did not get a chance to make this case during their trial.

More recently, environmental protesters have been making the same argument. Most of the time the courts have rejected it, but with a few exceptions.

In July 2017, Jessica Reznicek and Ruby Montoya, who then lived in the Des Moines Philip Berrigan Catholic Worker House, announced during a press conference that since the preceding November’s elections they had been burning construction and electrical equipment and cutting valves in order to delay construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. They spoke of the influence of the Catholic Worker and Plowshares tradition of antiwar protest and cited the dangers to health and violations of religious principles they were combatting; the pipeline’s route transporting oil from North Dakota to Illinois trespasses on land sacred to Native Americans and is dangerously near water sources that leaks could pollute. They publicized the pipeline’s dangers through other talks, but after the FBI raided the Catholic Worker House and the Iowa senate legislated a 25-year penalty for sabotage, the two women dropped out of public sight and have not yet been charged.

On October 11, 2016, the month before the Des Moines team began their actions, protestors sometimes known as the Valve Turners shut off valves on four other pipelines, Keystone XL in North Dakota, Trans Mountain in Washington State, and Enbridge in Montana and Minnesota. These pipelines were to bring oil from the tar sands deposits in Alberta. Making petroleum products from this kind of oil releases more global-warming emissions than most other sources, so this concern added to the problems with potential water contamination and routing through sacred Native American lands. In Minnesota, Emily Johnston and Annette Klapstein made a safety call to Enbridge, explaining their actions and providing warning so Enbridge could shut down the pipeline remotely, which they did. Similar calls occurred at the other location.

All the Valve Turners were charged. Ken Ward, in Washington, was not allowed to use a necessity defense. His first trial resulted in a hung jury. At the second, he was convicted of burglary with one juror describing him as a hero. The judge sentenced him to two days in prison and 30 days of community service. Michael Foster, in North Dakota, was also not allowed to make a necessity defense. He was sentenced to three years in prison, two of them suspended and served on supervised probation. His colleague Sam Jessup was given a two-year suspended sentence. Leonard Higgins, in Montana, was convicted of felony criminal mischief and misdemeanor trespass and sentenced to \$3755 restitution and three years in prison, deferred.

However, in Minnesota things went differently. Johnston was charged with felony damage to “critical public service facilities” plus other charges that might lead to decades in prison. Klapstein was charged with aiding and abetting. But Clearwater County district judge Robert Tiffany granted them a necessity defense. This defense had never previously been put before before a jury in a climate case. Their legal team lined up climate change science experts James Hansen, Bill McKibben, Anthony Ingraffea, and eight others to testify.

Jury questioning identified only a few potential jurors who cared about climate change, and at least one of them was cut by the prosecutor. Many had jobs dependent on the pipeline, or spouses with such jobs. However, the day the trial began, October 8, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its report saying that limiting carbon emissions soon is more urgent than expected. The legal team had plans to show how Clearwater County itself would be negatively impacted by global warming.

But this evidence was not presented. The judge acquitted the Valve Turners on all counts. The only physical evidence of damage the prosecutor could present was one “cut chain,” which the judge decided hardly meets the standard of “damage to critical infrastructure.”

An educational opportunity was lost. But a legal precedent was gained. The Minnesota Appeals Court support of Tiffany’s decision to allow the necessity defense means that it can be used in

other jury cases, at least in Minnesota. And the case also restricted the meaning of “damage.”

And the necessity defense had already been successfully used, early in 2018, in a non-jury trial before Judge Mary Ann Driscoll, when 14 activists, including former Pittsburgh resident Tim DeChristopher, disrupted construction of a high-pressure gas pipeline being built through the Boston suburb of West Roxbury.

Sources:

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Marianne Novy is a long-time member of the Merton Center and now a member of the new Pittsburgh branch of Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light, an interfaith organization active against climate change.

IS CLIMATE CHANGE A LOST CAUSE? BY ISABELLE OUYANG

As Pittsburgh gets chillier, the global temperature is set to rise. So apparent are the looming consequences of climate change that even the Trump administration admitted the fact in an environmental impact statement released in August, as part of President Trump’s decision to rollback emission regulations. With current emissions levels, the prospects are gloomy. In the next century, the planet is slated to be four degrees Celsius (seven in Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial levels. That is, unless nations make drastic energy reforms.

Here’s the catch: the report uses this fact as a reason to produce more emissions. That’s right. Trump proposes to freeze fuel efficiency standards for car manufacturers, contingent on the argument that an additional eight billion additional tons of carbon dioxide is just a drop in the bucket amidst already high emission outputs-- that climate destruction is already a lost cause.

How do we stay hopeful when the national dialogue about climate change is nihilistic?

Even climate advocates are faced with disheartening apocalyptic scenarios that feed into individual powerlessness: sea levels rising, intensified droughts and heat waves, worsening hurricanes and natural disasters. The terms “climate anxiety” and “environmental grief” appear in publications ranging from Scientific American to Vogue Magazine. Along with worsening mental health, climate change is even linked to increased community hostility and aggression. How do we retain our resilience, even when time, stress and even the presidential administration are working against us?

First, let’s recognize that extraction industries profit from a dialogue of collective powerlessness. Just 100 companies are responsible for 71 percent of global carbon emissions. Yet, environmental burdens are levied on individual consumers to drive eco-friendly cars or go zero-waste. Cutting your carbon footprint is by no means pointless. But, the narrative reduces an individual’s power to that of a consumer, rather than that of a citizen. It tells you that your power is restricted to your lifestyle, rather than in politics or corporate accountability.

Extraction industries quietly make off with large profits, without suffering consequences or limitations. But extraction industries aren’t the only profiting party. In 2018, Republican congress members accepted over \$18 million in contributions from the oil and gas sector. Meanwhile, the Democratic National Committee reversed a unanimous resolution to ban campaign contributions from fossil fuel corporations after a mere two months, in order to accept money from employers (i.e. corporations) and PACs in the sector.

If the conservative administration’s analysis gets one thing right, it’s that higher fuel efficiency standards aren’t going to solve our climate crisis alone. But, neither is skewing the facts to support the corporate interests of automakers. The administration’s refusal to acknowledge its role in collective efforts against climate change is strategic. It allows for corporations and the politicians that advocate for them to distance accountability.

If you’re searching for hope, look to people-minded people, and not profit-minded people. Movements

to divest institutional money from fossil fuels are taking sizeable chunks of money away from the industry—7.19 trillion as of this year. Communities on the frontlines of climate change, who have already been hit by environmental damage, are working to protect our planet. Indigenous activists are mobilizing to form groups, like the L’Eau Est La Vie resistance camp in Louisiana, to protest the last stretch of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Early this year, one of the first Flint Michigan activists won a Goldman Environmental Prize, along with five other international human-rights and environmental activists. In Pittsburgh, around 100 people rallied for This is Zero Hour, a diverse youth-led national day of action. Protesters as young as 12 took the mic.

Those combating the status-quo of apathy and futility are doing so by joining forces with the people around them. According to an American Psychological Association statement about climate anxiety, even just using public transportation increases “community cohesion,” and reduces symptoms of depression and stress. Talking to your neighbors or community members who care as much as you do is a way to make your voices collectively louder. It’s also a way to feel less alone when the national dialogue wants you to feel this is an individual battle.

So, if you’re feeling powerless and fearful of the future, reach out to those around you, whether that means looking for existing efforts, getting involved in local advocacy groups, or bringing up shared concerns. You can’t fight climate change alone, and you don’t have to.

Isabelle Ouyang is a NewPeople Fellow.



HOUSING SUMMIT CONFRONTS MARKET FAILURES

BY NEIL COSGROVE

If participants in the Pittsburgh Housing Summit were certain of anything by the Summit’s conclusion on November 10th, it was that America’s market-based approach to providing its citizens with shelter would never meet the goal set by the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights that everyone deserved housing “adequate for the health and well-being” of individuals and their families.

“An entirely privatized system like we have does not meet the basic human right of housing,” sociologist Gianpaolo Baiocchi asserted. “We have to make demands that are unreasonable, because the reasonable is not working.” Jackie Smith, one of the summit’s organizers, kept reminding participants throughout the day that demands that seem unreasonable to those profiting from the current housing market are entirely reasonable to those who are being victimized by it.

The evidence detailing that victimization is overwhelming. According to Baiocchi, 20 million households in the US are spending more than half their income on housing. Pittsburgh has a shortage of more than 17,000 affordable housing units, with affordability generally defined as carrying rents or mortgages of no more than 30% of the household’s income. An analysis by Public Source shows how increases in Pittsburgh’s median monthly rents easily outstripped the inflation rate over a recent 14-year period, while “the incomes of renters, a population that typically

earns less than homeowners, have not risen at all.”

The human toll is staggering. While the legion of homeless populating the streets in coastal cities such as San Francisco and New York are the most visible portraits of misery, the impact on low-income citizens of our region can be more subtly devastating. Maps presented by Anne Wright of the CMU CREATE Lab illustrated how whole neighborhoods with high rates of corporate and large investor housing ownership also contain the highest rates of evictions and Section 8 federal housing vouchers and, consequently, higher rates of families making frequent moves, with the stress and uncertainty those moves produce in both adults and children. Low-income families are being forced out of Pittsburgh and into inner-ring suburbs with lower cost housing, and sometimes into more distant locations that feature long trips on public transit to get to much needed work.

Landlords do what a market system expects them to do, which is to seek profit through increased rents and, too often, neglect of maintenance. Renters do what a market system expects them to do, which is to work a job. The result is not adequate housing for all, but ever-increasing rents, sometimes substandard housing, stagnant incomes, displacement, and cascading hardships, culminating at times in the loss of any shelter whatsoever.

During an era of steadily worsening

housing conditions for low-income and working class Americans, local, state, and local governments have been AWOL far too often. Laws allow human relations commissions to punish landlords who discriminate against protected classes, but landlords who gouge tenants wallowing in substandard housing can escape legal action if they are inflicting their greed and neglect on everybody. Paul O’Hanlon, Chair of the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Task Force, complained that the Allegheny County Health Department’s main tool for going after landlords of substandard housing is “rent withholding,” in which the County holds the paid rent “while people continue to live in horrendous conditions, the landlord makes a few repairs and then gets all his rent back, and the tenants receive nothing for their trouble.”

Budgets for federal housing support are currently shrinking. Wright pointed out that only 30% of applicants for Section 8 rent vouchers are successful, and a tenant complained that the minimum monthly rent required of low-income tenants has risen during the Trump administration from \$25 to \$150.

Given the abject failure of the “market model” to supply adequate housing for an ever-growing segment of the citizenry, one obvious need is for public officials who both recognize the scope of that failure and the need for a vigorous governmental response. Participants called for greatly expanded voucher systems, rent-controls, and free legal

representation for those threatened with eviction. The Furthering Fair Housing Task Force is recommending “robust mandatory inclusionary zoning,” through which developers are required to include a percentage of affordable housing as part of their development.

But, as City Council member Deb Gross pointed out, 45 units here and another 40 units there will barely dent the need for over 17,000 units. Community Land Trusts must obtain and make available a significant amount of Pittsburgh’s existing housing stock. The Urban Redevelopment Authority must become more responsive to the need for affordable housing as a vital part of regional economic growth. Baiocchi called for non-market alternatives such as “limited equity cooperatives,” in which a building is partially collectively owned and partially individually owned, for “mutual aid cooperatives” featuring “sweat equity” and for “tenant syndicates.”

In the meantime, for those activists who wish to get more deeply involved, the Pittsburgh Regional Tenant Union is seeking new members and the Landless People’s Alliance is planning for what is hoped to be a massive Housing March on April 21, 2019. The Alliance is also looking for March Planning Committee members.

Neil Cosgrove is a member of the NewPeople editorial collective and the Merton Center board.

ARCHCITY DEFENDERS (CONT’D)

BY NEIL COSGROVE

Both Strode and Voss told dinner attendees about individual clients they’d had, including one given a \$500 ticket because her neighbor had left the lid of a garbage can ajar. Such cases are “not unique,” said Voss, “but everyday life for thousands of poor people across the country.”

“The most radical commitment that we make,” added Strode, “is to listen to what our clients say and to believe them” because those clients are often “made to suffer irreparably for the most ridiculous charges.”

Tiffany Sizemore, who welcomed the event’s attendees, said her experiences as a public defender in Washington, DC and a clinical law professor at Duquesne University demonstrated that the cases on which ArchCity works are not unique to the St. Louis area. “When you represent black and brown people,” said Sizemore, “you can’t take anything for granted. ... Judges don’t make your case for you, as they will at times for prosecutors, landlords, and the like.”

Jules Lobel, a professor at Pitt Law School, explained why he thought the last two Merton Award winners have been legal organizations advocating for the rights of minorities and the downtrodden. “We are in an era when law, justice, and democracy are under attack, said Lobel. “The issues of racial and social justice are at the forefront.” The 2017 and 2018 awards, he added, are a recognition that integrating religious, social, peace, and legal activism is now necessary.

Since ArchCity Defenders was founded by three

newly graduated lawyers, volunteering to legally assist the homeless of St. Louis, the organization has grown to 22 full-time staff, consisting of lawyers, paralegals, and other support positions. Their basic mission of providing “holistic legal advocacy” has led ACD to partner with the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University, providing its students with “practicum semesters,” and Strode said the organization hopes to have some in-house social workers in future.

ArchCity is also seeking to expand their geographic footprint into Illinois and other areas of Missouri, while also “making linkages” with other organizations in the Midwest, a region Strode said is “really underserved.”

For Strode and Voss, at the present moment, the St. Louis city budget is indicative of a destructive, counter-productive mindset, with 63% of expenditures going to “public safety” and an “outsized, bloated police force,” while less than one percent is spent on human services. In his speech to dinner attendees St. Louis native Strode reviewed his city’s racist past and warned that “a loss of a sense of history, or rather a denialism of history, is an incredibly dangerous thing,” a phenomenon that is at the core of this country’s inability to engage in the systemic reform. Meanwhile, ArchCity Defenders keeps fighting that system, one case, one class-action suit, one campaign at a time.

Neil Cosgrove is a member of the NewPeople editorial collective and the Merton Center board.



Left to Right: Darnika Reed, Michael John Voss, Rob Conroy, Blake Strode, Krystle Knight and Gabriel McMorland. Photo by Steve Capri



‘THE FIFTH RISK’ BY MICHAEL LEWIS

BY MOLLY RUSH

Tweets, lies, furious outbursts, bragging: daily fodder for the news coverage that obscures the real story: the long-term damage to government departments and programs.

Michael Lewis’s The Fifth Risk vividly recounts the terrifying story of how willful ‘ignorance of the workings of government’ are undoing the best and most necessary programs that keep us going as a nation.

It began with the transition team, a necessity required by law for any new administration. Trump saw no need for one. He finally agreed that Chris Christie raise funds needed to pay staff to investigate and find candidates to lead and operate the agencies. He raised millions for this purpose.

Furious Trump roared, “Shut it down! F--k the law. I don’t give a f--k about the law. I want my f--king money.”

“Chris, you and I are so smart that we can leave the victory party two hours early and do the transition ourselves.”

Months later a number of posts were still vacant, including FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Centers for Disease Control.

Finally, Rick Perry was named to the Department of Energy (DOE). He had once called for its elimination. Not many know that it is responsible for guarding and tracking the nuclear arsenal, keeping bombs out of the hands of terrorists. DOE trains all the international nuclear energy

inspectors. It provides low interest loans to solar energy companies to encourage investment in alternative energy and energy efficiency. And so much more. Regarding Perry, a staffer told Lewis, “He’s never been briefed on a program, not a single one.”

“His sporadic communications” writes Lewis, “have in them the sense of a shell-shocked grandmother trying to preside over a pleasant family Thanksgiving dinner while pretending that her blind drunk husband isn’t standing naked on the dining room table waving a carving knife over his head.”

Lewis outlines DOE’s five major risks, the scariest being ‘ProjectManagement.’ The 5th Risk is that society falls into the habit of responding to long term risks with short-term solutions. “It’s the existential threat that you never imagine.” One example: losing track of a nuclear bomb.

Then there’s ARPA-E (Advanced Research Projects Agency--Energy), which provides \$70 billion in loans to researchers with “scientifically plausible wild ideas that might change the world. Pound for pound, dollar for dollar...it’s hard to find a more effective thing government has done than ARPA-E.” Fred Smith, founder of FedEx, Bill Gates and Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott agree. Yet Trump’s first budget eliminated ARPA-E as well as all research on climate change and cut in half work to secure the electrical grid from attack or natural disaster.

Lewis is a fascinating storyteller. His material is based on lengthy interviews with top agency officials.

The USDA (US Department of Agriculture) prepared elaborate briefings for its new head, former PepsiCo lobbyist Joel Leftwich. Three weeks later he turned up for an hour. After a three-weeks delay, he spent only an hour in his office. Top staff included a former truck driver, a meter reader, and a former Republican National Committee intern. Required skills for receiving staff jobs included “a pleasant demeanor.”

The USDA manages the school lunch program and other programs to alleviate hunger, 70% of the agency’s budget. No one showed up for the briefing on hunger programs. “They don’t seem to be focused on nutrition.”

USDA’s labs changed the way we live. Whereas the average farmer in 1872 fed four, 255 are fed today. Meat safety is another priority.

Chief scientist Cathie Woteki was replaced by Trump campaign co-chair Sam Clovis, a former right-wing talk show host. One of Woteki’s focuses was converting plants into FUEL, in response to climate change, “which will force changes in the way crops are grown.” Now that innovative voice is gone.

Then there is the Department Of Commerce. It is responsible for the census. New Secretary Wilbur Ross, a 74-year-old billionaire, met once with his predecessor, Penny Pritzker. “He came by himself...it was pretty clear he had no idea what he was getting into.”

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has data on climate and weather going back to records kept by Thomas Jefferson.

Without that data, no plane would fly, no bridge be built, no war be fought. “If you don’t believe in climate change, you at least want to understand the climate,” said a Bush official. Yet DJ Patil, a data specialist in the Obama Administration, “watched with wonder as critical data disappeared across the federal government,” writes Lewis.

Data from EPA, Interior, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, FEMA, FBI crime reports, and much more vanished from websites. Patil and others created exit memos that show that “this stuff pays for itself a thousand times over.”

Throughout the 219 pages of The Fifth Risk, I found out how little I knew about just what good this so-called sprawling bureaucracy does and how little respect it gets.

The task is now up to us to and our representatives, backed up by media, to fight to repair the damage by a reckless, incredibly ignorant administration.

Molly Rush is a member of the New-People editorial collective and a co-founder of the Thomas Merton Center.

THE NEW SANCTUARY MOVEMENT AND OTHERS HELP IMMIGRANTS

BY MARIANNE NOVY

With the increased threats of deportation beginning in 2006, the Sanctuary Movement, active in the 1980s, has mobilized again as the New Sanctuary Movement. ____who? Name?____, the director of New Sanctuary Pittsburgh recently updated information about activities in Pittsburgh. She emphasized that the people the New Sanctuary Movement supports largely have no legal path to citizenship at present. Even if they have been persecuted in their home country, when they cross the US border, they may be classified as asylum-seekers but not as refugees. (“Refugee” is a designation given to specific people from specific countries at specific times; it must be granted through a long and complicated legal process before people come to the US.) Asylum seekers may live here for years. During this time they cannot legally hold a job or drive a car until they receive a work permit. This “asylum gap” was usually as short as 90 days but now is increasingly at least a year. These people may be granted work permits while their case proceeds through the court system, and if they are granted asylum, they have a path to citizenship, which begins with Lawful Permanent Resident (green card) status. Undocumented immigrants are more and

more targets for deportation, and if their deportation has been deferred, what used to be a routine check-in with ICE now puts people at risk of being suddenly removed from their homes and families.

There are now over 1100 sanctuary congregations in the US. They began in large cities like Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago, but are now found also in states such as North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Virginia, even in rural and suburban spaces. To be a sanctuary congregation does not mean that undocumented immigrants are actually living in the church; the sanctuary movement includes many other ways to help.

New Sanctuary Pittsburgh has formed teams and collectives to provide childcare, translation, conversational English classes, access to medical help, transportation (to jobs, school, shopping, doctor), work on legislative action, legal accompaniment and help, and, their main work, housing (expensive if the family needs to go to a hotel or Airbnb). Undocumented immigrants cannot access health insurance, and there is only one known place that will treat them without cost. They could use donations such as

bus passes and Aldi gift cards or get help with outright cash or through Paypal.

Sixth Presbyterian, East Liberty Presbyterian, Pittsburgh Mennonite Church, St. Andrew’s Lutheran, and Allegheny Unitarian Universalist are the Pittsburgh churches where the most people have been involved so far. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is holding a program called Allies in Faith to help other congregations prepare to aid immigrants; it began November 28th.

If people gain the legal status of asylee, a long path still remains toward getting a green card and then citizenship, and perhaps a longer one towards actually making friends with American citizens and feeling confident about everyday life in the US. Many local organizations provide various kinds of help towards people in this transitional period. Among others, these organizations include Community Assistance and Refugee Resettlement at the Northern Area Multiservice Center; Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Pittsburgh; Acculturation for Justice, Access and Peace Outreach; Immigrant Services and Connections; Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services; and the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh.

One new Pittsburgh organization has received national publicity for its different approach: Hello Neighbor, started and led by Sloane Davidson. Hello Neighbor matches immigrant families who have been in the US between six months to five years and have at least one child under 18 with partner families who will invite them for meals and get to know them and their needs. Sometimes they can find families with similar age children or similar job interests. Needs may include help with paperwork, acquisition of skills in English conversation, advice about shopping for food, and involvement in less focused activities that give a sense of community support and friendship. Hello Neighbor usually introduces two groups of 20 families to each other at the same time so that a parish or neighborhood can be invested in this effort as a community and hold large potlucks and other events, which will also involve people who have not received specific matches.

Marianne Novy is a member of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer and the chair of the Social Justice and Outreach Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.



WHAT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY HERE?

BY Elisa Ogot

Leading up to the 2016 Presidential Election, the advice many people gave to Liberals who come from conservative families or have close relationships with conservatives was to talk to them on a personal level and try to sway their votes away from Donald Trump. That strategy either wasn't followed or didn't work out the way many had hoped because, as we all know, the end result of that election was Donald Trump becoming our 45th president.

Now, as a Black woman living in America, it's not much of a surprise that not many people who identify as conservative are in my close personal circles. So, the "try and dissuade your Conservative pals!" strategy was never one that I could employ. Both my parents are immigrants from Kenya and at election time were not eligible to vote. However, in 2018, my situation has changed a bit...

In 2018 Elisa has a boyfriend! A white boyfriend. He is very smart, kind-hearted, and most importantly, open and willing to learn about all kinds of issues. Politically, he is liberal-leaning and supported Hillary Clinton in 2016. About half of his immediate family, however, voted the other way. When I learned this news, I was understandably shocked. For me and many people who look like me (According to exit polls, 89% of Black people voted for Clinton) the choice for president was a no-brainer--Donald Trump's frequent racist remarks,

his recorded gloating about committing sexual assault; his complete lack of governing experience; I could go on and on...I truly didn't understand how they could vote for a man like that. I still don't!

In the almost two years since the 2016 election, the country has become even more divisive. On social media and in the print and television media, certain characteristics have been ascribed to those on either side of the aisle: Conservatives claim liberals are weak and want our country to fail. Liberals claim conservatives are evil, dumb, racist, and are doing away with democracy.

It's hard to shake those negative stereotypes about Trump-supporting conservatives. So when faced with the chance to meet my boyfriend's family, I was very nervous. What would they think of me? I'm a liberal, Black woman and unapologetically so. Would they offend me? Would we be able to talk about anything??

Fortunately, his family was very welcoming. We've been together for a significant time now, so I interact with his family on a semi-regular basis. Every time I come over they are incredibly kind to me, cook for me, include me, and make sure I am as comfortable as possible in their home. We actually get along!

So, the question has become: What is my responsibility in this situation? My boyfriend's family is an increasingly

larger part of my life and the president that many of them voted for is taking our country down a dark, law-ignoring, and embarrassing path. Every day his decisions are negatively impacting women, immigrants, people of color, and the LGBTQ community--the minority groups who have already suffered for centuries under the forty-four other male presidents. I have a burgeoning personal relationship with a handful of conservatives, and according to the "try and dissuade your conservative pals" brigade, shouldn't I be having conversations with them about our current political climate? Shouldn't I be pushing them to vote for Democratic candidates who support the issues important to people like me in upcoming elections?

Historically, Black women (cis, trans, and queer women) have been at the forefront of American political and social change, and as a result, we feel an intense pressure to shoulder the burden of doing the work to make America a better place for everyone. But girl, it's EXHAUSTING. And it's unfair! Why should we have to be on the front lines fighting for people when barely anyone is fighting for us? On the flip side though, if we give in to apathy and decide to only look out for ourselves, who else will step up and do the work?

Ultimately, I want to talk to my boyfriend's family about politics, but I'm scared. I'm scared to open up a political Pandora's Box and not like what I

find in there. I'm scared that I'm going to get frustrated and upset and not be able to conduct myself in the way I want to. I'm scared that if I have a meltdown that it will negatively color their perception of ALL Black people. I'm scared that I will hear something that I can never un-hear and I won't be able to bring myself to return to their home.

It's not fair that I have to think about all of this, but alas, that is the reality of today's world. For now, I think that conversation will remain untouched; maybe as I get to know them more, I will feel comfortable enough to make the first move. Acknowledging I'm not comfortable enough yet makes me feel like a coward...and I hate that. However, as of this moment, "a coward" is all I feel secure enough to be.

Elisa Ogot is a NewPeople Fellow

MORE EVENTS

IN IT FOR THE LONG TERM BY BETTE McDEVITT

If you stop in or call the Merton Center on a Friday morning, you'll meet or speak with Lois Goldstein, a long time member and volunteer.

Lois came to Pittsburgh in 1983, from Bellaire, Ohio, with her husband George, who had accepted the position of director of the doctors group of the Miners' Clinic, in the New Kensington area. Through the people associated with the Miners' Clinic, Dan and Anita Fine, Julian and Rhoda Eligator, Lois and George found the progressive peace community in Pittsburgh.

Lois got involved in the planning for "In Concert for Peace," a response to the Cold War being waged by our government, and the USSR. Andre Previn, and most members of the Pittsburgh Symphony donated their time for the performance, along with Andre Watts as pianist. The event raised enough money for Peace Links to open an office at the YWCA.

Lois became the staff person for Peace Links, staying with that job for twelve years. Peace Links, an influential organization at the time, was started by Betty Bumpers, wife of US Senator Dale Bumpers, and the Pennsylvania Peace Links was begun by Teresa Heinz and Joan Specter, wives of our US Senators at the time. Their main concern was finding peaceful alternatives to nuclear war, and they did extensive outreach to China and the USSR. As Betty Bumper said, "Peace is too important a subject to leave to men, even if they are husbands."

The women came to realize that, as Gandhi said, peace must begin with children, and their work turned to early childhood education, working with providers and academics, resulting in a book "Starting Young: Supporting Parents for Peaceful Lifestyles,

Peace Link's mission widened to include women's rights and equitable development worldwide. Peace Links was recognized as an accredited Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) by the United Nations, and a delegation from Pennsylvania Peace Links attended the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China on September 4-15, 1995. The national office in Washington DC closed in the summer of 2001, with subsequent disbandment of the Pennsylvania chapter in 2007.

Lois found time to be an active member of the Merton Center and served on the board for a decade.. She recalls Art McDonald being a staff person at the time, and that he brought a "light touch" to the often serious matters facing the Center.

One of those "matters" she remembers, was when Michael Drohan, a member and at the time Director of Duquesne University's Institute of World Concerns, protested the University inviting Ambassador Robert Duemling, a State Department official who oversaw aid to the Contras, our government's ploy to overthrow the elected government of Nicaragua. The University went ahead with the invitation, and Michael resigned his position on the day that Duemling came to speak. Members of the Center pulled together an appropriate protest during Duemling's presentation, carrying crosses, each one representing someone who had been killed by the Contras.

Lois and George, who passed on in 1996, raised two sons, who carry on the family tradition of involvement in issues of peace and justice. Her son Don, a retired professor at Allegheny College, is active in the Fair Districts, the movement for redistricting reform, and Carl, who lives in Minneapolis works with his wife in a non-profit called Marnita's Table, which brings people together, focused on equality and inclusiveness.

Lois has seen some changes at the Merton Center "Primarily, " she said, 'with the involvement of young people, We didn't have interns in the past. The staff is younger, and parameters of the program have broadened to include equity and gender issues, The Center's intentional outreach to be more inclusive has shown results."

The presence, she said, of the young people, gives her hope.

Bette McDevitt is a member of the NewPeople editorial collective.



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DECEMBER 2018 and JANUARY 2019 EVENTS CALENDAR

Saturday, Dec. 15 - Fight for Lifers West, 10:00 AM at the Thomas Merton Center Annex, 5119 Penn Ave, Pittsburgh

Sunday, Dec. 16 - Book'em, 4:00 PM at the Thomas Merton Center Annex, 5119 Penn Ave, Pittsburgh

Monday, Dec. 17 - Monthly PUSH Meeting, 6:30 PM at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh - Squirrel Hill, 5801 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh

Wednesday, Jan. 2 - Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (PADP,) 7:00 PM at the First Unitarian Church. For more information call 412-384-4310

Saturday, Jan. 5, 19 - Fight for Lifers West, 10:00 AM at the Thomas Merton Center Annex, 5119 Penn Ave, Pittsburgh

Sunday, Jan. 6, 13, 20 - Book'em, 4:00 PM at the Thomas Merton Center Annex, 5119 Penn Ave, Pittsburgh

Sunday, Jan. 13 - Women in Black Monthly Peace Vigil in Slippery Rock, 10:00 AM at Ginger Hill Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

Monday, Jan. 14 - Amnesty International #39 Monthly Meeting, 7:00pm-9:00pm to First Unitarian Church, Morewood Avenue, Pittsburgh

Monday, Jan. 21 - Monthly PUSH Meeting, 6:30 PM at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh - Squirrel Hill, 5801 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh

REGULAR MEETINGS

Sundays:
Book'Em: Books to Prisoners Project
First three Sundays of the month at TMC, 4-6pm
Contact: bookempgh@gmail.com

Mondays:
SW Healthcare 4 All PA /PUSH Meeting
3rd Monday, 6:30 —8 pm
Squirrel Hill Library
Contact: bmason@gmail.com
Association of Pittsburgh Priests
2nd Monday, 7—9 pm,
St. Pamphilus Parish
1000 Tropical Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15216
Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILP)
2nd Monday, 7:00 PM
Thomas Merton Center, 5129 Penn Ave
Amnesty International #39
2nd Wednesday, 7—9 pm
First Unitarian Church, Morewood Ave. 15213

Tuesdays:
Green Party
First Tuesday of the month at Panera, Blvd of the Allies, Oakland, 7pm

Wednesdays:
Darfur Coalition Meeting
1st and 3rd Wednesdays, 5:30 – 7:00 pm,
Meeting Room C Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill
412-784-0256
Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (PADP)
1st Wednesdays, 7-8pm, First Unitarian Church, Ellsworth & Morewood Avenues, Shadyside
Pittsburghers for Public Transit
2nd Wednesday, 7pm, 1 Smithfield St., lower level

Thursdays:
International Socialist Organization
EveryWednesday, 7:30-9:30 pm. Contact isopgh@gmail.com for location.
Global Pittsburgh Happy Hour
1st Thursday, 5:30 to 8 pm, Roland's Seafood Grill, 1904 Penn Ave, Strip District
Green Party Meeting
1st Thursday, 7 to 9 pm, 2121 Murray,
2nd floor, Squirrel Hill
Black Political Empowerment Project
2nd Thursday, 6 pm: Planning Council Meeting, Hill House, Conference Room B

Fridays:
Unblurred Gallery Crawl
1st Friday after 6 pm, Penn Avenue Arts District, 4800-5500 Penn Ave., Friendship and Garfield 15224
Hill District Consensus Group
2nd Thursday, 6pm - 8pm, Hill House Conference Room 2
People of Prisoners in Need of Support
3rd Friday, 7:00pm New Hope Methodist Church, 114 W. North Ave, Pittsburgh 15212

Saturdays:
Project to End Human Trafficking
2nd Sat., Carlow University, Antonian Room #502
Fight for Lifers West
1st & 3rd Saturday, 1 pm, TMC Annex
Anti-War and Anti-Drone Warfare Coalition
4rd Saturday at 11:00 am at TMC, 5129 Penn Ave., Garfield, PA 15224

The Thomas Merton Center works to build a consciousness of values and to raise the moral questions involved in the issues of war, poverty, racism, classism, economic justice, oppression and environmental justice.

TMC engages people of diverse philosophies and faiths who find common ground in the nonviolent struggle to bring about a more peaceful and just world.

BECOME A MEMBER

Subscribe to The NewPeople by becoming a member of the Thomas Merton Center today!

As a member, The NewPeople newspaper will be mailed to your home or sent to your email account. You will also receive weekly e-blasts focusing on peace and justice events in Pittsburgh, and special invitations to membership activities. Now is the time to stand for peace and justice!

Join online at www.thomasmertoncenter.org/join-donate or fill out this form, cut out, and mail in.

Select your membership level:

- ___ \$15 Low Income Membership
- ___ \$15 Youth / Student Membership
- ___ \$25 Introductory / Lapsed Membership
- ___ \$50 Individual Membership

- ___ \$100 Family Membership
- ___ \$500+ Cornerstone Sustainer Membership
- ___ Donation \$ _____
- ___ Monthly Donation– Become a TMC Peacemaker \$ _____

Or Become an Organizational Member:

- ___ \$75 Organization (below 25 members)
- ___ \$125 Organization (above 25 members)
- ___ I would like to receive the weekly activist Eblast
- ___ I would like to receive The NewPeople newspaper mailed to my house
- ___ I would like to receive The NewPeople newspaper via email

Please complete and return to TMC. Thank you!

Name(s):

Organization (if any):

Address:

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Home Phone: _____

Mobile Phone: _____

Email: _____

Mail to TMC, 5129 Penn Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15224

Call 412-361-3022 for more information, or visit:
www.thomasmertoncenter.org