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where does freedom begin?

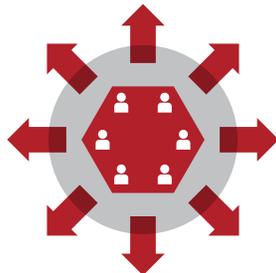
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PHOTO BY HANBIT KWON

some of slumlord Ajay Raju's Tom Ford shoes cost up to

\$12,000

per pair



according to the University of Wisconsin's Center for Co-operatives, over 30,000 co-ops account for more than \$500 billion in revenue, employing nearly 1 million people



Philadelphia's suburbs have seen a greater percentage increase in people living in poverty between 2000 and 2011, with an increase of 25.9% in the city and 39.7% in the suburbs, according to The Brookings Institute

Base-Building:

Activist Networking or Organizing the Unorganized?

by Tim Horras
July 20, 2017



Philadelphia Tenants' Union members confront wealthy slumlord Ajay Raju of Cross Properties, which is behind the mass eviction of Penn Wynn tenants in the Wynnefield section of West Philadelphia.

PHOTO BY STEPHANIE OLECHOWSKA

The dominant left-wing political forms of our present moment are either amorphous “movements” without formal structures, or nongovernmental organizations (also known as nonprofits or NGOs). Radicals should reject both of these options and form explicitly political organizations (anarchist, Marxist, socialist, communist, whatever).

Socialists should not be afraid to take on organizing work which overlaps with organizing currently being undertaken by the NGOs. But instead of “tailing” the activity of liberal NGOs by providing volunteers for their efforts, we should carry out this work under our own banner: the banner of socialism.

Instead of “subsuming” or “liquidating” our work into the amorphous “movement,” we should found political centers which engage in community and workplace organizing, while simultaneously participating in standard leftist activities such as protests and political education.

The task of radicals, at present must be digging in deep to the class, going “to the masses,” building long-term relationships with layers of oppressed and working class people, and organizing in our neighborhoods and workplaces. This is the punishing, demoralizing grind work that activists prefer to avoid, but it constitutes the only way forward.

One major strategic error of the Left in the past several decades has been using a method of analysis which we might refer to as “issue-ism.” The idea here is that among struggles against imperialist foreign policy, against police brutality, in support of LGBTQ rights or workers rights, etc. we can choose to embrace one while rejecting another. Deeply-rooted social contradictions are treated as though they were consumer choices, which might be mixed and matched based on our personal preferences, as one might put different items from a grocery store into a grocery cart.

Most activists who have engaged in single-issue work come to understand the limitations of this sort of politics. The majority of activists either repudiate active political struggle entirely, or break toward reformism. Among more experienced political actors, there is another path which we also regard as an error: that is to imagine that combining some or all of the issues into a giant progressive coalition will lead to liberation.

Many look to a “movement of movements” strategy, holding out hope that uniting all progressive struggles together will somehow add up to more than the sum of its parts. However, despite its long-standing and generally untheorized popularity on the left, this strategy has produced little in the way of material gains for the working class.

The “movement of movements” strategy has historically been prone to rightist and leftist deviations. The rightist error (and the most common outcome) of a “Rainbow Coalition” is overtly or covertly corraling the social movements into the quagmire of the Democratic Party. The leftist deviation can be called “activist networking.”

Activist networking is what might be called lifestyle activism, in the sense of individuals who form their identity around being an activist and derive the majority of their social life from activism. These are the type of people who do not engage with, are not comfortable around and are not friends with non-activists or non-theory types, and whose weekly and monthly schedules are a busybody itinerary of meetings, discus-

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We Don't Ask Nicely for What's Ours

How revolutionaries can use reform demands to build power

by **Suzy Subways**
July 20, 2017

When you're ready to get rid of capitalism, gender oppression and white supremacy, what do you do? How do we make revolution? Well, the first thing to know is you can't do it alone. It takes massive numbers of working class and oppressed people. So how do we start building?

Power outside the system

Some revolutionary organizing builds a base of counter-power outside the system, by meeting oppressed people's needs independently. This can start small, like with a garden in a vacant lot to grow vegetables for a neighborhood dealing with poverty. It can be daring and life-saving, like the Jane Collective in Chicago in the early 70s, feminists who learned to perform safe abortions before they were legal. And it can build until it's strong enough to challenge the state—a goal revolutionaries call dual power. In Zapatista communities, indigenous people run their own free society with schools, farming, water systems, and health centers, where the Mexican government is no longer in charge.

While building counter-power, we also have to fight the state—we can't just ignore it and hope it'll go away. By "the state," I'm not talking about Pennsylvania, but the institutions the ruling class uses to stay in power, like the government, military and police. We're not strong enough yet to smash the state or take state power in order to end capitalism and all the other isms. But there are ways to win things we can use to build our power, so we can get strong enough to make revolution.

Fighting together for the territory of freedom

This is where reform struggles come in. We can demand immediate improvements in our lives that the state, landlords, and corporations can make happen because they have power over us. The danger is, it becomes tempting to just hope politicians and such will fix things, instead of imagining a world where the ruling class doesn't have power over us—and creating a strategy to fight for that world. Sometimes grassroots activists move into government positions, nonprofit leadership or public speaking roles that separate them from their community. Poor and working class movements can be co-opted and become reformist, only demanding reforms that don't challenge the state or capitalism. Instead, we have to build our collective power outside of and against the system.

Movements win reforms by using our social power. Politicians answer to big business nearly 100% of the time, but when working class and oppressed people organize a strong enough base, we can make them answer to us instead. This is because politicians are only in power over us due to the fact that we allow them

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A primary school in the Zapatista village of Oventic, in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico.

PHOTO BY MR. THEKLAN. SHARED WITH CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION-SHAREALIKE 2.0.

to be. It's our job to fight them until we can get strong enough to take their power back.

The Repeal Coalition in Arizona, for example, fights for reforms that actually take power away from the state. Their motto is, "Fight for the Freedom to Live, Love, and Work anywhere you please! Repeal ALL anti-immigrant legislation NOW!" Like the feminist demand to repeal all laws related to abortion, this demand stakes a claim for oppressed people to have autonomy over our own bodies and survival. It makes clear that the government is doing more harm than good, instead of demanding more laws. This clarity makes it easier to build a base of revolutionary struggle among people impacted by the laws. It's no surprise that the Repeal Coalition was started by Bring the Ruckus, a revolutionary organization that built toward a dual power strategy.

revolutionaries are made, not born

Philadelphia anti-prison organizer Layne Mullett criticizes reformist demands in her article, "Brick by Brick: Creating a World Without Prisons," published by the Institute for Anarchist Studies. She observes, "Many anti-death penalty organizations are supporters of Life Without Parole (LWOP) sentencing, based on the idea that people will only accept an end to the death penalty if LWOP is a sentencing option." But this demand just gives power to the state by keeping people in prison the rest of their lives. If you want to abolish prisons entirely, you need to make demands that are a step toward abolition. "In Decarcerate PA, we talk a lot about using language that is 'abolition compatible,'" Mullett writes. Decarcerate PA is an all-volunteer group that in-

cludes organizers who used to be in prison. So when they get people released, it can directly build the movement's power.

How about the demand for a guaranteed income that poor and working class people could live on whether employed or not? Imagine being able to organize full-time because the state provided an income when capitalism can't provide jobs. Currently, AIDS activists who are too sick to work are able to live on disability checks that were won by the demands of their own movement and others. This means they can organize for a few hours a week, fighting for more. Healthcare, freedom from prison, a home—we can see all these victories as territory that poor and working class people have won, like the mountains and farmlands that guerrilla fighters win in their battles against the state. Winning demands can win territory where people can organize, build, and bring in new people to the fight. From there, we get stronger and win more territory.

From the particular to the massive

Organizers build relationships of trust by going with people to their eviction hearings, visiting them in prison, blocking vans trying to deport them—making their isolated struggles the job of all oppressed people to fight, together. This is how we take on systems like capitalism and racism. Chris Dixon explores this work in his book Another Politics, about the anti-authoritarian current of revolutionary organizing. "We rarely fight ruling systems as abstractions," he writes. "Instead, we have to take on such systems through the specific ways—such as poverty, criminalization, debt, sexual violence, and workplace exploitation—in which they manifest themselves in people's day-to-day lives."

Fortunately, these ground zeroes are the most powerful places to fight. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward wrote in their groundbreaking book Poor People's Movements about

bureaucrats attempting to co-opt welfare recipients by encouraging them to lobby far-away politicians. "But welfare clients cannot easily go to the state or national capital, and when a few do, they are of course ignored," Piven and Cloward wrote. "Sometimes, however, they can disrupt relief offices, and that is harder to ignore." A crowd of angry poor women loudly occupying a welfare office can use their collective power to take control—although maybe just temporarily—of a space where the state routinely humiliates them.

While Piven and Cloward weren't necessarily writing from a revolutionary perspective, their research is useful for building revolutionary strategy. Oppressed people in those moments of defiance get a palpable sense of what a free society could feel like—and an awareness that we could run things better ourselves. This is what Chris Dixon means when he writes about "fighting for reforms so as to point beyond them."

Revolutionary consciousness and strategy

In 2009, Picture the Homeless, a New York City group led by homeless people, wrote collectively in Left Turn magazine, "In the best of all worlds, reform can help us figure out what the revolution will look like—if we use the process of winning reform to illuminate what it is that we want and what it is going to take to get it."

What will it take to get what we want? The Black Panther Party brilliantly revealed this with their 10-Point Program. Full employment, reparations, land, bread, housing, honest education, justice and peace—these could not be won without overthrowing capitalism and ending white supremacy. With every painful loss, and even when we win, we see how tiny our demands are compared to how much we all need to survive and live in dignity. Witnessing and experiencing the ways those in power ignore, ridicule and attempt to crush movements with violence is pretty intense. Anyone who participates in fights that can't be won under the present systems can see that the state doesn't serve the people—it's just in the way.

Oppressed people can only become revolutionaries when we stop thinking the current systems are legitimate and start believing we can actually change things. So to build for revolution, our day-to-day strategies have to delegitimize the state and build oppressed people's belief in our collective power. As Amy Sonnie and James Tracy write in their book Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power, about the poor and working class organizers they interviewed, "These people proved, again and again, that revolutionaries are made, not born. And that organizing, when sustained, transforms both lives and conditions." Reform demands, along with institutions of counter-power, can bring a revolutionary future into collective imagination if they're part of a vision and strategy. 🇺🇸



Members of the Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration sing and shout out the names of their loved ones doing life in prison without parole, in the state capitol building in Harrisburg last fall.

PHOTO BY SUZY SUBWAYS

Inauguration protesters face decades in prison

by Danielle Corcione

July 20, 2017



On January 20, 2017, Americans from all different backgrounds came together to disrupt President-Elect Donald Trump's inauguration on Capitol Hill. It's safe to say there were significantly more people resisting (outside of ceremony boundaries) than supporting the new administration. This estimate was later confirmed by the Washington Post's bird's eye view photos, which compared Trump's small crowd to those at both of Obama's inaugurations.

A day before the Women's March, Washington, D.C. activists organized #DisruptJ20, which brought together anti-capitalists and anti-fascists from all different leftist backgrounds. Particularly, those utilizing the black bloc tactic—who often wear all black and cover their faces to protect their identities—contributed to property damage and destruction. A parked limousine was set on fire shortly before President Trump's swearing-in ceremony. Property destruction dominated mainstream media narratives—though it only represented a small fraction of the entire day of action—and outlets failed to mention successful blockades that kept many Trump supporters from using certain entrances to the inauguration area.

It was at the anti-capitalist, anti-fascist

"black bloc" march that law enforcement (using pepper spray, flash grenades and other crowd-control tools) arrested over 200 demonstrators that day. Numbers vary among corporate media outlets. CNN reported 217, but the Washington Post reported 230; many, including the New York Times, simply stated "over 200." Nearly every account mentioned six police officers were injured—usually before they mentioned how many arrests were made.

The Defend J20 Resistance reports: "The arrests were made by use of a 'kettle' technique of individuals on the corners of L and 12th Street, without orders to disperse. 214 of these arrestees were charged under the Federal Riot Statute."

Protesters are facing up to 75 years in jail, according to Democracy Now!: "While most of the protesters were already charged with felony rioting, the new charges also include inciting or urging to riot, conspiracy to riot and multiple counts of destruction of property." Additionally, ThinkProgress reports D.C. cops "sought physical and emotional retribution on the hundreds of people kettled" and also used "rape as punishment."

Additionally, journalists covering the demonstrations were arrested. CNN reports

Santa Fe Reporter staff writer Aaron Cantú was indicted on eight different charges in June, including two felonies under the Riot Act. The Riot Act was originally passed in Massachusetts in 1786 in response to Shay's Rebellion, an armed resistance against economic and civil rights injustices. The demonization and criminalization of protests as riots would later be worked into the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Cantú's charges alarm writers and journalists like myself, who could soon become vulnerable to incrimination while covering protests.

Local Philadelphia organizations, including LAVA Space, A-Space, and Bindlestiff Books, have since fundraised on behalf of the J20 Defendants. **To support the Philly J20 Solidarity Financial Support Fund, visit: everribbon.com/ribbon/view/62860.**

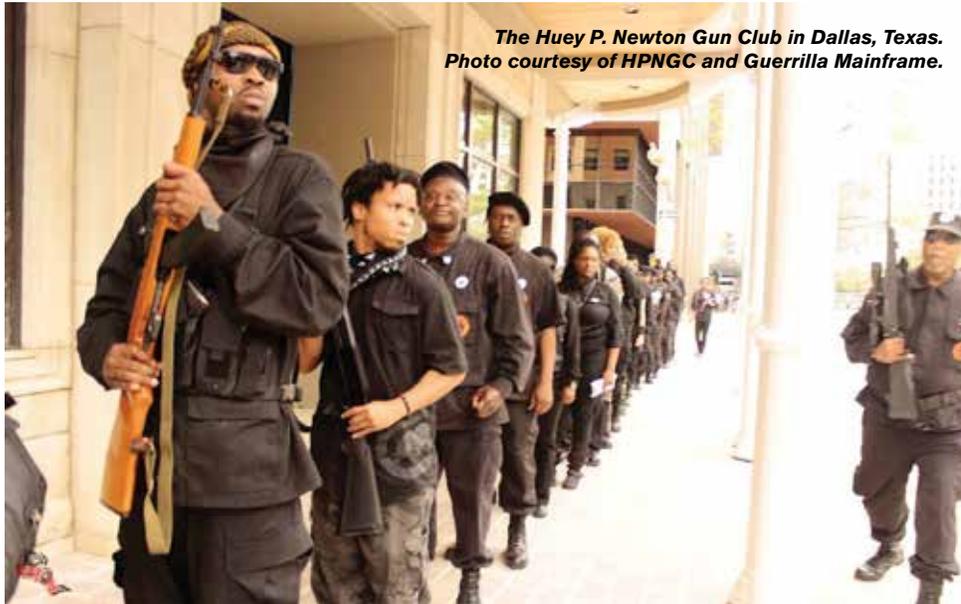
What recent events will echo similar legislation that limit the people's right to assemble? Combined with a Day Without Women, a Day Without Immigrants, and the airport protests in response to 45's Muslim ban, state legislatures have pushed towards criminalizing protests. The Hill reports North Dakota has signed four laws to stiffen fines for protesters, further oppressing Native water protectors at Standing Rock. South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Michigan, and Arizona have been working on similar measures, such as granting immunity to a driver who runs over protesters.

This isn't the first time demonstrations have been criminalized. We can attribute our country's political progresses to yesterday's protesters, pushing the boundaries of their time: the Civil Rights movement, the Stonewall riots, the Boston Tea Party, the Ferguson uprising—the list goes on as the fight against the ruling class continues. 🇺🇸



Armed and revolutionary

By Gene Patrick
July 20, 2017



The Huey P. Newton Gun Club in Dallas, Texas. Photo courtesy of HPNGC and Guerrilla Mainframe.

Hate crimes and the formation of armed hate groups are on the rise in this country. The left, people of color, and LGBTQ and Jewish communities have reacted in a seemingly unexpected way: they're arming themselves. After Trump's election win, traditionally liberal areas saw a spike in gun sales when nationwide sales were expected to go down. Leftist groups like the Huey P. Newton Gun Club, the John Brown Gun Club, and the Socialist Rifle Association have seen a surge in membership. How much of this is fear of far right terror and how much is a fear of a dystopian future? Was this election result a call to arms? Only for people who have been put to sleep by liberalism for the past eight years. Considering establishment liberalism's modern emphasis on gun control, the idea of the left embracing firearms might seem like something new. It is not, and exploring why highlights one of the many differences between leftists and liberals.

Let's take a step back in time to the 1960s. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale created one of the most revolutionary groups in American history: the Black Panthers. One of the Panthers' core tenets was arming communities of color and protecting them from police brutality. There are many gun control laws still on the books to-

day that were instituted as retaliation against the Panthers arming themselves; the white establishment loved open-carry laws until people of color started to carry too. The systematic suppression, smearing, and frivolous prosecution of the Black Panthers by the government are clear evidence of what the establishment fears. They fear empowerment. By providing meals and schools that the government wouldn't, by grassroots organizing to stop gentrification, by teaching young black men they don't have to be afraid of brutality, the panthers became too powerful to ignore.

When being killed in the streets and denied equal rights in an oppressive system, taking up arms was not just a revolutionary act but a necessary one.

Let's take a step even further back to the 1940s. One of socialism's most prominent writers, George Orwell, was a believer in the necessity of a free country to be armed. Orwell was a fierce anti-fascist and even volunteered to fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War. He did so at the cost of great personal injury from a sniper's bullet through the neck, thankfully surviving but losing much of his voice. As a lifelong socialist, with anarchist leanings, Orwell had this to say: "That rifle on the wall of the labourer's

cottage or working class flat is the symbol of democracy. It is our job to see that it stays there." Orwell understood that monopoly of violence in the hands of the state is anathema to a free democratic society. As often as this quote is cited by gun activists on the right, it's important to not take it too far out of context. The quote was delivered while Orwell was discussing the formation of a home guard to repel fascists in England, whether they be domestic or European invaders.

Now let's fast forward to the present. This idea of an anti-fascist armed guard or militia has manifested in an entity called the Redneck Revolt. Their name is a nod to the armed workers' rebellion in 1920s West Virginia. They're a syndicate of armed groups, usually in the form of a John Brown Gun Club chapter, popping up in many states all over the country, including right here in Pennsylvania.

They work to keep poor, working class, Jewish and LGBTQ communities and communities of color safe by teaching armed defense and the principles of mutual aid. Redneck Revolt routinely protects counter-protesters at hate rallies and stops cross burnings. This is vital direct action to stop the rising wave of white nationalism. White nationalist hate groups are forming political parties, running campaigns, and forming armed "defense forces" all across the country, especially in the South. Without groups like Redneck Revolt, who will be there to protect the most vulnerable among us? The police? We all know better than that; we have to defend ourselves. Mutual aid is our only way forward.

To be blunt, the hope for an America without guns or any sort of meaningful gun control is naive at best and dangerously delusional at worst. In terms of guns and ammunition stockpiles, the far right has us beat by 10 country miles. This is a very dangerous side of the ratio to be on in a world of increasing fascism, xenophobia, economic instability, and environmental catastrophe. Arming yourself and your community is a revolutionary act and always has been. Consider contacting a local gun club and signing up for a firearms course, whether it's the John Brown Gun Club, the Socialist Rifle Association, the Huey P. Newton Gun Club or any other—I know I will. 🇺🇸



Corruption Amidst a Housing Crisis

By Maddie Rose

July 20, 2017



“Philly? Corrupt? I’m so shocked!” Every Philadelphian seems to respond to new government scandals with only dripping sarcasm. It isn’t a lack of concern—it’s just that discovering corruption seems another part of daily life in Philly. Scandals aren’t even scandalous, and being charged with a crime doesn’t often keep politicians from successfully running for re-election. The line between “corruption” and business as normal is fairly thin when the power is mapped out and money sources are traced. Yet while many politicians offer little more than profit-induced bureaucratic incompetence, some are wrapped up into scandals so outlandish they can only be managed by people with a little too much money and power.

Many of these all-too-common corruption stories are made possible because our city council has what is considered to be one of the strongest legislative powers in the country. It’s called the “councilmanic prerogative,” and it holds a firm control over what land is bought and sold throughout the city. The prerogative isn’t even an official power but an unwritten tradition—one that no city council member would dare block by another, and one that has functioned unquestioned for many decades.

Usually each potential buyer to land owned by the government must compete, where the highest bidder wins. The city makes money, the taxpayers (maybe) benefit, done. But through this power, any city council member may sell the property to whomever they want for land market value—often much lower than the bidding price, especially in gentrifying areas. This is done through placing a hold on the land, and negotiating individually with the interested buyer.

Hypothetically, it has the potential to offer relief in suffering neighborhoods. Representatives for each district have more control over who can build in that area and offer cheaper land, such that affordable housing can be built. The power is intended to be used to block projects that seem against the interests of the district (though historically, few have ever been

blocked). It also allows for low-income housing and to improve the quality of the projects that are built.

In practice, it’s a little messier. And nobody serves as a better example for the messiness of councilmanic power than Kenyatta Johnson, whose practices were thrust into the spotlight after being sued by the former opponent for his city council seat, Ori Feibush. Feibush is a notorious developer in the area who claims his attempts to purchase property were being blocked by Johnson as retribution. As the proceedings begun, suddenly data started emerging about Johnson’s use of the prerogative. The data was revealing enough to prompt an FBI investigation.

As the FBI probed into just how land was distributed in Philadelphia, inquisitive voices questioned the nature of the properties Johnson sold. Journalist William Bender of the Daily News noted that many properties were being sold as market-rate, luxury homes that were certainly not affordable to even the average renter. One luxury home built had a jacuzzi, roof deck and built-in speakers. (The developer, Frank Kumas, had contributed \$8,500 to Johnson’s campaign.) Another developer, Anthony Merlino, also purchased below-market-rate property through Johnson (promptly donating to his campaign fund a week later). Many of the homes are listed for over \$400,000—a particularly unique definition of “affordable.”

That most of Johnson’s campaign donors are real estate developers is not unusual for a city council member. His donor records reek of zoning and land-use attorneys, real estate associates, and just about anyone likely to profit from land distribution. Topping the list is the design planner for Montgomery County Planning Commission, Kevin Chavous. \$2,000 each came from the Zuritskys, father and son (and President and CEO, respectively) of Parkway Corporation, which dominates real estate and parking garages in Philadelphia. Bart Blatstein, CEO of Tower Developments, offered \$5,000. The same Tower Developments that owns Tower

Place Living, a hotel-style living luxury building with a game room, theatre, yoga studio and fitness center.

Other donations to the Johnson campaign come from even shadier places. The Chief of Staff of Chakah Fattah made a sizable contribution not long before Fattah was sentenced to 10 years in prison for fraud and money laundering. Johnson was intimately involved in Fattah’s election campaign and a friend of Fattah’s. “Friends of Blondell Reynolds Brown” is another major contributor—Brown being another city council member who has previously been found guilty of taking illegal loans from Fattah. Whatever you make of Johnson, he seems to know how to pick his friends. And his friends sure know how to distribute money and property.

The councilmanic power Johnson exploits was recently investigated in a Pew Charitable Trust report that sought to determine how land is really regulated. The report found that of the six Philly City Council members who have faced convictions since 1980, control of city land played a role in—surprise—every single case. Which isn’t particularly shocking, considering that this practice routinely takes place behind closed doors. Public records are not generally documented or kept, and the information that has been disclosed has only surfaced through right-to-know form submissions. Bender claims that developers discuss privately how some council members are known to use prerogative to thank political supporters and incentivize campaign contributions.

These practices are likely only the surface of the city council’s dirty laundry. Johnson was the unlucky one whose data was revealed (so far; stay tuned) and even then, few paid attention. We’re used to scandal here. But for a man who campaigned on promises to grow neighborhoods by “supporting affordable housing options,” it seems likely the people of his district are suffering from a lack of low-income housing—unless you’re a buddy of Johnson’s. *

Building a New Economy From Below: Cooperatives and Revolution

by Sasha Berkman

July 20, 2017

To condemn the capitalist mode of production is a simple enough thing, especially for those who bear the brunt of its horrors. The challenge is to begin to imagine serious alternatives, ones that sustainably address both our current economic and social inequities. For those concerned with overcoming capitalism the solution must include two components. It must include a 'survival' aspect to address immediate needs (of hunger, homelessness, and unemployment) and simultaneously blueprint sustainable alternatives for the future. That is it will need to build both defensively and offensively, for present and for future. Radicals and anti-capitalists have through theory, principle, and finally experimentation answered this call in a number of ways. To some it has looked like a heavily centralized "state" structure to put resources where they are needed (think Cuba), while others have sought to disperse economic power to localities, communes, and workers councils (think revolutionary Spain). In the face of the overwhelming push for privatization of U.S. society, communities have begun to embrace co-operatives as the building blocks of an alternative, egalitarian economy.

Co-operatives: An Overview

A co-operative, according to the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), is defined as a business, "...owned and run by and for their members...[who] have an equal say in what the business does and a share in the profits." More than this though a co-operative is defined by its values of "...self-help, self-responsibility, democra-

cy, equality, equity and solidarity." This stands in contrast to a for-profit business' strict hierarchy, authoritarianism, and production of alienation.

Co-operatives are not minor players either. According to the ICA there are over 2.6 million co-ops worldwide with about 1 billion members. The ICA estimates that the 300 largest co-ops had a turnover of \$2 trillion in 2014. In the U.S., according to the University of Wisconsin Center for Co-operatives, over 30,000 co-ops account for more than \$500 billion in revenue, employing nearly 1 million people. These range from retail stores to healthcare, entertainment to education, and transportation to credit unions.

Academic studies have also lent evidence the viability and successes of co-operatives. A 2016 study in the Journal of Labor and Society concluded that co-ops, "are neither quaint anachronisms nor utopian fantasies: they are real, viable economic alternatives, with both economic muscle and idealistic soul." They point to the relatively equal level of 'productivity' compared to private enterprises, more stable employment (especially in the face of economic crises), and higher levels of work satisfaction among worker-owners and less "alienation." The study also notes the mounting evidence of a *democratic spillover effect* (my term), where worker-owners develop a political consciousness that extends outside the co-op into the community, both national and international. The study also highlights important challenges facing co-operatives, primarily tied to the bourgeois class' hesitancy to lend capital to co-operatives

(they are not, it seems, foolish enough to bankroll their own successor). It should also be noted that a co-operative in and of itself does not make a revolution, and can risk becoming isolated and eventually defunct.

In order for cooperatives to successfully bridge the divide between surviving presently and supplanting capitalism entirely, innovative strategies will have to be created. The authors of the above study highlight linkages between organized labor and worker co-operatives as one potential strategy to overcome the otherwise limited influence of co-ops. They point specifically to Resolution 27, unanimously passed by the United Steel Workers in 2014, establishing a partnership with Mondragon (a federation of Spanish worker co-operatives, including some 70-80,000 worker-owners) to help establish unionized, worker owned co-operatives in the U.S. and Canada (you can also learn more about this effort at their website, 1.worker.1.vote.org). While such efforts are encouraging, they may falter unless a keen awareness is developed for confronting the intersecting oppressions upon which our society and economy are built: racism, patriarchy, ableism, etc. The above study notes that while the resolution is exciting, connections between organized labor and co-operatives have existed in the past and fizzled out.

New avenues must be explored then to craft dynamic solutions to old and new problems. Such promising cases exist at the grassroots both within the U.S. and abroad, unique to their historical and material circumstances. I will examine two such cases.

Co-operatives for Civil Rights and Autonomy

In Jackson, Mississippi, a city named for infamous racist/genocidaire Andrew Jackson, a grassroots movement, Cooperation Jackson, has emerged attempting to build a "solidarity economy...anchored in co-operatives and other worker owned, democratically self-managed enterprises". In language reminiscent of the Black Panthers and Black Lives Matter, they posit that the only time black lives 'mattered' in the U.S. was when they were in bondage. Since the economic system has remained essentially unchanged since those days (profiteers of slavery were never made to pay reparations) to 'matter' in such a system is utterly undesirable. Co-founder of Cooperation Jackson, Kali Akuno, boils it down to this equation: the more value (profits) black labor produces, the more they are valued, the less value (profits) the less they are valued, and when they are unprofitable they are easily discarded. Echoing Martin Luther King's



PHOTO COURTESY COOPERATION JACKSON



YPJ Fighters photo by Biji Kurdistan.

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concerns that black people in the US were “integrating into a burning house.”

Cooperation Jackson proposes a mass movement that incorporates building social projects while also seeking independent and transformative economic development. Akuno goes on to say these projects must be independent of state and capital, democratically and worker owned initiatives that empower the community to address social, economic, and material needs; ranging from community self-defense to community farms. A core objective for the organization is the supplanting of the economic system of capitalism, highlighting the threat of incorporation into the ‘burning house.’ These initiatives also expose the unique structural inequities of the American settler-colonial project and the mix of social liberation and anti-capitalism that it will take to create a true alternative economy.

Cooperation Jackson has established the *Chokwe Lumumba Center for Economic Democracy* and Development a community center that includes health and wellness programs, and a community garden called the ‘Freed Farms Co-operative.’ They have begun buying plots of land to establish farm co-operatives in an attempt to decommodify (i.e. make it a public good) as much land as possible to counter gentrification. They are currently fundraising for a factory and have plans for such ambitious projects as a construction co-operative, housing co-operative, waste management/recycling co-operative, and an arts and culture co-operative. Though these may seem like ambitious goals, the recent election of Chokwe Lumumba, Jr. (for whose father the community center is named) to mayor of Jackson, partially due to grassroots campaigning from Cooperation Jackson, means the group may have an ally in office. Lumumba has promised to make Jackson, “the most radical city on the planet”. Ambition and courage are paying off.

Co-operatives for Democracy and Women’s Emancipation

Across the world, in the midst of war-ravaged Syria, an ongoing social revolution in the mountains of Rojava is putting into form similar ideas. The economic system is being established along the principles of *Democratic Confederalism*: direct democracy, feminism, and ecology. In keeping with these principles, the economy is being set up to “augment the resources of the society instead of exploiting them, and in a way that satisfies the society’s multitude of needs.” Dubbed the ‘social economy’ by the Kurds, its primary goals are neighborhood control of resources, supporting the natural environment, and creating a strong infrastructure; to fuse the social body and the economic one.

Once the Assad regime retreated or was forced out, the Kurds redistributed the land to the smallest form of its new democratic *corpus*, the commune (or the neighborhood, typically consisting of 100-500 households). At these neighborhood assemblies, individuals propose co-operatives, and they are voted on by these assemblies. This process has been stunningly detailed in the recent book, *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women’s Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan* (Pluto Press, 2016). The authors note that in regard to co-operatives, “diversity blossoms, with co-operatives being built for bread-baking, textile production, sewing and alterations, cheese-making and other dairy production, growing peanuts and lentils, and selling cleaning materials.”

Many challenges still remain. For generations the Kurdish population was treated as a cancer requiring ‘excision’ by the Ba’ath party, under President Hafez al Assad they pursued an ‘Arab Belt’ policy seeking to push Kurds off the border between Turkey and Syria and resettle Arab farmers there. Proving partially unsuccessful they instead economically underdeveloped the region, what the authors regard as ‘quasi-co-

lonialism’. The region was forced to produce only monoculture crops (primarily cotton and wheat, so much so that the northeast canton of Cizire produced 50% of all Syrian wheat) with no ability to process those raw goods. With Assad gone (for the moment) and land in the hands of the people, they have been able to diversify and have begun to produce for themselves based on their needs and desires, as determined by principle and the neighborhood commune.

In an attempt to overcome patriarchal restrictions, the Kurds in Rojava have emphasized women’s emancipation as a primary principle. Prior to the revolution, Kurdish women had faced, as they describe it, the double oppression of being Kurds (an oppressed minority in Syria) and women being de facto dependents of their husbands. Women in the region faced economic isolation as well as being subjected to honor killings, underage marriage, and domestic abuse. Spearheaded by the Kurdish federation of women’s movements, ‘Kongreya Star,’ they declare there can be no truly free society without the liberation of women. “In every council, every commission, every leadership position, every court, women must make up at least a 40%.” This also includes independent women’s committees, militias (the now-famous YPJ), and women’s co-operatives.

Five years in the people of Rojava are attempting to, in the face of crushing economic sanctions and Daesh terror, establish an ecological and democratic industry to meet economic and social needs.

Co-operative Future

While co-operatives offer many advantages, demystifying them will be as important as building them practically into our lives and movements. The trees cannot be lost for the forest, the inspiring examples set by Cooperation Jackson and the Kurdish people of Rojava offer models of how co-ops can be integrated into broader social fabrics. They lend evidence to the power of a thorough and intersectional politics, that the economic conversation must happen alongside the social one and the political one. While co-ops can be humanizing and powerful in their own right they cannot fully supplant exploitation and oppression (inherent in capitalism) in isolation. But they are also more than a band-aid solution to a chronic disease.

Our thinking will have to engage with the material conditions around us while also exposing and upending the illegitimate hierarchies of patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, etc. This must be as inherent as the function of the co-operative itself. Like the women’s lentil co-operatives of Rojava, economic independence will have to be interlinked with social liberation. Otherwise co-operatives risk becoming passive bystanders to violence of capitalism. It will have to be asked of us: are co-operatives the means or the ends in themselves? While ultimately the ends are unknowable we must build them consciously. In other words, the *means* must be pregnant with the ideas of the *ends*. 🇺🇸

The Need for a Socialist Sprawl

by James Lyuh

July 20, 2017

Over this year, Philly Socialists has helped launch two branches: Bucks County Socialists (BCS) and Montgomery County Socialists (MCS). While these branches are self-governing, Philly Socialists has extended our support and resources. Philly Socialists has limited capacity and faces many projects, so it is worthwhile to discuss whether we should commit resources and cadre to supporting suburban organizing. In an attempt to understand the concrete situation of the suburbs, let us address two common characterizations of suburbs: “suburbs are wealthy or upper-middle class” and “suburbs are too dispersed to effectively build organizations.”

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In its report *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America* (2013), the Brookings Institute published its finding that *the overwhelming majority of America's poor live in suburbs, not cities*. The migration of poor and working-class people into the suburbs is complicated. Many arrived during the period of “white flight,” when white families left cities as black families moved in and federal money subsidized the creation of whites-only suburbs. Many were also immigrants, responding to a growing demand for their labor. Many were simply those who were too poor to continue living in cities; rent had become too high to access quality schools and safe neighborhoods.

Alongside the long-standing de-industrialization of many towns, the Great Recession devastated booming suburbs, pulling the economic base out from under the poor and immigrant workers who had moved to the suburbs. These economic crises brought into poverty members of the middle class and those who had managed to climb out of poverty during the suburban boom.

However, it is not simply a matter of expanding poverty. Suburban poverty is fundamentally different from urban poverty. While neoliberal austerity programs in the 1990s and 2000s led by both Republicans and Democrats have gutted social welfare programs, the original construction of the social safety net focused on inner-city neighborhoods and isolated rural areas where poverty rates were the highest. The location of the remaining social safety net

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infrastructure—transportation, free health clinics, homeless shelters—does not match current needs. The meager resources that the poor typically can turn to are not in the suburbs.

It is this economic situation to which Philly Socialists can respond. While rich suburbs exist, so do poor ones. Our task is to build an infrastructure that can improve the lives of the poor and oppressed, independently from the state and a defunct political system, both in and outside Philadelphia.

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Dispersion is a real, serious problem. In our experience with BCS and MCS, we have found that within a single town there are few socialists. Moreover, the quantity of socialists in a town might not match the opportunities for socialist organizing there. Without established means of communication, news about a socialist gathering or opportunities for organizing in one town might never reach another. What needs to occur is cross-county coordination; however, in the absence of any pre-existing coordinating structure, the obstacles to starting an organization can be insurmountable for a small number of isolated cadre.

Philly Socialists can provide the resources and coordinating base from which suburban socialists can begin. Over the years, we have developed an infrastructure of experienced cadre and supported by monthly dues. Given access to these resources, suburban socialists can begin the outreach work to coordinate among isolated socialists and begin work that can provide the basis for a self-sustaining branch.

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Why should we direct cadre and resources towards uncertain prospects in the suburbs rather than existing, and often growing, city work? Supporting autonomous organization may sap our resources without our partner organization being able to reciprocate our support for a long time. However, we should never forget the scope of our mission. The aim of Philly Socialists is not to build the strongest organization in Philadelphia, but to support an international movement.

Part of this mission is building a mass party of the working class. This does not mean our task *today* is to coordinate every suburban socialist or the entirety of the working class. We are not in a position to do this. However, we are working towards being in that position, through national coordination work and base-building in Philadelphia. Instead, we must establish the infrastructure that *enables* us to build a party that can reach into the entirety of the working class.

We cannot claim to be building a working-class party, if that party stops at the outskirts of our cities. It is clear that substantial barriers existed that stymied the efforts of past organizers. However, with a strong city-base to lean on, suburban socialists can renew their efforts on a far stronger footing. As our movement grows, this is a crucial experiment with important outcomes. Many cities have socialist organizations, and it is time that we think about how we can organically spread and support the efforts of comrades beyond our normal stomping grounds. 🇺🇸



PHOTO COURTESY BUCKS COUNTY SOCIALISTS

People's Congress of Resistance

by Danielle Corcione

July 20, 2017

How can the resistance sustain itself through grassroots organizing? Unity through democratic resistance.

"The two major parties have proven to be unwilling to make significant changes, socially and economically, that would benefit regular working class people," says Adiah Hicks, member of the local chapter of the Party for Socialism and Liberation. "I believe that the People's Congress of Resistance will give more agency to working class people who have to deal with the fallout from out of touch politicians making policies that only serve the wealthy. It will also allow people to organize a national resistance to the onslaught of terrible policies put forth by the current administration."

The People's Congress of Resistance, a two-day conference dedicated to real and authentic representation in organizing, hopes to bring together our country's underrepresented leaders, such as those within immigrant families vulnerable to ICE raids; Native, Black, Muslim-American, and LGBTQ communities; the environmental, feminist, and anti-war movements; the healthcare and education industries; and impoverished Midwestern and Appalachian communities.

The conference will take place on Saturday, September 16 and Sunday, September 17 at Howard University in Washington, DC. Local organizers and activists hope to bring back better strategies and new ideas to Philadelphia after the weekend of democratic unity.

"We know that the state and billionaires' congress will never represent the people, so winning concessions from it can't be the only goal, or the primary goal," explains Timour Kamran, candidate member also for PSL Philly. "We undertake [the People's Congress of Resistance] not to change them, i.e., the ruling class, but to change ourselves. In putting together the People's Congress, and creating a space where people can exercise their political power, we will re-create ourselves a people capable of making good on that power we already have. The People's Congress will be a vehicle of expression for the people's struggle, and it will allow us to see our own power reflected back, multiplied."

Kamran adds PSL plans to host regular meetings in Philadelphia to serve a local People's Congress: "here organizers and individuals in Philadelphia can come to be heard and collaborate, offering assistance in the struggles of others and receiving assistance in their own." ❖

sion groups, protests, and conferences.

These individuals are not particularly concerned with effectiveness, because for them it is more of a hobby, an identity, or a "safe space" for like-minded people to discuss common interests without having to engage with working class people with their warts and all.

In terms of practice, the "activist networking" model is one wherein activists from one organization agree to attend the events put on by activists from another group with the expectation that the latter will reciprocate by attending their events. This often creates a comical scenario: 20 different organizations "endorse" an event at which only 40 people show up.

the most important end product of the campaign is new and more experienced militants, rather than reforms, laws, or material gains

The final outcome of this model is to create an "activist circuit" where the same dozen or so single-issue activists attend each other's protests in a round-robin of stagnant or diminishing numbers. Even when political pressure turns up the volume (i.e. an issue is newsworthy or politically salient and therefore drives larger attendance at the events organized by the activists), the lifeless cycle of activist networking eventually brings down the numbers of attendees back to pre-crisis levels.

Both of these are poor substitutes for a genuinely intersectional politics.

An example of the two contrasting approaches would be as follows:

A political group employing an activist-networking approach is looking for a new campaign. They read the news to find "hot issues" that are being reported on in the media. Once they've determined the issue they want to agitate around, they look for an NGO they can "partner" with, providing warm bodies to show up at the NGO's events and to help actuate the already-existing strategy of the NGO. Often this looks like showing up to City Hall or the state capitol, as part of a coalition of "the usual suspects," to lobby legislators to support or oppose a particular bill, or showing up at a rally put on by the NGO in command of the campaign. Usually the passage of a law is the primary goal of these campaigns.

Maybe the group might try to recruit one or two participants from the action, but since most of these people are already organized and are members of one of the larger groups, only a handful of people are brought into the organization. As enthusiasm inevitably drains from the campaign in the face of setbacks, participation bleeds away, so the group ends up back at square one, or worse, ends up with fewer people involved than

they started with. At this point, groups usually cut their losses and look for the new "hot issue" of the day, thus repeating the cycle.

A political group which takes a "base-building" approach toward organizing a constituency approaches "issue" work a bit differently. The first step involves a canvassing the "base" where the group is attempting to organize: talking to co-workers, knocking on doors in a neighborhood, or chatting with commuters on the train or at the bus stop. Since the vast majority of individuals in our society are not members of a particular political group or even a union, we say that recruiting someone from a working class constituency into a mass organization is an act of "organizing the unorganized."

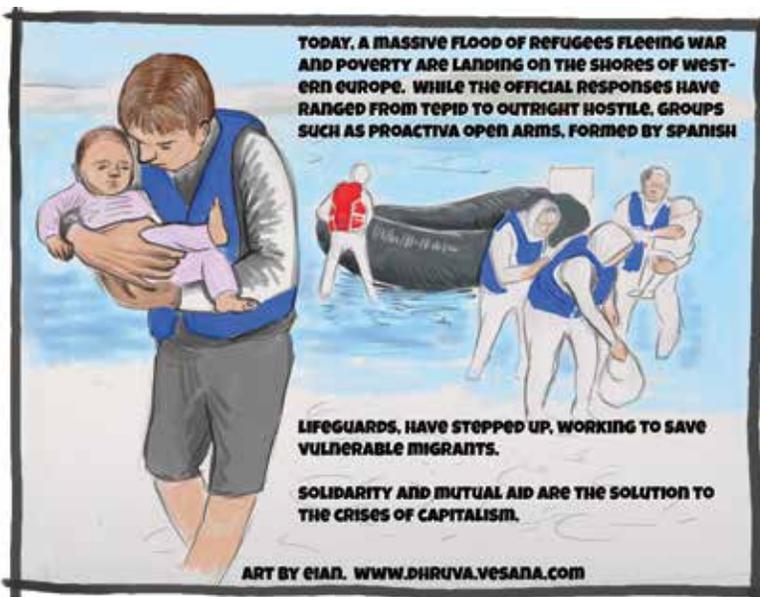
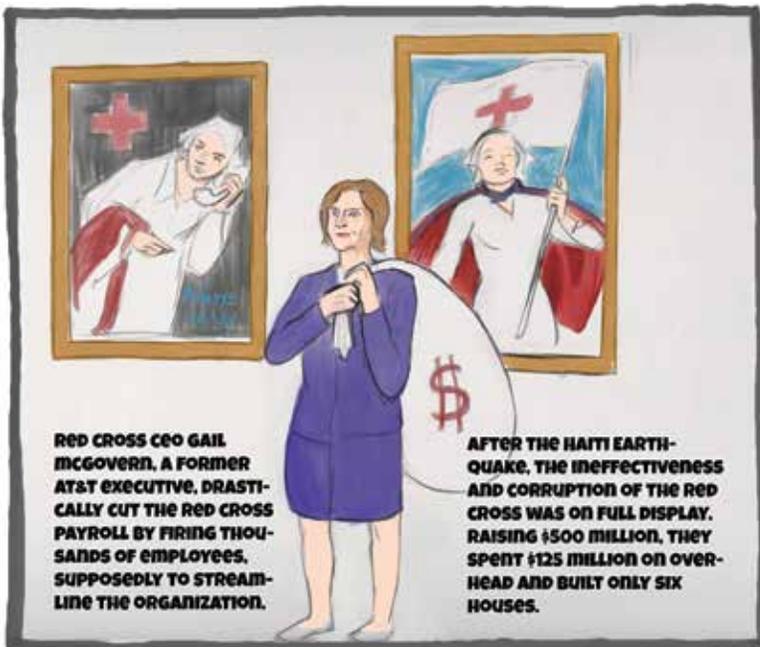
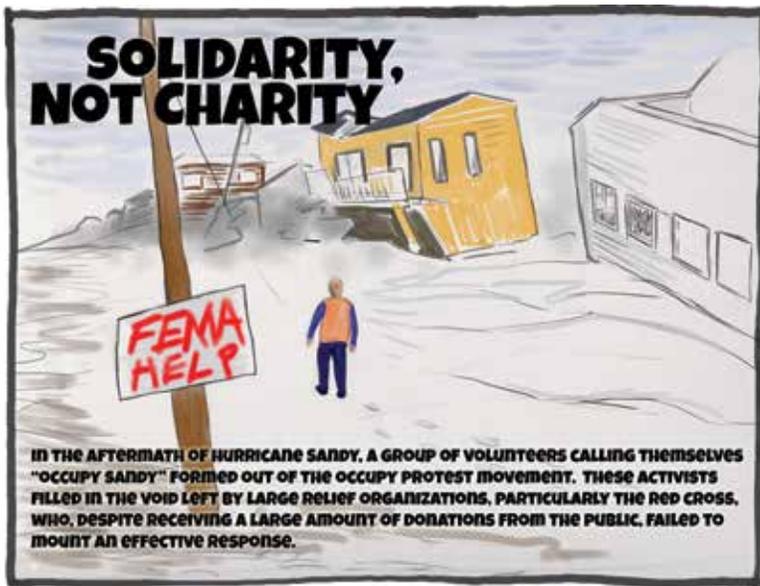
Simultaneous to this, research is undertaken to get a sense of where the constituency is situated in the process of capital accumulation and in the "big picture" of the capitalist system.

Through conversations and research, several possible demands or campaigns are sketched out, based around criteria such as winnability, the likelihood that the campaign will build capacity of the organization and help cohere working class forces (rather than promote temporary cross-class alliances), and whether the campaign has the potential to encourage grassroots militancy (rather than transporting the arena of struggle to specialist-only spaces such as the courts through, for instance, pursuing lawsuits as a primary tactic).

When several possible ideas for campaigns are produced, organizers return to the constituency and sound out these ideas in various conversations to find out what demands (if any) attract support and gain the interest of the constituency, then tweak and modify these as needed. Around that time, a mass meeting is called, contacts made during the conversation phase are invited in, and a democratic process unfolds where the most active elements of the constituency choose a campaign and begin working on it. This is sometimes referred to as the "mass line" method: from the masses, to the masses.

While engaging in the campaign, smart organizers always keep in mind that the most important end product of the campaign is new and more experienced militants, rather than reforms, laws, or material gains. The latter are welcome and while ostensibly the temporary goal of the group, they serve as fuel for the organization to reach the long-term goal: the production of working class militants, trained to fight and think critically about the capitalist system and their place in it. This may mean taking more time and effort on leadership development and political education than appears immediately practical for the purposes of winning a demand.

To use the Marxist jargon, a common fight is how working people from wildly different backgrounds can cohere around a shared vision. What is needed at the present moment is a politics that is rooted in the working class, forged where disparate elements of the class can find common political ground against a common enemy. ❖



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 27

6:30pm

**Philadelphia Tenants Union
Executive Committee Meeting**

REPAIR THE WORLD

July 30

10am – 6pm

Strategize your PotLuck

PHILLYSOCIALISTSLOCAL@GMAIL FOR LOCATION

August 4–6

**Conference on Socialist Base-Building:
Toward a Marxist Center**

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

August 7

7pm

**Philadelphia Partisan August
Planning Meeting**

LIBERTY CHOICE

August 27

12pm

Oregon Avenue Octopi Vs Philly Socialists

LOCATION TBA

Cada lunes

6:30pm

Clases de Ingles GRATIS

CIRCLE THRIFT, 1125 S. BROAD

Cada martes

6:30pm

Clases de Ingles GRATIS

TOWEY REC CENTER

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