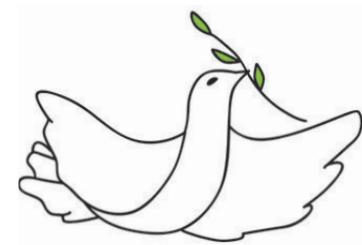


THE NEW PEOPLE

PITTSBURGH'S PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE NEWSPAPER OF THE THOMAS MERTON CENTER



VOL. 49 No. 2
March 2019

PPT FOCUSING ON FARES, COALITION BUILDING

BY NEIL COSGROVE



Community organizer Joshua Malloy speaks at a recent reansit action.

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Pittsburghers for Public Transit (PPT), a project of the Thomas Merton Center, has recently won some major victories in the struggle for equitable, accessible public transit in our region. PPT convinced the Port Authority of Allegheny County (PAT) to seriously rethink aspects of their Oakland-to-Downtown Bus Rapid Transit project, and to abandon a plan to use police for fare enforcement on the rail lines.

Moreover, the group appears to have established constructive dialogue with PAT CEO Katherine Kellerman and other agency leaders, while receiving a \$47,000 grant from the Heinz Endowments to perform route-mapping for low-cost service improvements in currently underserved locations.

That mapping work underscores PPT's basic mission, as does the organization's current focus on achieving "greater fare equity" for low-income riders. "We are very much grounded in equity," says PPT's Community

BLACK CRACKS AND THE PETROCHEMICAL BUILDOUT OF WESTERN PA

BY PATRICIA M. DEMARCO, PH.D.

On January 15, 2019 over 150 concerned citizens gathered at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Mt. Lebanon to hear about advances of the petrochemical industry based on liquid hydrocarbons extracted by hydraulic fracturing for natural gas. While people hear about fracking for gas, it is less apparent that liquids extracted from most of the formations in the Marcellus shale in Pennsylvania become plastics. The Shell Appalachia "cracker" plant is the first proposed such facility – the intended initial point for a massive infrastructure designed to make plastic precursors for mostly single-use plastic packaging materials. There were five presentations addressing comprehensive aspects of the proposed petrochemical buildout in western PA.

Matthew Mehalik, Executive Director of the Breathe Collaborative listed the following concerns about the petrochemical industry expansion into Western Pennsylvania:

1. For the last two years Western PA had poor air quality on 249 days of the year.
2. The industry has used a "normalization of deviance" to slowly accustom people to their activities. Of the 11,682 hydraulic fracturing wells drilled in PA there have been 13,656 well and site violations!
3. The pollution increases from this proposed

industrial hub will be substantial, as evidenced by the industry profile in Louisiana and Texas.

4. With over two million tons per year of carbon dioxide emissions allowed under granted permits, this industry is a climate change disaster.

5. Health effects from emissions are anticipated in Beaver County alone to range from \$20 to \$46 million annually. If all three proposed facilities are built as planned, the health effects in Beaver County will mount to \$616 million to \$1.6 billion.

6. This industry already presents a significant financial burden to Pennsylvania residents. Shell Appalachia was granted a \$1.6 billion package of tax benefits over 25 years. Including the environmental and social impact of the petrochemical industry adds \$6.1 billion to the region's costs.

7. Job projections by the industry are misleading. Most of the jobs will be out of state, temporary construction jobs, and much of the production in the facility will be displaced by automation.

8. The petrochemical industry converting natural gas liquids to plastic precursors is the only scenario in which the industry can see a profit. The U.S. shale oil industry has burned through a quarter trillion more dollars than it has brought in over the last decade.

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Rainforest Threatened

OPEN LETTER FROM VENEZUELA TO OUR FRIENDS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

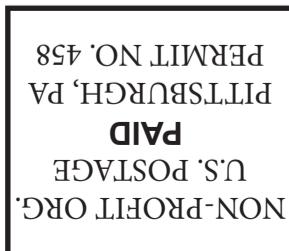
We, the organizations and people who defend human rights, activists and promoters of Non-Violence and Peace, conscientious objectors and anti-militarists, who take action in Venezuela, address this open letter to our friends throughout the world:

Venezuela suffers a Complex Humanitarian Emergency generated by political decisions, not by natural disasters or armed conflicts. Violence flourishes in societies without democratic guarantees for participation in free and fair elections to elect representatives and powers. There cannot be conditions of dignity and peace if there is not a decrease in poverty, hunger, inequality, and improvements in the access to basic goods and services for the entire population, especially for the most vulnerable sectors. To promote non-violence and peace we must advance in the elimination of the exercise of Power from the logic of authoritarianism.

In 2018, poverty rates reached approximately 48% of households. Inflation reached 1,229,724% and could reach 10 million% in 2019. A single family needs 60 monthly minimum wages to acquire the basic goods and services necessary to survive. In 2017, 64% of Venezuelans lost approximately 11 kilograms (24lbs.) of weight and 33% of children between 0-2 years of age suffer delays in their process of growth and development. 53% of Venezuelan households has had to recur to survival strategies such as begging and searching for food in the trash.

In 2018, non-governmental organizations reported that 60% of the medical attention that existed in 2011 had disappeared, the maternal mortality rate increased by 66% and child mortality rate by 30%. Since 2017, more than 79,000 people with HIV stopped receiving anti-retro-viral medicine. Venezuela has the highest growth rate of malaria cases in the world, adding 43% to the cases of malaria in Latin America. The resurgence of eradicated diseases such as tuberculosis (10,952 cases), diphtheria (9,362 cases), and smallpox has caused the deaths of at least 5,000 people. In 2018, the scarcity of medicine reached 85%. The deficit of beds available in hospitals reached 64%, 79% of hospitals do

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Saturday: Noon to 4PM

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The East End Community Thrift (Thrifty) is an all volunteer-run thrift shop which provides quality, low-cost, used clothing and household goods to the surrounding community. Thrifty needs volunteers and shoppers! Please contact us at (412) 361-6010 and ask for Shirley or Shawna, or stop in at 5123 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15224. Email ShawnaPGH@aol.com.

We are mission driven volunteers who look to build love and community by serving others in times of need.

Follow @GetThriftyPGH on Instagram

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The NewPeople distributes over 2,200 copies each month diverse people, organizations, businesses, and groups.

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Deadline to submit is the 13th of every month.

For information or to help distribute the paper, Call 412-361-3022 or email newPeople@ThomasMertonCenter.org.

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TMC supports these organizations' missions.

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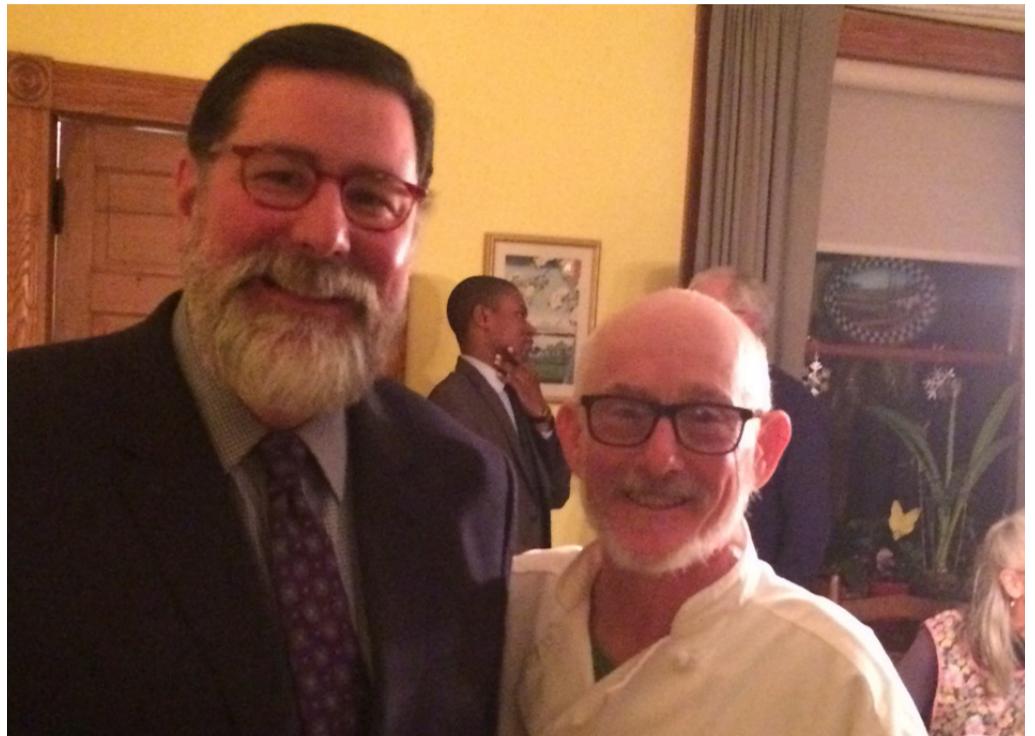
Looking for Helpers in the Rio Grande Valley
Trump's Assault on Public Service

TMC FUNDRAISING DINNER WITH MAYOR PEDUTO

BY MOLLY RUSH



Guests engaging in lively conversation. Photos by Christine Wolfe.



Mayor Bill Peduto poses with chef Howard Aikens. Howard and Christine Wolfe regularly prepare and host these monthly dinners.

WE REMEMBER

Marie Bellin, long-time friend of the Merton Center and admirer of Thomas Merton. Marie was a faithful member of the Thomas Merton Study Group in the earlier years of the Center. She was a woman of faith and focused her life on her family. She enthusiastically took part in pilgrimages of the Merton Study Group including one to Gethsemani, the monastery and home of Thomas Merton. Marie's daughter, Elaine, has often been an in-kind supporter of the Center at our New Person Award dinners. Marie passed away on Jan. 23, 2019 at age 84.

Sean Nolan, MD, a native of Ireland, internationally-known endocrinologist and a member and supporter of the Merton Center. Dr. Nolan had a medical practice in Weirton, WV and served at the Weirton Medical Center up to a few months before his death. He was well respected and will be greatly missed by his colleagues and patients. Dr. Nolan took an interest in the activities of the Center over the past several years, attending some of our award dinners and providing needed financial support. Dr. Nolan's son, Sean, has been a volunteer at the Merton Center. Dr. Nolan passed away on Jan. 26, 2019 at age 76.

We are grateful for the long and fruitful lives of Marie and Sean who witnessed and supported the values of the Thomas Merton Center.

RECOGNIZE ALL ASPIRATIONS: A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Israel has as much right to a nation-state as Palestine, or Iraq, or Iran, or India, or the United States, or Great Britain, or Germany, or Russia or Turkey.

I must assert this because I am a radical peacenik and member of the Thomas Merton Center. The creation of Israel involved acts that can and should be criticized. But that is true of every nation. The Netanyahu government is committing acts that we must oppose.

The article in the February 2019 New People recommends 'One Democratic State' as the basis for a solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. This will not happen without a war with hundreds of thousands of deaths unless the aspirations of all are recognized. The article seems to regard Israel as inherently colonialist. This is rhetoric and counterproductive.

The two-state concept is not an easy solution. But it may be the only solution, regardless of Netanyahu's work to prevent implementation. Jerusalem obviously should be the capital of both nations.

Love and Peace,
Jon Robison

Editor's Note: We enthusiastically welcome our readers to continue the conversation with Letters To The Editor or responses to our articles and submissions.

TRANSIT ACTIVISM

PPT FOCUSING ON FARES, COALITION BUILDING CONT'D

Organizer Josh Malloy. As housing costs in Pittsburgh push more and more low-income citizens into the ring suburbs, those citizens find themselves penalized monetarily by Port Authority fare policies.

With greater distances to travel, passengers are more likely to switch routes before reaching their destinations, and to pay a transfer fee to do so. PPT wants those fees eliminated. Locations where PAT's CONNECT Cards can be purchased are also more sparse in those ring suburbs, thus making it more difficult to obtain the cards, and such benefits as weekly or monthly passes that lower transit costs for those most in need of them.

Consequently, PPT is pushing the Authority to expand CONNECT Card purchase locations throughout the county, and to add a feature called "fare-capping" to those cards. With that feature, if a rider pays \$25 within a week for single rides, that rider's CONNECT Card would automatically convert to a weekly pass. If, within a month, a rider pays \$97.50 for single rides, the card would convert to a monthly pass. Regarding accessibility to CONNECT Cards, it's important to note that single fares with a card costs \$2.50, while a rider paying cash is charged \$2.75 per fare.

Because of the preponderance of low-income riders in the Mon Valley, PPT is

also advocating for either the extension of the East Busway to Monroeville and McKeesport, or connection to the Busway from those communities via bus-only lanes and signal priority.

The fare equity and busway campaigns comprise two of the "four key transit planks" in PPT's "Riders' Vision for Public Transit." The other two involve air quality, climate change, and linking transit to affordable housing. And while Josh Malloy observes that the first two planks can be shouldered primarily by PPT, the latter two demand extensive coalition building both regionally and state-wide.

An example of such coalition building is the work PPT did this past year with residents of North Point Breeze, organizing a push to place affordable housing units in the proposed Lexington Technical Park adjacent to the East Busway. "We found a lot of folks who wanted North Point Breeze to return to what it was when they moved in," Malloy says.

Hoping to get 100 affordable units in the development, residents eventually settled for 50, which was still a considerable improvement over what has happened in Bakery Square, where nothing but high-end housing has gone up right next to that section of the busway.

PPT has also met with "several other environmental groups," says Malloy, in an effort to convince the Allegheny County Health Department to use money collected in fines from regional polluters for "regular free fare days" during this coming summer. PPT would then use those days to educate people about climate change and public transit's role in lessening its effects.

PPT's approach of interconnecting public transit with myriad social justice issues has drawn the attention of cross-state organizations like 350 Philadelphia and 5th Square, according to Malloy. 5th Square identifies itself as "an urbanist political action committee" that supports candidates "committed to policy change in the areas of transportation, land use, and public space"

350 Philadelphia has joined a coalition fighting to stop construction by SEPTA (Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority) of a power plant in the Nicetown section of Philadelphia. The plant, which will use fracked gas, is seen as a prime example of environmental racism, situated in a neighborhood mostly populated by people of color.

State-wide cooperation by public transit advocacy groups appears to be an absolute necessity going forward, given the need to secure and increase funding

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for such transit. PPT Director Laura Wiens wants to see more participation by large employers in the form of making fare reimbursements an employee benefit.

Meanwhile, current state funding formulas are under threat from a federal lawsuit filed by independent truckers and the National Motorists Association. The suit claims it is unconstitutional for the Pennsylvania Turnpike to be giving the state department of transportation \$450 million a year to help fund public transit.

"We are very concerned about the lawsuit," commented Organizer Malloy, "and going back to 2007," when the Port Authority was forced to make sharp cuts in routes due to a drop in state funding.

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

CANCELLING THE INF AGREEMENT: THE MOST DANGEROUS MEN ON EARTH

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

On Friday Feb 1, 2019 President Trump made the following announcement: "Tomorrow, the United States will suspend its obligations under the INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) Treaty and begin the process of withdrawing from the INF Treaty. For arms control to effectively contribute to national security, all parties must faithfully implement their obligations."

In those words Trump unilaterally and without any democratic pushback put an end to the 1987 INF Treaty hammered out by then President Reagan and President Gorbachev of the Soviet Union. The Treaty, which was signed in December 1987, was an agreement for both parties to prohibit the fielding of ground-launched cruise missiles that could fly between 310 and 3,420 miles. It was, perhaps, the most significant step in ending the Cold War, which had the world on tenterhooks from the early 1950s to the signing of that Treaty. By this Treaty, the US obliged itself to withdraw its forward based cruise missiles, which it had installed in all the allied countries

of Europe, threatening the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union. Abandoning this Treaty is no less symbolic as it represents a belligerence on the part of President Trump not seen since the early 1990s. It is not an exaggeration to say that it purports the beginning of a new deadly arms race between Russia, the US and, no doubt, China.

The reason that Trump gives for walking away unilaterally from this Treaty is that Russia has been in violation of the Treaty. It seems there is substance to this allegation in that Russia has built new supersonic cruise missiles within the range prohibited by the Treaty. But it is alleged also that the US has not been in compliance with the Treaty. Another factor to be considered is that the US through NATO has practically surrounded Russia with newly minted NATO countries breathing down Russia's neck. Russia rightly sees itself surrounded by so-called enemy countries. And there is another wrinkle to the US withdrawal, which is that it seems none of the European countries

want intermediate range nuclear weapons installed in their territories. The reason, no doubt, is that they would be the victims if ever a nuclear spat were to arise. The German Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, declared that "ending the Treaty would have many negative consequences." Japan is also opposed to the breaking of the Treaty when its chief cabinet secretary, Yoshihide Suga declared the action would be "undesirable." All in all, US allies find the withdrawal undesirable and unacceptable.

China was not and is not part of the INF Treaty. It would appear that the real reason for the US walking away from the INF, however, is China, as the US sees this Treaty as hobbling their ability to attack China with intermediate range missiles. This suspicion is strengthened by Trump appointing John Bolton as his national security adviser. Bolton is the most belligerent warmonger on the planet at this moment. He has been saying for decades that the US should walk away from this Treaty because with it the US cannot contain

and threaten China. Bolton is angling for war with Iran and Venezuela, just to name a few other of his major targets. He has dubbed Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela a troika of tyranny, all of whose governments he wants to overthrow. The withdrawing from the INF is further complicated by Trump appointing Elliot Abrams as his Envoy to Venezuela. Abrams is an arch war criminal who engineered the Iran-Contra scandal, the war on Nicaragua in the 1980s and the El Mozote massacre in El Salvador. When one puts Trump, Bolton and Abrams together one is pretty sure to have a nuclear cocktail.

If one were to approach the problem with violations of the INF Treaty rationally one might suggest that one have negotiations on compliance and invoke the articles surrounding compliance with the Treaty. It seems, however, that no such measures were ever taken or hinted at. If Trump is such a great negotiator, as he proclaims himself to be in his negotiations with Kim Jung Un of North Korea, how is it that he does not use a little of those

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RETREATING FROM PEACE

CANCELLING THE INF AGREEMENT: THE MOST DANGEROUS MEN ON EARTH

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skills with President Putin?

This whole debacle points to the fact that Russia, the other signatory to the Treaty, is not the problem at all. That is just a camouflage for something else. And, as it has been pointed out, that else is containing China and putting China under notice. We are just being put off the scent by their raising Russia's non-compliance.

What the whole saga reveals is that we have a troika of nuclear madmen at large: Bolton, Abrams and Trump. What this suggests is that the abolition of all nuclear weapons is our most urgent task at this moment. What these three people illustrate is that nuclear weapons are too dangerous not just for rogue regimes such as North Korea but for the US as well.

Michael Drohan is a member of the Editorial Collective and former board member of the TMC.

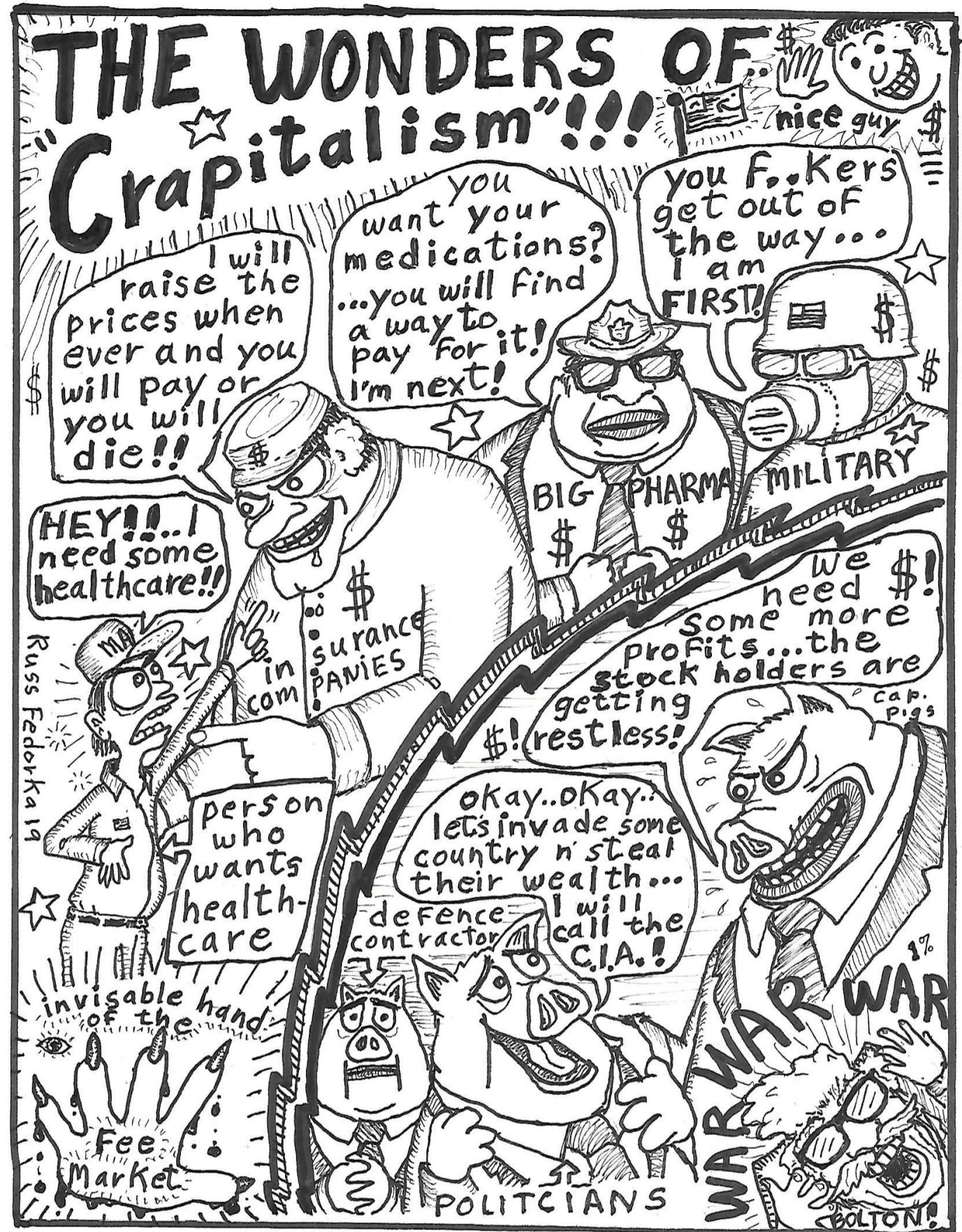
SOCIAL JUSTICE SEEKERS LOOK TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN 2019

BY KEVIN HAYES

Members of Social Justice Seekers are planning to make positive changes in our city in 2019 through their own work and aligning themselves with other activist groups like the Merton Center, the Association of Pittsburgh Priests, Pax Christi, Casa San Jose, the Isaac Walton League, Pittsburgh North People for Peace, and others. Social Justice Seekers started in 2017 as an ecumenical and interfaith group to promote social justice values and call people to make social justice values a priority in their lives and society. Their Mission Statement is: Social Justice Seekers are people of faith who share common goals for positive change. We are committed activists who work for justice, peace, and reconciliation in our community and the world. We act with the hope our efforts will yield beneficial social-justice outcomes.

Due to the enthusiasm for Social Justice Seekers (SJS) and to have as much impact locally as possible, SJS started SJS South and SJS North.

SJS North meets every month, typically on the first Monday of the month. Their next meeting is March 4 at 7 PM at St. Paul United Methodist, 1965 Ferguson Rd, Allison Park, PA 15101. Issues the group are looking to address in 2019 is Gun Control, and specifically working to stop the proliferation of gun ranges in



the North Hills; Immigration; Economic/Just Wage, and adequate Health Care for all. If you would like to be involved in the SJS North group, please email your name, zip code, and name of your church/mosque/synagogue/temple affiliation if applicable to Mary Ann Love at maryannlove@comcast.net. Your email address will then be added to the SJS North and general SJS communication list.

being a part of a regional group, please email your name, zip code, and name of your church/mosque/synagogue/temple affiliation if applicable to Kevin Hayes at khayes@hayesdesign.com Your email address will then be added to the SJS South and/or the general SJS communication list.

Kevin Hayes is a principal and founder of Hayes Design Group - Architects. He has been active in social justice issues for over 35 years in Pittsburgh, and is one of the co-founders of Social Justice Seekers.

SJS South meets each month, typically on the last Monday of the month. Their next meetings are on February 25 at St. Paul Episcopal Church at 7 pm, 1066 Washington Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15228, and then on March 25 at Bower Hill Presbyterian Church at 7 pm, 70 Moffett St, Pittsburgh, PA 15243. Issues the group is looking to address in 2019 include Immigration, and helping immigrant families; Health Care, and protecting access to affordable care for all; Environmental protection, especially clean air and water; and working to promote interfaith dialogue in the South Hills. If you would like to be involved in the SJS South group or be involved generally without

SUFFERING VENEZUELA

OPEN LETTER FROM VENEZUELA TO OUR FRIENDS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD CONT'D

not have running water, 53% of operating rooms have closed, and 95% of medicine, medical supplies, and equipment are imported.

Millions of people have taken to the streets asking for free and credible elections, respect for the constitutional order, the separation of powers, and the rule of law. The response has been the implementation of a repressive military plan called "Plan Zamora", with the participation of security forces, the National Bolivarian Guard, and armed civilians. According to non-government organizations, there were 6,729 protests in 4 months across the country, 135 people murdered, more than 12 thousand detained, 848 political prisoners, and over 230 victims of torture, cruel and unusual punishment, and millions in exile. The result has been a systematic persecution against the political dissidence which has generated the opening of a preliminary examination by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. In 2017, the Fuerza de Acciones Especiales (FAES) police force was created with the purpose of conducting a social cleansing campaign in the popular barrios; they also committed arbitrary detentions, forced entries, and extrajudicial executions. According to the human rights organization, Provea, FAES

has murdered at least 205 people.

On January 10, 2019, Nicolás Maduro proclaimed himself president for a second period, violating the national Constitution and installing a de facto government. The declarations by the United States government considering a military response have generated a comprehensible global reaction. Unfortunately, the reaction has not been to avoid a war, due to the tragedy which that would represent for the Venezuelan people and the region, and supporting the peaceful exit of Maduro from power so that the Venezuelan people can freely express their will. The reaction posed the conflict as one of Maduro and Venezuelan socialism versus Yankee imperialism. This reaction, by amplifying the Venezuelan government's propaganda, commits a great act of injustice against the people, of whom the majority want a political change.

If we want to talk about imperialism in Venezuela we must tell the whole truth. Our country continues being an exporter of petroleum, and the United States continues being a main commercial partner along with China and Russia. The land has been militarized with important negative consequences with the increase

in mafia activity, slave-like conditions, sexual exploitation, environmental damage, a negative cultural effect on indigenous communities who have been transformed, along with campesinos, into miners, along with massacres and disappearances of miners.

We do not want a forceful military intervention. We do not want more death or pain. We urge the entire world to not ignore the clamor of the Venezuelan people. We can stop a war; we can stop a military intervention. It depends on every single one of us and our actions to place enough pressure so that the solution we face is non-violent, and inclusive, with the democracy and justice which the Venezuelan people and humanity itself deserves. We want it to be our voices and aspirations, not arms, which finally decide the future and destiny of our country. But for that, we need your help.

Authors: Alba Purroy, Alejandro Álvarez Iragorry, Alexis Ramírez, Alfredo Infante, Ángel Zambrano, Aura Scaramelli, Catalina Valera, Cristal Palacios

Cristóbal Plaza, Daniel Arzola, Daniel Certain, Douglas Gómez, Erick Lairet, Eulgis Palma, Feliciano Reyna, Gracia Salazar, Israel

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Valera Perez, Juan Carlos La Rosa, Katiuska Camargo, Lexys Rendón, María Eugenia Redondo, María Fernanda Abzueta, Norkys J. Salcedo, Rafael Uzcátegui, Raúl Hurtado, Robzayda Marcos Vera, Rodolfo Montes de Oca, Rolanda Larez, Santiago Zapata, Seymar Liscano, William Requejo, Zoraida Pacheco

ORGANIZATIONS: Acción Solidaria / Action for Solidarity, Asociación Civil Oportunidad, Centro de Justicia y Paz -Cepaz, Clima21 – Ambiente y Derechos Humanos, CODHEZ: Comisión para los Derechos Humanos del Estado Zulia, Conciencia Ciudadana A.C, Creemos Alianza Ciudadana, EXCUBITUS DHE, Instituto Mead de Venezuela A.C, Laboratorio Ciudadano de Noviolencia Activa, Laboratorio de Paz, LuchaNoViolentaEnVenezuela, Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos (Provea), Proyecta Ciudadanía A.C, Psiquearte, RedOrgBaguta, Revista SIC del Centro Gumilla, Unión Vecinal para la Participación Ciudadana A.C, Wainjirrawa

US OVERTHROWING THE GOVERNMENT OF VENEZUELA

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

The US has a long history of derailing or overthrowing democracies in Latin America. A good starting point, though not the first, might be the US interventions in Cuba in 1898 when Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders derailed the efforts of Cubans to oust the Spanish from their country. The US imposed a puppet regime and, with the so-called Platt Amendment, claimed the right to intervene whenever their interests were at stake. On to Guatemala in 1954, when on behalf of United Fruit the US overthrew the democratic government of Jacobo Arbenz. In 1973 it was Chile's turn when the US helped to overthrow Salvador Allende, replacing him with General Augusto Pinochet, a brutal dictator. The most recent case is that of Honduras, where in 2009 the US contrived to have its elected President Manuel Zelaya ousted and replaced by a repressive but compliant regime. Now in 2019, it is Venezuela's turn for regime change by the US and its allies in-country. The pattern is clear.

Venezuela under Hugo Chavez and under his successor Nicolas Maduro tried to institute a government which would share the wealth and benefits of a resource-rich country with all its citizens, with particular attention to the poorest citizens. This is what is dubbed socialism by the US

and which is so abhorrent to Trump, his cronies and compatriots in both the Republican and Democratic parties. Is this any surprise? After all, 99.9 percent of the citizens of Venezuela could not afford to enter the door of Mar a Lago and other Trumpian decadent resorts.

As I write (Feb 12, 2019) a coup is underway in Venezuela orchestrated from Washington DC and the Trump administration. The prelude to the coup is the imposition of economic sanctions by the US, on Venezuela going back some two years now. The objective of the sanctions is to make the economy of Venezuela scream and make the country ungovernable. Venezuela is robbed of its assets from the Venezuelan oil company CITGO in the US. This is larceny and a crime by any other name. The sanctions imposed by the US together with the dramatic drop in the price of crude oil, has paralyzed Venezuela and made it practically ungovernable. At present, largely as a result of the sanctions and the drastic fall in oil prices, the situation in Venezuela for most of the population is practically insufferable. Inflation is estimated to be a million percent per annum at the moment. But let there be no doubt; this crisis is manufactured largely in the US with sanctions and economic war. All this is not to deny the shortcomings

of the Venezuelan government and corruption within it. These factors are definitely part of the present crisis but undoubtedly the US bears the major part of the responsibility for this economic crisis. The end game, of course, is clear. It is to depose a government which would dare to take the interests and welfare of its most impoverished citizens seriously.

The latest episode in the execution of the coup is the declaration of the leader of the Legislative Assembly in Venezuela, Juan Guaidó, on January 23 to be the real President of Venezuela. The optics of his declaration are quite comical, seeing him declare his allegiance to himself whom he elevates to replace the elected President. But the tragic comedy progresses with the US and President Trump recognizing Guaidó as the legitimate President of Venezuela. Many other sycophantic rulers of European countries and Canada have followed suit. All one can say is how sad it is that so-called democratic countries have stooped so low in betraying all democratic principles.

There is no doubt that the Maduro regime in Venezuela is guilty of much mismanagement and even corruption in its governance. But it also has to be recognized that it has been hobbled by

resistance and obstruction from the elite economic and privileged classes. Add to that the punishing sanctions by the US and you have a picture of why Venezuela is a basket case.

As of this writing, we do not know the final outcome of the crisis in Venezuela. The forces aligned internationally against the Maduro regime are enormous. The Guaidó faction is no doubt confident that the US and its allies around the world will facilitate a victory and complete the overthrow of the Maduro regime.

The obvious solution in Venezuela is dialogue between the opposing factions. Guaidó might concede to negotiations but with an incalcitrant Trump behind him and egging him on, negotiations seem less likely. Russia, China and Turkey together with Bolivia and Mexico are with Maduro and in favor of a resolution by dialogue. In the end it all comes down to whether US hegemony can be stopped in its tracks or not. It is a tall order to halt the destructive forces of the US, given that they hold all of the proverbial cards: they can keep the country ungovernable with all kinds of sanctions and interventions.

Michael Drohan has been a member of the editorial collective since its inception.

CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

THE FUTURE OF LEGAL CANNABIS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Nearly two years ago on April 6th, 2016, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf signed a bill to legalize medical cannabis, commonly referred to as marijuana, for qualifying conditions and ailments as detailed on the website for pa.gov. There are currently 17 conditions that qualify for medical use, including cancer, seizures, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), inflammatory bowel disease, various types of epilepsy and autism. As of February 15th, 2018, medical cannabis is now legal for qualifying patients in the form of vapor, drops, tinctures, and since the summer, dried flower.

With the successful implementation of a medical cannabis market in Pennsylvania, Governor Tom Wolf and newly-elected Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman have begun exploring the possibility of legalization for recreational use. As of 2018, 33 states have medical cannabis programs. Of those 33 states, just 10 have legalized recreational cannabis use including Michigan, California, Colorado, and Washington. State House Rep. Jake Wheatley introduced a bill for legalization of recreational cannabis in Pennsylvania on Feb. 4, 2019.

In a tweet responding to public comments, Governor Wolf said, "More and more states are successfully implementing marijuana legalization, and we need to keep learning from their efforts. Any change would take legislation. But I think it is time for

Pennsylvania to take a serious and honest look at recreational marijuana." Lt. Governor Fetterman has been making waves with his involvement in cannabis discourse and education within public and local domains, and has opened his office to public comment on the matter. Fetterman is currently visiting all 57 counties in the state on a listening tour to learn what residents think about legalizing cannabis for recreational use.

One result of the growing trend of legalization is that more platforms have been created to educate wary citizens and encourage deeper discourse, although major media outlets and other organizations are reluctant to join the conversation in a productive capacity. CBS Universal recently declined to air a \$5 million ad from Acreage Holdings, a medical cannabis company which depicted the benefit of medical cannabis in the lives of real patients: a young man who suffers from seizures, a war veteran with an amputated leg, and a recovering opioid addict. The ad provides commentary on the silencing of medical cannabis discourse and inspires contemplation of how problematic it can be to deny the measurable benefits it can provide to many people.

With the delay of legalization comes the missed opportunity to study and learn more about the plant's benefits, its effects, and other, non-psychoactive uses. The rapidly-growing CBD and hemp-infusion industries have been changing the way most people

see cannabis and the benefits it can provide. Scarcity of information leaves open space for dangerous misconceptions and propaganda.

Legalization would also ensure safe access to cannabis. Consumers would be able to purchase a genuine cannabis product from a state certified dispensary with virtually no risk of intentional contamination by other substances. Even though incidences of cannabis tampering are very rare, it can and does happen in an unregulated illegal marketplace. A few cases of synthetic cannabis laced with rat poison have recently been documented in Illinois, resulting in the deaths of two young men. "This is an unusual outbreak," Renee Funk of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told The Associated Press. "Investigators are not sure yet how the fake pot got contaminated," Funk said, "but the CDC has dispatched a team of investigators to Illinois...to help pinpoint the source and hopefully identify the culprits."

"Each day we've seen the number of cases rise," said Nirav Shah of the Illinois Department of Public Health. "Synthetic cannabinoids are unsafe. They are not regulated and people don't know what chemicals may be in them, like rat poison." Legalization has been shown to be an ideal solution: the state generates revenue by taxing dispensary purchases and consumers are protected from synthetic and toxic substances. Medical cannabis has been proving to create billions in revenue nationwide, with exponential returns for the

investment of participating states. Research findings from the Colorado State University-Pueblo's Institute of Cannabis Research, show that "a taxed and regulated cannabis industry contributed more than \$58 million to the local economy", reports the *Denver Post*. "While there was about \$23 million in added costs to legalization – including law enforcement and social services – the county still ended up with a net positive impact of more than \$35 million." CSU-Pueblo has also made headlines for its scholarships funded by tax on local cannabis sales. Last year, Pueblo County was able to dedicate \$420,000 in scholarships for 210 students. This year, the scholarships are expected to "top \$750,000" reports KOAA.

While it may take some time, education, and conversation, Pennsylvania will undoubtedly be hearing more about legalization of recreational cannabis in the imminent future. As the governor said, "We need to take a hard look at marijuana. We need to study it, understand its complexity, and infuse it into society in a healthy and maintained manner."

Editor's Note: To submit your thoughts on this topic to the Lt. Gov's office, visit: www.governor.pa.gov/recreational-marijuana-feedback/

Stephanie Schnupp is an Undergraduate at Slippery Rock University.

THE DE-EVOLUTION OF PRO-LIFE POLICY

As a middle-school student in the mid-90's, I was introduced to the pro-life movement by a Catholic friend. She enlightened me to the grisly process of partial-birth abortion, and explained how the act of aborting a pregnancy at any time after conception was nothing short of murder in any case. The pro-life movement, as explained to me then, was not just about changing women's minds from terminating pregnancy. Eugenics, the death penalty, genocide, and physician-assisted suicide were all topics of concern, actual threats to the sanctity of human life and early steps down a slope that was foretold to end up with government-sanctioned extermination of people. Our generation's holocaust.

I carried these ideals in my heart for decades. In 2003, the United States banned partial-birth abortion and the movement's attention shifted fully to the full repeal of Roe v. Wade. The best hope for the cause was for a conservative Supreme Court to hear a case for repeal. While an ostensibly noble notion – if abortion is murder, and murder is illegal, shouldn't it follow that abortion be outlawed? – there is no consideration for the very real tragedies that occur in thousands of pregnancies each year which necessitate the decision to terminate. However, with Trump's appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the

Supreme Court in 2018, their hope could become reality.

Trump is hailed as a champion of the pro-life movement since aligning his campaign with evangelical leaders who guided his rhetoric. In his 2019 State of the Union address, he proposed the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, a federal ban on abortion past 20 weeks gestation. While 20 states already have similar bans in effect, the scientific evidence cited in support is questionable. In 2005, research published in JAMA shows that the pathways required for the fetal brain to perceive pain are not complete (meaning the sensation of pain cannot reach the brain) until the third trimester, approximately 27 weeks gestation. Developing fetuses are capable of reflexive movement earlier, but since the experience of pain is subjective, it cannot be measured in any meaningful way. Even so, Utah has implemented legislation requiring that anesthesia be administered to a fetus prior to abortion if necessary after 20 weeks.

With a threat to the rights afforded women to consult with their doctors and make an informed decision about their health and looming life, states are taking it upon themselves to ensure their agency. New York, Virginia, and Rhode Island have all received attention recently for proposed measures to protect women's rights and

access to abortion within the scope of current federal law. Countless women affected by tragedy late in their very wanted pregnancies have come forth to explain why and how women arrive in a position that necessitates the decision to abort – stories of fetal demise in states with prohibition and the mothers who must carry their deceased children to term and deliver a dead child; mothers who, after learning of fatal genetic defects, are forced to watch their child suffocate in their arms minutes or even hours after delivery. These are realities that humans face, and should be allowed to address in whatever manner deemed appropriate for the family in consultation with their doctor.

Pro-life advocates tell a very different story. Despite the 2003 federal ban, opponents claim that New York's law will allow partial-birth abortion to become legal again, that women can abort healthy babies on a whim, and that babies born alive after an abortion procedure is performed would be killed. A cursory review of the actual law shows that these are all fabrications – fears nonetheless stoked by the retelling of stories of doctors like Kermit Gosnell. Gosnell was tried along with several associates after investigations into his practice revealed that he failed to provide counsel to patients, violated patient's rights to consent for procedures,

was responsible for the deaths of several women in his care, and of killing at least three babies born alive when abortions were unsuccessful. Gosnell was convicted in 2013 of multiple murder charges, involuntary manslaughter, and over 20 lesser charges in violation of Pennsylvania's Abortion Act, which prohibits abortion after 24 weeks gestation, and sentenced to three consecutive life sentences. While his story is indeed horrific, it is an extreme example of why abortion must remain legal and well-regulated.

The fight to repeal Roe v. Wade must be abandoned not in spite of the pro-life agenda, but in full support of it. We must advocate for the lives and rights of women to determine what is appropriate for their bodies and families. We must advocate for a society and planet that support the upbringing of children with adequate nutrition, childcare, education, and healthcare available to all, and we must support and install leaders who practice peace and reject the call to engage in violent actions and wars to resolve conflict. If we cannot do this, we cannot ever claim to be pro-life.

Cheryl Bauer is an active member of the Editorial Collective at the Thomas Merton Center



NATIONAL MOBILIZATION to Oppose **NATO**, War and Racism

**March and Rally • Saturday, March 30, 2019
1 pm • Lafayette Park, Washington, DC**

April 4, 2019, is the 51st anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Disrespectfully ignoring Rev. King's lifelong dedication to peace, military leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the expanded military arm of the United States that has been responsible for many wars and destruction around the world, have chosen to celebrate NATO's 70th anniversary on that very day in Washington, D.C. This is not only an insult to Rev. King, but is NATO's message that Black lives — and indeed the lives of the vast majority — really do not matter.

We are calling for a peaceful mass mobilization against NATO in Washington, D.C., on Saturday, March 30. Additional actions will take place at the opening of the NATO event on April 4.

We invite you to add your and/or your organization's name to the list of supporters of the anti-NATO, antiwar and antiracism actions in Washington, D.C. Contact@no2nato2019.org or 518-281-1968

no2nato2019.org / #No2NATO

Related Events:

Wednesday April 3

No to NATO – Yes to Peace Disarmament
Counter-Summit — worldbeyondwar.org

Thursday April 4

Evening, Black Alliance for Peace Celebration
blackallianceforpeace.com

Local Contact Information

Krystle Knight
Krystle@ThomasMertonCenter.org
412-361-3022

Please use the case sensitive link below to sign up
for ridesharing

<http://bit.ly/NO2NATOPGH>

"Ad donation Jim Ferlo in support of the U.S. Peace Council"

SEEKING ECO-JUSTICE

BLACK CRACKS AND THE PETROCHEMICAL BUILDOUT OF WESTERN PA CONT'D

9. The large amounts of money spent in Pennsylvania to influence shale oil and gas industry legislation erodes democracy. Severance taxes have been minimized, protections to communities have been limited or eliminated, and people have been threatened for complaining or speaking out.

Patricia DeMarco, Forest Hills Borough Council

The petrochemical industry is relocating from the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Texas as climate refugees fleeing the devastation of repeated hurricanes and coastal storms. With proximity to the Marcellus and Utica shale fields, accessible because of seven exemptions in the federal laws that would have protected drinking water and air quality as well as worker safety, the industry has staked out Western Pennsylvania for development.

Plastic production for packaging is the primary target output. The problem of plastic waste is only expected to grow as plastic production increases exponentially—from a mere two million metric tons annually in 1950 to more than 300 million metric tons today, and a projected 33 billion metric tons each year

by 2050. Plastics are made of long-lived polymers; they do not break down easily in the environment, neither in landfills nor in the oceans. Plastics are not readily broken down by biological systems—they are indigestible and provide no nutrition when introduced into food chains. Nearly all the plastic ever made is still in the biosphere.

Worldwide, factories produce 400 million tons of plastic per year, with plastic bottles produced at a rate of 20,000 per second. Globally, 60% of all plastics ever produced are accumulating in landfills or in the natural environment. Americans discard 33.6 million tons of plastic a year; only 6.5% of plastic is recycled for re-use, and 7.7% is burned in trash to energy facilities. The ubiquitous contamination of the earth from man-made plastics presents a system problem. We need to seek a systematic solution.

The problem of global pollution from plastics has three components: 1. Economic Issues; 2. Environmental and Health Issues; and 3. Ethics Issues. We have built a society that uses plastics designed to last forever for materials that have a useful life of only minutes – plastic bags, coffee cup lids,

straws. We must decide whether we shape our society for the short-term profits of a few petrochemical industries or preserve a viable environment to support our children forever.

Robert Schmetz, Chairman of the Beaver County Marcellus Community and Citizens to Protect Ambridge Reservoir. He gave press documentation of evidence for radioactive contamination of water from shale gas drilling and disposal of produced water" for road dust and ice control.

Terri Baumgartner, Beaver County Activist, organizer with Clean Air Council and member of Beaver Marcellus Community and Citizens to Protect the Ambridge Reservoir spoke of the health harms from both fracking and the petrochemical plant. She raised several pointed questions: "As for the Beaver County cracker this toxic air soup will serve, how many average citizens know that if it goes online it will release more than 30 tons/year of hazardous air pollutants, including benzene, linked to cancer and childhood leukemia, and toluene, linked to brain, liver, and kidney problems; and to spontaneous abortion and birth defects? How many know that the cracker's 159 tons/year of

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particulate matter (PM 2.5) would provoke cardiovascular and respiratory disease, as well as lung cancer and bladder cancer? How many know that the cracker would emit more formaldehyde, the No. 2 cancer driver from air pollution in SWPA, than the Clairton Coke Works? How many know that it would emit 3 times what the Clairton Coke Works emits in volatile organic compounds – cancer-causing VOCs that help create asthma-intensifying ozone?"

Thaddeus Popovich spoke of the hazards to both workers and community residents from the fine sand used in the fracking process. With severe effects similar to black lung from coal mining, people who breathe the fine powdered sand develop silicosis, an unexpected consequence of the petrochemical invasion.

For a fuller discussion of these issues, see <https://patriciademarco.com/2018/12/21/re-thinking-plastics-in-our-future/>

Patricia DeMarco is a member of the Forest Hills Borough Council

VISIONARY IMAGINATION: THE GREEN NEW DEAL

For quite a few years I have been following the work of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. The objective of the Forum established by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim has been to establish a new academic field of study that will guide environmental policy and environmental humanities.

Twenty years ago the intersection of religion and ecology was neither a field of study nor a force for transformation. This work was originally influenced by my favorite "geologian" Thomas Berry. He wrote that participation in the Dream of the Earth has the potential to open up the human species to an ecologically viable future. Transforming the relation of the human being to itself, to the planet, and to the elements of the cosmos requires a vision that can facilitate a reinvention of human nature. To dream of the Earth is "to reinvent the human—at the species level." The goal of this reinvention is to "place the human within the dynamics of the planet." It is the historical mission of our times, a mission that calls for the emergence of a human species that can enact socially just and ecologically sustainable ways of dwelling in the world and this mission requires visionary imagination.

Reimagining an environmentally just vision, the Green New Deal may be likened to FDR's New Deal policies and his 1944 vision of a 2nd Bill of Rights and the Freedom Budget of 1966. In his 1944 State of the Union address, President Franklin Roosevelt called for an Economic Bill of

Rights, stating that "Necessitous men are not free men." Those "who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made." Roosevelt died before he could introduce these rights as a constitutional commitment.

The dream continued and in 1966 the Freedom Budget for All Americans addressed the changes that promised to eliminate poverty within a 10 year period. The plan called for the employment, decent housing, health care, and education for all people and acknowledged these as basic human rights. When the government provides opportunities and privileges for white people and rich people they call these programs 'subsidies.' When they do it for people of color and poor people these programs are disparaged as 'welfare.' The fact is that everybody in this country lives on welfare.

Suburbs were built with federally subsidized credit. The highways that take our white brothers and sisters to the suburbs were built with nearly 90% federally subsidized money. Everybody is on welfare in this country. "The problem is that we all too often have socialism for the rich and rugged, free enterprise capitalism for the poor. That's the problem." said Martin Luther King, Jr., in response to the 1968 Poor People's Campaign. The Rev Dr. King was assassinated and the campaign for the Freedom Budget for All Americans slowly died.

The Green New Deal has been introduced as a modern-day resolution to these

inequalities. It echos the call for ambitious changes and a 10 year plan of mobilization. This timely call for environmental and human rights is a call for reinvention of what it means to be human. Here are the ten pillars of the Green New Deal as laid out in the proposal by Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, the new Congressperson from NY, early in 2019:

"Guaranteeing a job with a family-sustaining wage, adequate family and medical leave, paid vacations, and retirement security to all people of the United States."

"Providing all people of the United States with — (i) high-quality health care; (ii) affordable, safe, and adequate housing; (iii) economic security; and (iv) access to clean water, clean air, healthy and affordable food, and nature."

"Providing resources, training, and high-quality education, including higher education to all people of the United States."

"Meeting 100 percent of the power demand in the United States through clean, renewable, and zero-emission energy sources."

"Repairing and upgrading the infrastructure in the United States, including ... by eliminating pollution and greenhouse gas emissions as much as technologically feasible."

"Building or upgrading to energy-efficient, distributed, and 'smart' power grids, and

BY WANDA GUTHRIE

working to ensure affordable access to electricity."

"Upgrading all existing buildings in the United States and building new buildings to achieve maximal energy efficiency, water efficiency, safety, affordability, comfort, and durability, including through electrification."

"Overhauling transportation systems in the United States to eliminate pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector as much as is technologically feasible, including through investment in — (i) zero-emission vehicle infrastructure and manufacturing; (ii) clean, affordable, and accessible public transportation; and (iii) high-speed rail."

"Spurring massive growth in clean manufacturing in the United States and removing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from manufacturing and industry as much as is technologically feasible."

"Working collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in the United States to eliminate pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector as much as is technologically feasible."

Wanda is Convener of the Thomas Merton Center EcoJustice Working Group and Board Member of PA Interfaith Power & Light.

ART AS ACTIVISM

"SAVIOR SAMUEL" SHOWCASES SOUTHERS' EARLY WORK

BY JEFF CUMMINGS

Last Friday night, I attended a preview of "Savior Samuel," a play by local playwright Mark Clayton Southers. I am a big fan of Mr Southers' work. He is a former steelworker, an award-winning playwright, photographer, scenic designer, theatrical producer and stage director.

He is also the founder and producing Artistic Director of the Pittsburgh Playwrights' Theatre Company, the company that is producing this run of "Savior Samuel." Southers has produced well over 150 full-length and one-act plays with the Pittsburgh Playwrights, including August Wilson's complete 10-play American Century Cycle. As a young working-class man of color living in Pittsburgh, Southers was privileged to have had the opportunity to be mentored by August Wilson.

Southers has garnered recognition of his own around the world. His play "Ma Noah" was the recipient of the 2004 Theodore Ward Prize at Columbia College, Chicago. His poem play "Angry

Black Man Poetry AKA Endangered Species" had a successful run at Teatr Śląski in Katowice, Poland, in 2009. He was the Artistic Director for the 2016 year-long August Wilson Festival at Short North Stage, Columbus, Ohio. His play "Miss Julie, Clarissa And John" was featured at the 2017 National Black Theater Festival and had a three-week run at the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland.

"Savior Samuel" was written in 2002, but this is the first time it has been produced. If you are a fan of Mark Clayton Southers' work, I recommend that you go see this play.

If you are not a fan of Mark Clayton Southers, I recommend you become one immediately. He is a very important local artist of international acclaim. He is passionate, creative, humane and bold in all the works of his that I have seen.

One other important highlight of this play is an excellent performance by

Aaliyah Sanders, a 10th-Grader from the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. Ms Sanders is cast as Essie, the deaf teenage daughter of Black pioneers in late 19th Century Kansas. The entertainment industry is full of stories where actors are hired to portray minority characters, while actors from those same minority communities are so often overlooked and underemployed. It is so refreshing to see a production company do the intelligent thing by casting a minority actor to play a minority character. It's not surprising, though, when that production company is the Pittsburgh Playwrights' Theatre Company, an institution dedicated to diversity from its inception.

Please do check out "Savior Samuel" at the Trust Arts Education Building until March 16th.

Savior Samuel
By Mark Clayton Southers
Directed by Monteze Freeland
Dramaturgy by Dr. Kyle Bostian
Feb 8 thru Mar 16, 2019
At the Trust Arts Education Center, 805 Liberty Avenue
\$30 per ticket
<https://www.pghplaywrights.org/samuel/>

Please Note: Many Sunday matinees feature free talkbacks led by dramaturg Dr. Kyle Bostian following the performance. ASL interpretation provided for the Monday March 4th and Sunday March 10th performance.

Jeff Cummings is a fundraiser, writer and activist.

EXHIBITION, PUBLIC ART EXPLORE OUR SHARED HUMANITY

BY MAGGIE GRAHAM

We Are All Related, a multimedia exhibit of photographic portraits, audiovisual recordings, and written narratives by acclaimed Pittsburgh photographer Andrea London, opens March 22 at 937 Gallery, downtown Pittsburgh. We Are All Related features images and the personal narratives of immigrants and refugees, members of the LGBTQ community, people with differing abilities, and others facing discrimination and marginalization.

We Are All Related is a collection of compelling images and stories of the human experience and human and civil rights struggles of individuals and families living in the region. Select subjects include a Bhutanese family that survived 20 years in a Nepali refugee camp, a 94-year-old peace activist and Holocaust survivor, a transgender man, and a woman blind since birth whose parents fought for her ability to attend a public grade school.

A concurrent public art installation by Andrea London, designed to expand the visibility of We Are All Related, is also opening on March 22 at the corner of Penn and Centre Avenues in East Liberty. This high-traffic intersection will carry a conversation of cultural inclusion and prospective sharing through the streets of Pittsburgh. In a call for understanding and urgency, this installation includes large-scale vinyl printed portraits of diverse residents and the words "We Are All Related" translated in the 17 languages represented by the portrait subjects.

London has a decades-long career in photographic studio portraiture using black and white film. Her 30 years

behind the camera have provided her with a unique and deep connection between photographer and subject. Through these experiences, London began to see the importance of each subject's story and the threads that connect them. It's through this work that We Are All Related was born.

"This body of work is my attempt to counter the ugly rhetoric of separation and racism exploding all around us," London said. "I decided to bring forward my portraits of both the marginalized and mainstream to show the interconnections among people I observe every day. My hope is to convey that no matter our race, religion, culture, birthplace, gender identity, age or ability, we are all connected by shared experiences of struggle, oppression, triumph, love or loss."

The We Are All Related exhibition at 937 Gallery, 937 Liberty Avenue in Downtown Pittsburgh, and the public art installation on the corner of Penn and Centre Avenues in East Liberty, both run from March 22 through May 12. The public art installation is hosting a neighborhood kickoff party Sunday, March 24 from 2-4 p.m. A book of the portraits and narratives, also titled We Are All Related, will be available at 937 Gallery, in book stores throughout Pittsburgh, and online. To learn more, visit www.andrealondon.com.

Maggie Graham is an independent communications professional living in Morningside.

 *Information provided by VoteAllegheny*

2019 Elections Calendar

March: Tuesday **3/12/19**—Last day to circulate nomination petitions for the May primary

Wednesday **3/13/19**—1st day to circulate nomination papers for political bodies (including independents) for November election

April: Wednesday **4/3/19**—Verify your voter registration for May primary
<https://www.paVoterServices.state.pa.us/Pages/VoterRegistrationStatus.aspx>

Monday **4/22/19**—Last day to postmark voter registration before primary, or register online <http://register.votespa.com>

May: Tuesday **5/7/19**—Board of Elections meeting before primary

Wednesday **5/8/19**—LWVGP publishes Voters Guide in the New Pittsburgh Courier <http://www.NewPittsburghCourierOnline.com/>

Tuesday **5/14/19**—Deadline to deliver civilian absentee ballot application

Friday **5/17/19**—County must receive absentee ballots by 5:00pm

Monday **5/20/19**—deadline to postmark military and overseas absentee ballots

Tuesday **5/21/19**—PRIMARY ELECTION for some judges, Allegheny County Executive, County Council (districts 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13 and at-large seats), County District Attorney, County Controller, County Treasurer, Pgh City Council (odd # districts), City of Pgh Controller, Pgh School Board (even # districts).
Polls open 7am–8pm. www.VotesPA.com for your polling place

VoteAllegheny is a group of volunteers committed to ensuring that citizens of Allegheny County have safe, reliable, accessible, recountable, voter-verifiable elections. Join us at our weekly meetings on Sundays at 4pm, or visit us online at VoteAllegheny.org

SPEAKERS OFFER ANSWERS

JEFFREY SACHS, AWARD WINNING ECONOMIST SPEAKS MARCH 25

The first speaker of the Association of Pittsburgh Priests' Spring Series is Jeffrey Sachs, Ph.D., an award-winning economist with degrees from Harvard and Columbia Universities. His topic will be: "Poverty Requires a Faith Response: What Can We Do?" The event will be held on Monday, March 25 at 7 PM at the Kearns Spirituality Center, 9000 Babcock Blvd. in Allison Park (behind the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Divine Providence). Sachs has concretely responded to the dire poverty in our world by guiding policies and efforts in developing countries toward sustainable development.

Sachs is currently the Quetelet Professor of Sustainable Development at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. As an advisor to the United Nations, he helped to develop the current global Sustainable Development Goals. A co-editor of the *World Happiness Report*, Sachs is also the author of 17 books, the most recent of which is: *Building the New American Economy: Smart, Fair, and Sustainable*.

Although Dr. Sachs is Jewish in faith, Popes John Paul II and Francis have sought him out for input into encyclicals, most recently for "Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home." Sachs calls it "magnificent, breathtaking... compellingly holistic. It inspires in its profundity." He is similarly enthusiastic about the Church's social teaching: "I

love the leadership the Church shows in goodwill to humanity. Pope Francis has said repeatedly that his encyclicals are a call to all of humanity...they touch me very deeply." If you have wondered what responses we can make to poverty, join us as Sachs shares ways on how the Social Gospel of the Church can bring justice and peace in our world.

Plan now to hear the second speaker in the series, Greer Gordon, Ph.D. Dr. Gordon is a theologian, author, and lecturer, known for her teaching, publications, and work in the fields of evangelization and catechesis. Among her publications is *A Profound Understanding of the Feminine Person*



Jeffrey Sachs, Ph.D., Economist

and the *Plan of Salvation*. Dr. Gordon is one of eight women invited by the Vatican to respond to John Paul's Encyclical on Women and is the author of the monthly prayer journal *Give Us This Day*.

Gordon will speak on the topic: "Truth in the Heart: The Church, Entitlement, and Sexual Crimes" on Sunday, April 14 at 2 PM. Rape, molestation, seduction, sexual exploitation, and sexual harassment have all become exposed in the Church. The perpetrators and their silent accomplices who hid such acts are slowly being identified for their sinfulness. If we would be, as we claim to be, Christ in the midst of the world, then we must identify and reject the spirit of entitlement that has allowed priests and bishops to set themselves above the standards of Christian moral-ethical living. We must be bold in our analysis of facts, uncompromising in our defense of truth, and unrelenting in eliminating clerical entitlements. Dr. Gordon will present an analysis of what has happened and offer concrete suggestions as to how the Church may proceed in returning to a people who cherish God's love for "truth in the heart." Please join us for a prayerful exploration of the crisis in our Church.

A final Listening and Sharing Event will be held on Tuesday, April 30 at 7 PM. The clergy sexual abuse of minors, the cover up by our bishops, and the up to now inadequate response of

BY JOYCE ROTHERMEL

the Vatican is perhaps the greatest scandal in the history of the American Catholic Church. After a brief report on initial efforts being made to respond locally, those who gather will share their feelings, thoughts and recommendations. Opportunities for involvement afterward will be offered.

The fee for the upcoming talks is \$20 each. For the April 30 event, there is no charge. Participants can register at the door the day of the talks. For more information and questions, contact Fr. John Oesterle at 412-232-7512 or johnoesterle@gmail.com You are also invited to visit [www.associationofpittsburghpriests.com](http://associationofpittsburghpriests.com) Pre-registrations can be made to the Association of Pittsburgh Priests, P.O. Box 2106, Pittsburgh, PA 15230.

The Association of Pittsburgh Priests is a diocesan-wide organization of ordained and non-ordained women and men who act on our baptismal call to be priests and prophets. Its mission, rooted in the Gospel and the Spirit of Vatican II, is to carry out a ministry of justice and renewal in ourselves, the Church and the world. Members of the APP have faithfully supported the mission of the Thomas Merton Center throughout its decades long history.

Joyce Rothermel is a member of the Association of Pittsburgh Priests and the Thomas Merton Center

WENDELL POTTER ADDRESSES "MEDICARE FOR ALL"

With the 2020 U.S. Presidential primary campaign underway, health care remains a top concern for voters. Sometimes it seems there are as many health care reform proposals as there are candidates. Meanwhile, special interests, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, are actively working to quash any large-scale overhaul of the health care system.

Wendell Potter came to the University of Pittsburgh campus on February 6th to promote Medicare for All during these highly charged political times. The title of his presentations were geared towards his audiences. At the noon talk at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Mr. Potter's "Solving America's Health Care Crisis" was well received by over 60 medical students, residents, and doctors. The evening title talk to over 70 attendees was "Achieving Medicare for All." After both talks there was a lively, insightful, and concerned Q & A session.

Wendell Potter, President of the Business Initiative Health policy (BIHP), explained the benefits of Medicare for All for consumers, families, business owners, workers, and the economy. He is a health care reform advocate, a *New York Times* bestselling author, and a former health insurance executive who blew the whistle on the industry's unethical business practices in testimony to the U.S. Senate.

As a former insurance executive, Mr.

Potter spoke firsthand about the public relations and lobbying campaigns the insurance industry has used to popularize the employer-sponsored insurance system, even as premiums have skyrocketed, and many businesses and their employees are struggling to keep up. He also described how our health system became so broken, how the insurance industry continues to prosper at the expense of the rest of the economy, and why business owners must play a central role in the healthcare reform movement.

According to Mr. Potter, "Any systemic reform that leaves insurance companies in control of our healthcare system is doomed to fail, which is why a single-payer, Medicare-for-All type of system is both essential and inevitable. I know from my two decades as an executive at two of the largest health insurers that insurers' top priority is to 'enhance shareholder value' by maximizing profits and maintaining an expected profit margin."

"In addition, our multi-payer system is heavily burdened with administrative expenses unknown in other developed countries. Medicare for All is inevitable because the current system is not sustainable. Insurer and employers cannot continue to shift more and more of the cost of insurance and health care to their workers, which is the current industry-wide strategy. The number of uninsured Americans is rising again. Also, the number of

underinsured American, in plans with such high deductibles they can't use their coverage, continues to increase at a rapid clip."

Bob Mason, social worker and Board Member of Health Care 4 All PA, stated, "If we want to guarantee the American rights to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' and the Constitution's promise to 'promote the general welfare,' we urgently call upon our elected representatives to guarantee high quality, patient-centered, publicly accountable, compassionate health care for all."

Anita Prizio, small business owner, Allegheny County Council member, and treasurer for Health Care 4 All PA added, "I am excited Mr. Potter chose to speak in Pittsburgh now. The UPMC/Highmark divorce affects all of us, and I believe these institutions have little regard for the people they affect most. As a former health insurance executive, Mr. Potter offers insight how we, as stakeholder, including elected officials, patients, and taxpayers can hold these institutions accountable."

As already referred to, health care industries and their allies are already aiming their PR protests at the achievability of a Medicare for All health care system. Mr. Potter instructed us on being aware of FUD. This is the acronym for Fear-Uncertainty-Doubt that the insurance companies will surely use against this feasible plan. He

BY THERESA CHALUCH

also highlighted the importance of our messaging in promotion of this system.

The University of Pittsburgh Medical School's student groups, the Social Determinants of Health Interest Group and the Social Medicine Fellows, sponsored the noon presentation. Wednesday evening's event was hosted by the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, Health Care 4 All PA, the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, Democratic Socialists of America's Health Justice Committee (Pittsburgh chapter), and the Physicians for a National Health Program (Pittsburgh Chapter).

The southwest PA chapter invites all interested persons and parties to join us in this campaign which is getting more and more support. To learn more about our legislative initiative for a single-payer system go to <http://www.healthcare4allpa.com> web site. To learn more about the southwest PA chapter and about our monthly meetings, contact Theresa Chalich at

tchalich@gmail.com

Theresa Chalich is a registered nurse and chairperson of Health Care 4 All PA's southwest PA chapter.

MARCH 8TH

INTRODUCING PITTSBURGH'S INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S STRIKERS (PGH IWS)

While 2016 was a tumultuous year for women globally, here in the U.S. most would attribute that to the catastrophe of the Trump election. Globally, women faced continuous attacks from various government organizations. Poland's conservative parliament proposed a bill to ban and outright criminalize abortion, while the National Meeting of Women in Argentina was repressed during the same week Argentines were reeling from reports of seven separate femicides. No wonder that in 2016, most of us in the U.S. missed the sparks of this movement, as we were self-obsessing over the epitome of white feminism packaged by Clinton's "being with her."

In October 2016, Polish women responded to the abortion bill with a one-day general women's strike. On a Monday, thousands of women across 60 cities went on strike and by Thursday parliament voted down the proposed bill! Simultaneously, a grassroots online organizing effort resulted in Argentine women mobilizing a country wide one-hour strike against gender-violence, which resulted in most Latin American and Caribbean countries following suit. These near-identical events gained attention of women in both countries and fostered international collaboration. The Polish organizers reached out to the Argentine team, which resulted in a coalition of women from across 35 nations, including the U.S., in an international call to action.

I was part of the team in Pittsburgh that helped organize the first International Women's Strike (IWS) on March 8th, 2017. Two years ago, I read the platform against gendered violence in Spanish because I felt strongly it was necessary we honor the Latinx femmes who organize vehemently across Latin America to demand safety from the daily onslaught of gendered violence and femicide. In 2018 I was involved again and served on the education committee organizing a panel of women to teach the different positions of IWS' U.S. platform regarding terms of Paid Sick Leave while Pittsburgh's paid sick leave ordinance was being heard at the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. This year I have stepped back from organizing the event and sat down to speak with the 2019 steering committee. I asked the women to tell me why they were working on IWS, what they hoped to achieve with IWS, and why women and gender nonconforming people should participate.

Darnika Reed: TMC Board Member, Pittsburgh Coalition to End the Deadly Exchange, and PGH Jewish Voice for Peace

Darnika was a speaker at last year's event, focusing on the platform's position for an 'Antiracist and Anti-imperialist Feminism.' Darnika was drawn to work on IWS in 2019 because she, "think[s] it's important for the people working in ... Pittsburgh to create demands for the city of Pittsburgh.... There are a lot of issues that need to be addressed that aren't unless you pressure [y]our local politicians." When asked what makes IWS different than the Women's March she said, "Last year and this year so far we don't have politicians and candidates involved.... It's a time for activists and advocates and organizers who work on

these issues all the time to be uplifted. I think it's more important for that to happen than for politicians and candidates to get a platform." When asked about what she hoped IWS would achieve Reed said, "I hope for this year we bring more awareness to the injustice we see happening at the Allegheny County Jail, [...] to the problems that sex workers face, and the [Pittsburgh Police] participation in the exchanges and training with the Israeli military".

Dena Stanley: Trans YOUNiting, Maddezsweetz

Dena Stanley is a Trans-rights activist and founder of Trans YOUNiting, who spoke at the PGH IWS' rally in 2018 on the platform position to end gender violence. Each interviewee said they were either going on strike or skipping class and when I asked Dena if she was going on strike we laughed about how she feels she's already on strike because of her unjust working conditions. She explained that, "[my bosses] feel because I'm just one individual trying to fight a whole corporation that its ok to do whatever they want to do and say whatever they want to say and make me feel just any type of way when I come into this place ... to [do] my job. I don't feel like I should be disrespected at all because I am who I am; I shouldn't be disrespected because I'm a trans woman. ... If we work as a collective to start to change that narrative that these corporations know that, 'No you're not going to be able to do this,' and it's not just trans women that's going to stand with me; it's going to be women in general that are gonna stand and say you're not going to [...] do this to our fellow sister."

Considering the controversy of previous Women's Marches and the notorious presence of white cis heteronormative patriarchal capitalist supremacy that exists even within the left's organizing spaces, I asked Dena to explain how PGH IWS was centering marginalized voices. "By having [them] at the table, [...] making sure they're included all the way around, [...] and making sure that our voices are heard and they're [white women] not overstepping ... [by] giving us room to lead ourselves." As to why she thinks women and gender non-conforming people should strike, Dena unequivocally stated that, "we're a part of this movement and our voices need to be heard and we have to be at this table [...] It's trans women, it's non-conforming [folks], it's a whole collective under the trans umbrella that is affected as well. We have to support as well as get that support."

Renzy Tayci: PGH International Socialist Organization

During my interview with Renzy, she eloquently described the collective power while seamlessly parenting her young toddler, who was demanding her mother's attention. In these moments, she was a window into the world women face, balancing her social reproductive work while expressing why she was involved and what she hopes IWS achieves. Renzy emphatically stated, "The way women and non-binary people are going to create the world [we] want is by withholding our labor. By showing the strength that we all have as working-class people by withholding our labor and forcing the powers that be to accept our demands.... I'm hoping that we achieve a strong

BY Krystal Knight and INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S STRIKE USA CHAPTER

powerful feminist movement here in Pittsburgh that can bring the city to its knees for any demand we deem necessary.... a fighting feminist movement that can raise hell at any time reproductive rights are threatened or gender violence raises its head or labor rights are threatened.... It's important women and gender non-conforming people come together because even though we are many and do a ton of the labor that holds Pittsburgh up we have the least amount of resources, so the only way that we will be able to achieve our demands ever is if we withhold the one resource we have the most of and that's our laboring power."

Emily Culver: Pitt Grad Student, PGH Socialist Alternative (SA)

I was happy to see anti-capitalism was still central to IWS, given the connections across different coalition nations. Emily was drawn to do the work this year because, "IWS has a very important socialist history and I identify as a socialist and am part of SA." Culver stated she was also motivated because, "IWS is about international solidarity. I lived in Peru for 8 years and just recently moved back to the U.S. and IWS ... was very important in Peru. A lot of women participated, and it was something people were very passionate about." With recent victories when US workers go on strike and win their demands, Emily cautioned that folks here in Pittsburgh need to prepare if they wanted to strike on March 8th. "If people are interested in going on strike it's really important to do so in connection with an organization like a union." While most everyone agreed that a lofty local goal would of course be for a general strike, there is an emphasis on holding solidarity demonstrations. While Culver is proud to work with SA, she wanted to emphasize that, "it's not necessary to be involved in the kind of organizations we have in the coalition.... this kind of work can be done anywhereIt's not necessary to be a politicized person to understand the different oppressions we're experiencing."

Dighan Kelly: Pitt Undergrad, PGH Democratic Socialists of America

PGH IWS has been able to organize student walkouts on CMU's campus the past two years and efforts by student organizers like Dighan are continuing that tradition. Dighan touched on how Pitt's campus culture drew her to the work. "Pitt functions like a small microcosm of PGH and we're not that small. There are 28k students, faculty, and staff and a ton of other people involved in the institution and a lot of the issues we see playing out on campus are even bigger, more widespread issues in the city itself or are symptoms of the same city issues". When I asked whether PGH IWS is focused more on striking or solidarity, Dighan pointed out that, "IWS takes a lot of different forms depending on where it's happening. [...] Some countries are doing strikes for the causes that are ... most relevant to them geographically and some people are just walking out for a day. Some people are doing things very different and I think part of the beauty of IWS is people can resist however makes the most sense to them. [...] Maybe asking

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

WHY PITT'S GRAD STUDENTS NEED A UNION

When graduate students at the University of Wisconsin successfully formed a union in 1969 they made headlines because such an entity had never been seen before. But now, according to the web site set up by the University of Pittsburgh union organizers, 36 universities and university systems have such unions, while active organizing is taking place at 24 others.

Ali McIntosh and Shelby Brewster of the Pitt Graduate Student Organizing Committee spoke to the *NewPeople* recently and expressed confidence that an election to form a union will be successful, and hope it will take place before the end of the current semester. Whether an election occurs that soon depends on an awaited decision by a Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board hearing examiner, following hearings this past October and November. The hearings were meant to resolve the issue of whether or not Pitt graduate students are actually employees of the university, a legal argument commonly made by institutions of higher learning hoping to prevent unionization.

McIntosh and Brewster, both teaching assistants, have no doubt that they are employees—teaching, holding office hours, and performing other duties that absorb more than the 20 hours their appointments say they are to devote to their assigned tasks. “I wrote the syllabus and do all the grading of

my students’ work in the course I’m currently teaching,” said Brewster. The problem, both say, is not that they are functioning as employees but that their lack of status as employees prevents them from earning a living wage, having guaranteed benefits, and working under clearly defined conditions of labor.

A union-negotiated contract would allow graduate students to obtain year-over-year increases in their “stipends.” At present, McIntosh pointed out, Pitt also insists that grad students may not take supplemental employment outside the university. “Being a graduate student is a full-time job,” Brewster asserted, “and we ought to be able to make a living in Pittsburgh.”

Without adequate income, and this is especially true of those with families and children, students are forced to add to their already growing debt. McIntosh offered that a fourth of her current paycheck from Pitt is already going to pay off a loan she could not defer. First-generation graduate students often come from lower-income families, McIntosh added, and struggle to make up-front payments for travel to academic conferences and seminars, while such activities are essential to building the credentials that will get them future positions. Reimbursements from their department are not guaranteed, nor helpful for students who can’t make

the initial outlay.

It’s the guarantees that a legally binding collective bargaining agreement would provide that these students most yearn for. “We do have great health insurance at present,” said Brewster, “but we could lose that at any time.”

“As it stands,” added McIntosh, “our grievance process is shadowy and tenuous at best,” while pointing to the current Title IX investigations involving Pitt’s Communications Department. Appropriate behavior is not codified, and the potential for conflicts of interest is considerable—a student’s grievance, for instance, might name the student’s own faculty supervisor.

McIntosh said a contract could provide for education of administrators, supervisors, and faculty regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. A clear and independent grievance process would also, she thinks, provide greater protections for students of color, queer and transgender students, and students who are parents.

A contract could also ensure adequate training for teaching assistants before they receive course assignments. Lack of training may result in graduate students having difficult initial experiences as teachers. “Student evaluations can help or hurt you on the job market,” said McIntosh.

BY NEIL COSGROVE

Brewster said that she hadn’t discerned much difference in how graduate students across departments reacted to her organizing efforts. The student union web site does have particular pages devoted to students in STEM disciplines and to international students, who are seen as particularly vulnerable to university scare tactics, given their status. “There are definite abuses in sciences,” she adds, sometimes related to students’ isolated work in labs.

“Every graduate student I know has a stake in our issues,” said McIntosh. The two organizers are encouraged by the support they’ve received from undergraduates and from the Community Support for Academic Workers (CSAW) group. Their biggest challenge, they say, is the resistance from the university, particularly the less-than-objective discussion of unionization on Pitt’s web site, and the machinations of the law firm (Ballard Spahr) Pitt has hired to prevent an election.

“Our taxes and tuition dollars are helping to pay for that law firm,” observes McIntosh.

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

INTRODUCING PITTSBURGH'S INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S STRIKERS (PGH IWS) (CONT'D)

professors not to respond to emails and putting an auto-responder about why they’re not responding [March 8th].” As for why she thought it was important for women and gender non-conforming people to participate, Dighan said, “We’re the people who see our voices left out the most or interrupted the most in the smallest spaces, [...] to not only call attention to the pain and problems we’re facing every day, but to uplift ourselves. [...] I want to make this space better than when I got here ... to see what we can do for the next cohort of students or people who occupy that workplace.”

PGH IWS’ main march and rally will take place downtown on March 8th, starting at the City County building, snow, rain, or shine. I am privileged to work at the Thomas Merton Center and know I can safely exercise my right to strike on March 8th. I implore all our members and supporters to take a stand with me on this year’s International Women’s Day because solidarity is our weapon. To get updates on organizing efforts, event times, and details on the student strike, email the steering committee at pgh.iws@gmail.com

or visit www.facebook.com/pghM8womensstrike/

Krystle M. Knight is the Community Organizer for the Thomas Merton Center. She is a queer, second-generation Latinx of Mexican descent originally from Houston, TX.

Student Walkout & Rally! International Women's Strike

Students and young people have been at the forefront of the resistance against Trump and of movements against gun violence, racism, police brutality, and attacks on women and the LGBTQ community. Across the country in a historic wave of teachers strikes, students have marched in solidarity with their teachers and joined the picket lines.

There is a growing mood among us as young people and students to take action against injustice, but we must recognize that we can only win our liberation from racism, sexism, queerphobia, transphobia, and all forms of oppression and exploitation by connecting our struggles and organizing on our campuses, in our workplaces, and in the streets.

In solidarity with women striking around the world for International Women’s Day and the International Women’s Strike, we’re calling on students, staff, and faculty from local high schools and universities to walk out of their classes on March 7th at 3:08pm and unite for a multi-school rally at Schenley Plaza to demand reproductive justice and Title IX protections for all, an end to sexual assault and discrimination on campus, fair wages and working conditions for all campus workers, and ultimately a new system that puts the needs and rights of women and working people before profit.

Rebecca Rovins: CMU Undergrad, PGH Socialist Alternative

TROUBLES OVERSEAS

JAIR BOLSONARO AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE AMAZON FOREST

Brazil elected a new President of the country in October 2018 named Jair Bolsonaro. He took office on January 1, 2019. Bolsonaro is reckoned to be a Trump on steroids and his election is ominous for the future of democracy not only in Brazil but on the planet.

His coming to power is nothing short of a travesty of democracy. The most popular candidate in the run up to the elections was Luis Ignacio da Silva, otherwise known as Lula, a former President, but he was banned and jailed on what are mostly trumped up charges. The party of Lula, the Workers Party or Partido Trabalhadora (PT) had ruled Brazil for over a decade before its leader and President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, was impeached and deposed by manipulation and false accusations.

The Workers Party in Brazil had lifted some 40 million Brazilians from poverty and instituted major checks on the invasion and destruction of the Amazon biosphere. The changes instituted by PT brought the wrath of the elite and affluent classes of Brazil and Bolsonaro is their mascot. It has to be said, however, that in its latter years in power the PT had gained a reputation for incompetence and corruption, leading to a loss of popular support.

To get an idea of how radical and right wing Bolsonaro is, one need but mention

his comment that the brutal military generals who ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1984 were not brutal enough. He claimed that instead of imprisoning and torturing dissidents they should have killed them. On the economic level, Bolsonaro represents an extreme form of what is called neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism policy promotes the abolition of any and all regulations on corporations and businesses. Protections of the environment, of worker safety and of rainforests of Brazil are to be abolished. Free reign for capital and minimum government.

During the PT years of governance, the rate of destruction of Amazonian forests had reduced considerably because of the recognition of indigenous rights and of the fact that the Amazon constitutes the lungs of the world on which planetary survival depends in great part. In its function as the Earth's lungs, the Amazon takes in more than 2 billion tons of greenhouse gas (CO₂) per year and breathes out fresh oxygen. Consequently PT had introduced a forest code forbidding Amazon landholders from clearing more than 20 percent of their land. Reserves were set aside for indigenous people, constituting approximately 13 percent of national territory. In addition, Brazil had signed the Paris Accords, committing itself to cutting greenhouse emissions by 43 percent by 2030 in its

submission to the Paris climate agreement. This agreement has been signed and ratified by the Brazilian Congress, making it the law of the land. This agreement and the regulations it demands are an extreme irritant to Bolsonaro and his cohorts. One can have no doubt that he will try to do a Trump on these accords; namely he will try to withdraw from these agreements. One of the obstacles, however, that he faces is that he does not have a majority support in Congress. Will he be able to override Congress or bypass it is one of the major questions that Brazil faces. Of his intention, however, there can be little doubt.

Most of one's suspicions of what Bolsonaro would do have been borne out. Within hours of assuming the Presidency on January 1, 2019, he launched an assault on environmental and Amazon protections with an executive order transferring the regulation and creation of new indigenous reserves to the agriculture ministry, which is controlled by the powerful agribusiness sector. The intention here is clear, namely to remove the role of the indigenous people, the main protectors of the Amazon habitat, from restraining the ravages of agribusiness. The demarcation of indigenous areas in Brazil has been under an agency called FUNAI, which was part of the Justice Ministry. But now with the executive decree, this role has been

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

given to a new ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, which is governed by an evangelical pastor. The intention and direction is clear. In case it was not, Bolsonaro made it clear in a tweet on January 2, 2019 in which he stated:] "More than 15% of national territory is demarcated as indigenous land and quilombos. Less than a million people live in these places, isolated from the true Brazil, exploited and manipulated by NGOs. Together we will integrate these citizens." Neo-colonial and imperialist sentiments peppered with resentment at indigenous rights could hardly be clearer.

The danger to democracy, the environment and even to the planet that Bolsonaro represents can scarcely be exaggerated. It is compounded by Brazil being a rather young democracy where democratic institutions are fragile. Whereas Trump in the US is restrained by many democratic forces, the fear in Brazil is that Bolsonaro will trash any democratic opposition. We have only to look at how he came to power to get an idea of how full-throated fascism is a real danger in Brazil.

Michael Drohan is a member of the Editorial Collective and a former Board Member of TMC

YEMEN CAN'T WAIT

Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, is currently facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis; the United Nations reports that half of the population is already facing pre-famine conditions and is entirely reliant on aid for survival. At least 400,000 children younger than age 5 are at risk of death from malnutrition. Without urgent action, millions of civilians could face starvation solely as a result of an ongoing armed conflict. Yemeni children who manage to survive will live with the devastating health and developmental impacts of malnutrition for the rest of their lives.

Yemen is an Arab country located in the south of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders Saudi Arabia in the North and Oman in the East. The western and southern part are on the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Constitutionally the capital of Yemen is the city of Sana'a, but due to recent developments, the port city of Aden is the provisional capital.

For the most part of the 20th century, Yemen was divided into North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic), which became independent in 1918 after the Ottoman Empire had dissolved. South Yemen continued to be a British protectorate until 1967. In 1990 the two states formed the Republic of Yemen. In 1990 Ali Abdullah Saleh became the first president. Soon after, the country was confronted by a civil war. In the following two decades the Yemeni people suffered from many violent attacks, especially from Al

Qaeda.

In 2011 Yemeni revolution followed other Arab Spring mass protests. After clashes between the police and rebels, President Saleh fled to Saudi Arabia and began to lose international support. He transferred the office to Vice-President Abdabbuh Mansur Hadi, but he was not able to control the situation either. By 2012, there has been a small amount of U.S. special-operations troops supported by the CIA in Yemen in reaction to violent attacks against the Yemeni population. The government tried to fight the many separatists but was not able to hold them back. In 2014 and 2015 Houthi took over the government in Sana'a with the help of the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and deposed the government of Abdabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Meanwhile a branch of the militant Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) joined together with Al Qaeda and tried to build an Islamic Emirate and after two fails the third attempt appeared to have worked, since the two organizations established governmental structures in their territories. Currently three parties try to control Yemen: The Hadi loyalists, Houthi and Saleh loyalists, and Al Qaeda and ISIL.

But behind the scenes countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia try to use the conflict for their own regional interests; especially the massive intervention by an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia and supported by the United States. Not only is the conflict

very brutal but it also caused the current humanitarian crisis, which affects the whole Yemeni population.

Humanitarian and political solutions are both needed. The United Nations is now urging warring parties in Yemen to give it access to a vast store of grain at the Red Sea Mills facility south of the port of Hudaydah. Able to feed millions for at least a month, the grain from the World Food Program is now at risk of rotting there.

We must call on the U.S. government to use every tool at its disposal (diplomacy, economic influence, and other strategies) to cease U.S. military support of the parties waging war in Yemen, enable aid workers to reach those in need, and promote peace and economic recovery.

To: Donald J. Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, USAID Administrator Mark Green and Members of Congress:

Message: We call on you to use all tools available to the United States to avert further suffering and death in Yemen. Humanitarian officials project that half of the country's population is on the brink of famine, including 5 million children. Yemeni children who manage to survive will live with the devastating impact of malnutrition for the rest of their lives.

The conflict in Yemen must end to prevent further loss of life. We call on our U.S.

BY JOYCE ROTHERMEL

government leaders to: end all U.S. military and intelligence support to the Saudi-led coalition waging war in Yemen.

- Use U.S. influence and leverage in the region to promote peace and responsible economic policies that will enable the Yemeni population to access and afford food and medicine.

- Ensure the humanitarian response in Yemen is fully funded to meet the immediate nutrition needs of Yemen's civilian population.

Let us join in this effort with Bread for the World and many others who are calling on our U.S. government to stop providing support that fuels the war in Yemen and make every effort to end the nation's famine conditions. (Visit www.bread.org/Yemen and sign the petition.)

(Information for this article was sourced from Wikipedia, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (NOCHA), the New York Times, and Bread for the World.)

Joyce Rothermel is a member of the Association of Pittsburgh Priests and the Thomas Merton Center

FIXING BAD POLICY

LOOKING FOR THE HELPERS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

BY SYMONE SAUL

In December of 2018, I observed first-hand the humanitarian crisis at the so-called Texas-Mexico border and found volunteers and activists working outside traditional bureaucratic systems to address long-term and immediate needs. In the Rio Grande Valley, it is not government or major NGOs but individuals and small, informal groups who are making huge waves in people's lives and in protecting our future.

Somi Se'k Village

The indigenous people of Somi Se'k (what we call Texas and Mexico) are known as the Carrizo-Comecrudo tribe, or Esto'k Gna in their language. Juan Mancias, the tribal chairman, is leading efforts to monitor border wall construction, because it will obliterate the natural habitats of endangered species and burial sites on sacred land. The tribe is accomplishing this by developing a series of sustained encampments to physically resist the construction.

The proposed path will travel mainly through private property, including that of the National Butterfly Center and the Ramirez gravesite, near Mission, TX where construction began on February 4th, 2019.

The Carrizo-Comecrudo are welcoming peaceful activists of all backgrounds from around the country to join their

encampments. They are putting their bodies on the line to protect our lands from further destruction and colonization. For them, it is not a matter of choice, but a matter of survival. As Juan often says, "Our existence is our resistance."

Asylum-Seekers in the Rio Grande Valley

Dozens of adults and children, as young as 2 months old, are living under tarps, cot-to-cot, on the Port-of-Entry bridge in Brownsville, TX. As they await their turn to legally request asylum, Team Brownsville brings them dinner and donations every evening. Without Team Brownsville, the migrants would often have no access to food. It is a small operation. People cook meals for Gaby Zavala and her volunteers, who walk the carts of hot, delicious food approximately ten blocks into Mexico to be served to asylum-seekers. She's built relationships with the neighbors she serves. She is able to bring specific donations for new arrivals and learn about the safety issues they face, including monetary and sexual exploitation by the border agents.

After crossing the border (whether between or at a Port of Entry), our neighbors are detained at ICE facilities and some are released, ankle monitors in tow, to a temporary Catholic Charities shelter before being transported to a local bus station. Angry Tias & Abuelas is a volunteer organization that coordinates asylum-

seekers at the Greyhound stations, helping them get safely to their sponsors.

Tornillo Detention Center

Fierce public outcry in 2018 regarding the separation of families led to policy reversals and heightened awareness of children's detention camps, such as the one in Tornillo, Texas. Its largest population in December was around 2800 children. It was built as a temporary facility and has since been shut down. Many people credit the monitoring efforts of Josh Rubin of Witness: Tornillo and many other unaffiliated campers/activists who came to bear historical witness to a site where lack of transparency and Non-Disclosure Agreements were a higher priority than background checks on Direct Care Workers.

As we walked the perimeter of the barbed wire fence, watched closely by security personnel, cameras, and invisible sensors, Mr. Rubin Thomas Wainwright explained that camps like these cost \$700-\$1000 per day per child. It is another type of privately-contracted, for-profit prison. There are hundreds of these camps across the country costing taxpayers over \$3 billion in 2018 alone even though many have compared them to U.S. Internment camps and Nazi concentration camps.

We found a deflated soccer ball in a sewage drain and Josh, who'd been there for

months, said he used to kick the balls back over the fence to the children's delight. The guards' response was to hang opaque black tarpaulin on the fence to detach them completely from the outside world. There are an estimated 14,000 children being detained in immigrant prisons daily in the U.S., a number that was tripled since 2017. We have already seen how much public outcry can make a difference in these children's lives..

Self-determination is all one needs to find practical ways to create an indelible impact and all should feel encouraged to do what is needed in situations that may seem insurmountable or distant to us here in Pittsburgh.

For more information and to support the groups mentioned in this article, visit:

www.facebook.com/SomiSekVillage

www.facebook.com/TeamBrownsville

www.wowfacebook.com/ AngryTiasAndAbuelas

www.catholiccharitiesrgv.org

Symone Saul is a newly-elected board member at the Thomas Merton Center.

TRUMP'S ASSAULT ON PUBLIC SERVICE

BY CHARLES MCCOLLESTER

President Trump's government shutdown was a cheap, tawdry, fear-mongering piece of blackmail designed to assert his will over Congress and possibly impose a shameful border wall, even if it takes diverting money from the military in the name of an imaginary national emergency. It is only the latest and most dramatic result of the 40-year right wing attack on government itself in the name of freeing the capitalist entrepreneurial spirit from all restraint. Trump's fictional border crisis quickly developed into a real one as children were separated from their mothers in a slovenly and vindictive fashion.

The shutdown of the government and threats by President Trump to repeat it if he does not get his way caused direct pain to federal workers and contractors as well as undermined the vital work done by a myriad of agencies that oversee transportation safety and maintenance, worker health and safety, environmental monitoring and protection, food and drug inspections, emergency management, national parks and monuments, education and housing assistance from the federal government, food stamps, veterans assistance, national health researchers and a myriad of other programs that impact state and local government activities as well.

The shutdown was a logical extension of a Republican anti-government agenda that has been cutting social services and desperately needed infrastructure investment for decades in order to transfer

untold wealth to the obscenely wealthy. Using the threat of a shutdown to build an ugly racist wall is only the latest example of an ideological assault on government operations, taxation and regulations that has radically increased economic inequality, pushing a large segment of the middle class into the category of the working poor.

These actions reflect a highly organized movement to unleash the aggressive pursuit of private gain and unlimited accumulation of wealth by a very few, rather than provide for the common defense and promote the general welfare of all. Republicans for decades cloaked their incessant demands for cutting needed social, labor, infrastructure and environmental programs behind a phony concern for the expansion of national and state debt. The total hypocrisy of this ritualistic shedding of crocodile tears over the burden that governmental debt will supposedly place on our grandchildren was revealed when Trump gave massive tax breaks to the rich, pumping up long term debt to fuel a false short term prosperity based on easy money and stock speculation. There was nary a peep out of the legions of once bold deficit hawks.

Government, as discredited and corrupted as it is on many levels, is the main institutional counterbalance to the power of private corporate wealth. Budget cutting and deregulation on the state level reinforces the effect of the Trump assault on federal workers. While

right-wing commentators and think tanks attack the operation of the public sector at all levels as wasteful, their lobbyists work to block regulation, enforcement and funding. While the lobbying arm of the moneyed oligarchy corrupts legislators and thwarts legitimate governmental efforts, their propaganda arm screams about the corruption and ineffectiveness of government as the natural outcome of liberal, collectivist or socialist policies.

Trump has declared a national emergency over the few thousands of ragged refugees from poverty, crime and exploitation gathered at the border. Using such a declaration was tried after Katrina by President George Bush when he attempted to unilaterally reduce the minimum wage for cleanup and restoration efforts. Pushback from Congress forced Bush to reconsider, but Trump's threat to redirect military funding and bypass Congressional funding powers extends his encroachment on legislative appropriations powers. These repeating crises lets him selectively decide who are essential and must work without pay and those that are furloughed and neither work nor get paid until this manufactured crisis or the next one is over.

There are encouraging signs that people are rising in defense of public service. Women and the young are taking the lead. A wave of teacher strikes bubbled up from the bottom, out of the rank and file, and swept across West Virginia, Arizona and Oklahoma. The movement revealed broad public support for public education.

In the recent engineered government shutdown, the public outpouring of gratitude and material support for federal workers at the airports, parks, coast guard and elsewhere working without pay mirrored that for teachers striking for increased state funding for the education of children. The new crop of Democratic presidential challengers are advancing a range of progressive proposals on tax policy to reverse the growth of inequality and enable investment in universal single payer healthcare, public education from preschool to university, and a green new deal.

The spirit of aggressive self-interest stirs up the forces of confusion and division to prevent us from entering into an intense dialogue about the kind of world we are leaving our children and grandchildren. We need radical nonviolent change that bridges the divisions between us: urban-rural; public and private interest; head vs. hand workers; men and women, young and old. More than ever we need a revival of the spirit of compassion and solidarity. The days are lengthening, the sun inches higher on the horizon each day, spring will come!

Charles McCollester is a member of the Battle of Homestead Foundation.

REGULAR MEETINGS

March 2018 EVENTS CALENDAR

Thursday, March 7 - Student Walkout & Rally! International Women's Strike. 3:08 – 5:00pm. Schenley Plaza (4100 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA).

Saturday, March 8 - March & Rally! International Women's Strike: Pittsburgh. 4:00 – 6:00pm. Pittsburgh City-County Building (414 Grant St, Pittsburgh, PA 15219)

Friday, Mar 8 -20 hour Street Medic Training in Pittsburgh. 6:00pm – March 10, 2019, 6:00pm (Register: <https://goo.gl/JPKTRQ>)

Saturday, Mar 9 -20 hour Street Medic Training in Pittsburgh. 6:00pm – March 10, 2019, 6:00pm (Register: <https://goo.gl/JPKTRQ>)

Sunday, March 10 -20 hour Street Medic Training in Pittsburgh. 6:00pm – March 10, 2019, 6:00pm (Register: <https://goo.gl/JPKTRQ>)

Wednesday, March 13 - Monthly Meeting - Pittsburghers for Public Transit. Department-Human Services (1 Smithfield St, Pittsburgh, PA 15222). Repeats every second Wednesday of the month.

Thursday, March 21 - Forging a Feminist Future: Panel of Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commissioners. 1:00 – 2:30pm (JVH, Thayer Hall Point Park University 201 Wood Street, Pittsburgh 15222).

Sunday, March 24 - The Legislative Path to Ending Gun Violence. 10:00am – 12:30pm. Temple Sinai (5505 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15217, USA).

Saturday, March 30 - National Mobilization to Oppose NATO, War and Racism. 1:00 – 6:00pm. (Lafayette Square, Washington, D.C. 1608 H St NW, Washington, D.C. 20006)

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,
Prince of Peace Center, 81 South 13th St.,
Southside, 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
Black Political Empowerment Project
Second Tuesday of the Month, Hill House Association, 2nd Floor, 1835 Centre Ave. 6pm.

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
Every Wednesday, 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

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