

The Philadelphia Partisan

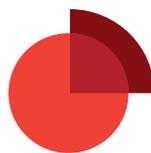
standing our ground

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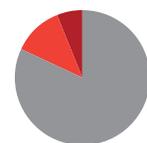
Art by Rachael Amber

300,000

over 300,000 face hunger at least part of the year in Philadelphia, according to a report released last November by Hunger Free America



the CCP administration's original contract proposal would have required new faculty to teach 25% more classes per year



In a report, the Neighborhood Garden Trust identified 28 gardens for protection, 15 gardens for acquisition, but 200 community-managed gardens threatened by insecure land tenure and redevelopment

Community Is Home

The César Andreu Iglesias Community Garden

By Nick Millman



Two children help out at the César Iglesias garden during the April 6 citywide garden clean up day. Photo by Mara Henao.

Using the César Andreu Iglesias Community Garden is how Mara Henao, a Kensington resident, first learned about the Philly Socialists (PS). Now, Mara serves as one of the co-chairs for PS, and continues to use the garden for personal use and for political organizing. “It is a green space,” Mara said, “a shared garden, but also a public park for the community at large to enjoy.”

Other community gardens throughout Philadelphia, such as those of the City Harvest program led by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) and other nonprofits, are not as accessible to the people at large. Enclosed by steel fences with lock and key, city-owned gardens are made up of several, private plots of land that individuals rent. Garden use is restricted to enrolled PHS members. To volunteer and access a fenced-off PHS garden, one must apply for membership, a process that requires paying \$100, submitting financial history, and proving that one lives within designated zones in the city to qualify. There are generally long waitlists to register for a plot, which can last from several months, up to even a year. Although such gardens are considered “community-owned,” in practice they are not readily available to the people in general for free use.

The César Iglesias garden, located at Lawrence and Arlington street in North Kensington, does not require financial payment and does not divide up the land into individually owned plots. The shared, open quality of these gardens invites Philadelphia people, especially Black and immigrant communities who live in Kensington, to interact with unenclosed green space, to access food grown from the land, and to deepen, even redefine, community relations in urban spaces. Local church

members and neighborhood residents have participated in clean ups in the past and have shared garden seeds with each other to grow in their own backyards.

“This garden means everything to me. Community is home.”

Anthony Ryan, a resident of Kensington, regularly uses the César Iglesias garden and tends to it alongside members of Philly Socialists, his partner, and his neighbors. After learning about the garden from a PS member knocking on his door last year, Anthony began picking edible herbs and decided to become more involved in the garden activities. “This garden means everything to me,” Anthony said. “Community is home.”

Volunteers at the garden regularly host events to create community, and a sense of home and belonging. For example, on Saturday, April 6, the PS participated in the citywide 12th Annual Philly Spring Clean Up event to prepare the garden for the spring planting season. Over forty people volunteered for the daylong clean up, including members of Philly Socialists, Kensington residents, and others from local organizations, such as the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, Asociación

continued

Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

This summer, the *Partisan* celebrates local movements that organize to work the soil, free the land, and keep our communities' resources for the people. In Philly's abundant neighborhoods, groups like Soil Generation and the César Andreu Iglesias community garden grow people power from the roots. But, our city's bureaucracies help profit real-estate developers and prevent the people from fair access to housing, land, and the earth's resources. In doing so, they repeat the racism of this country's founders against the Native American Lenape who lived in our region.

Philadelphia's movements against gentrification and for community control of the land are part of a worldwide movement to keep the land green and empower the people who live on it. No one person symbolizes this worldwide movement more than Wangari Maathai (1940-2011), the African feminist and environmentalist activist from Kenya whose image graces our cover. Maathai was part of international socialist movements and spoke about how colonialism, gendered and sexual violence against women, and capitalism work together to throw people off their land. Her long career participating in on-the-ground work with African peasants and indigenous peoples demonstrated the deep interconnections between ecological justice, decolonization, women's rights (to political empowerment and to autonomy over our bodies), and the redistribution of wealth.

Rachael Amber, the Philadelphia artist who created this cover image, writes, "I decided to create this portrayal of Wangari as a part of the Earth and community because she is an integral inspiration in many ways to me and so many others, and I wanted to honor the legacy she's imprinted upon the world. She was and forever is a badass woman who was driven by hope, love and green energy—and I'm so inspired by her endless efforts toward paving paths for communities and cultivating care to the people and their connection to the planet. I hope to do the same through my artwork and future endeavors of service. When I see her, I see the face of matriarchal wisdom giving power back to the people and nurture to the planet. She didn't allow limitations or separations to be an option; she truly embodied interconnection and oneness through all her visionary work."

Let Wangari Maathai inspire us all, from the gardener tending her vegetables on the corner lot to the activists fighting to protect Philly's children from lead in the soil and buildings. Let us keep growing, growing so big that developers can't take us down and we can build a new world. 🌱

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Puertorriqueños en Marcha (also known as APM for Everyone), and the greening program part of the South Kensington Community Partners (SKCP). Everyone made bed repairs for plants and removed litter from the garden. Volunteers also enjoyed the warm, spring day together, freely picking edible plants to take home, listening to music from speakers supplied by the SKCP, and eating tacos from the local food truck.

Amy Gottsegen, a member of PS who coordinates events and organizes outreach for the garden, explained that the citywide day of clean up kicked off a series of related events to be held at the garden. "We try to have monthly events," she went on to say, "our goal is to have a consistent presence" to build community. Garden work, organizing, and events take place year-round. During the colder months, volunteers, including members of PS and of the local community, door-knock on the homes of Kensington residents and distribute flyers that detail information about the garden and its activities, like seed-planting and indoor gardening. Volunteers regularly door-knock to build relationships with Kensington residents and to make sure they know the garden space is available for free use.

During warmer months, block parties, gardening tutorials, and much more, take place.

A Brief History of the Gardens

Building community out of the ruins of urban development has been at the heart of the César Iglesias gardens project since its founding in 2013. The Philly Socialists first established the garden by taking over unused land and transforming it into a collective garden and park space. The garden is named after the playwright, labor organizer, and president of the Puerto Rican Communist Party, César Iglesias, and in honor of the immigrant Puerto Rican and Latinx community that live in North Kensington.

The garden is rich in both social and ecological diversity. Fuego Nuevo, a ceremonial performance troupe led by Cesar Viveros, has recently performed rituals and dances on the garden lands. Cesar's artistic work and sculptures also grace the gardens. His artistic practice draws from Toltec and Aztec cultures, indigenous groups that originated from what is today known as Mexico. His powerful decorative contributions to the garden also include a statue of Quetzalcoatl, a feathered-serpent god, which

stands at the entrance, and an impressive mural of painted ceramic skulls.

More recently, the garden has become a site for mourning and memorialization. Cesar's wife recently passed away; to honor her life, he planted a juneberry tree in the garden. After real estate developers purchased the land of a nearby community garden called La Finquita and forced it to close down, community members started to transplant its vegetation to the César Iglesias gardens. A founding member of La Finquita planted a forsythia bush as a way to commemorate her son who also recently passed. The memorialization of lives and lands lost through the practice of transplantation has deeply shaped both the community bonds and the ecology of the garden.

Zef Willow, a gardener who helps care for the plants, said that the garden is a "miniature, living ecosystem." A mound of compost crawling with insect life—layered with scraps of onion, lettuce, oyster shells, and coffee grounds—supplies nitrogen and carbon to the earth and produces fertile soil. While some features of the garden, like the woody perennials growing in constructed herb beds, were planted by garden-

The Indigenous Tribes of the Delaware Valley

Rightful Owners of Stolen Land

By James Yeun & J. M. Audrey



Art by Corey Brickley. Turtle Island is what many Native American peoples call Earth or North America.

Have you been to Philadelphia's Manayunk neighborhood? Or perhaps Conshohocken or Neshaminy Creek? All these locations have been absorbed into Pennsylvania's history and culture, but they have deeper, older roots with the indigenous peoples of this area. These names all come from the Lenape (Leh-NAH-pay) peoples, who once flourished along the Delaware and lower Hudson river valleys. Unfortunately, the invasion of white settlers into the area in the 1600s and 1700s forced the Lenape west into the interior of the continent. However, many descendants are reclaiming their land and rights in the 21st century.

The Lenape: Origins and Diaspora

Today, many Lenape tribes are officially recognized. At the federal level, three Lenape tribes are recognized: the Delaware Tribe, the Delaware Tribe of Indians, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. At the state level, the Ramapough Lenape Nation and Nanticoke-Lenni Lenape Tribal Nation are recognized within New Jersey; the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware is recognized within Delaware. On top of this, Lenape tribes even exist as far away as Canada: the Munsee-Delaware Nation, the Moravian

of the Thames First Nation, and the Six Nations of the Grand River.

While Pennsylvania does not recognize any indigenous tribes, there are some active tribes throughout the state, including the Thunder Mountain Lenape Nation and the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania.

So many different names may seem confusing: If the Lenape are one indigenous people, why are there so many different tribes? Historically, Lenape territory stretched from eastern Pennsylvania along the Delaware River, through present-day New Jersey and portions of north-

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How to Plant People Power

Soil Generation turns community gardens into community control

By **Suzy Subways**

What do you grow in your garden? A garden can grow a lot more than food and flowers.

Soil Generation is a coalition of Black and Brown gardeners, farmers and community members who grow fresh produce in Philadelphia neighborhoods that often lack access to cheap and healthy food. Soil Generation is critical in a city where over 300,000 face hunger at least part of the year, according to a report released last November by Hunger Free America. Yet even more critical is the movement they are growing; turning land long neglected by the city into vibrant spaces of resistance and resilience. They hope to transform neighborhoods and place the land and its many bounties under community control.

In 2015, Soil Generation member Kirtrina Baxter gave a presentation on all the ways community gardens make communities stronger and healthier.¹ “In communities of color, there are exponentially more cases of asthma,” Baxter said. “What they’re finding out now is that that’s largely because we don’t have enough green space. There’s not enough trees, there’s not enough plants. We have disproportionately more obesity, high blood pressure and food-borne illnesses in our communities because of the foods we eat,” She said. “So first and foremost, for our health—that’s why a garden is important.”

Autonomy, Not Charity

If a community can grow its own healthy food, it can take control of access to nutrition and create better futures for its youth. And growing it yourself is key. If nonprofits from outside a neighborhood can help, that’s great—but it’s not the same as a community serving its own people.

For example, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society runs a program called City Harvest, through which more than 140 gardens and farms donate fresh vegetables to organizations serving families that have unmet needs for food. City Harvest produce donations help Broad Street Ministry serve chef-prepared meals to about 200 people experiencing food insecurity or homelessness every day. This is great, but it’s made possible by grants from wealthy donors, including funds linked to a pharmaceutical company and the Philadelphia Prison System, which are powerful players in systems that keep people poor. This is not food sovereignty.

Charlyn Griffith of Soil Generation, in an interview with Edible Philly last summer, explained that food sovereignty is about whole communities challenging the ways racism and economic



On October 25, 2018, Soil Generation rallied at City Hall to protect threatened gardens.
Photos by Angela Gervasi.



¹ Quoted from a video by Alicia Dorsey.

Lead Exposure and the Amityville Effect

How Philadelphia Leaves Residents Vulnerable to Lead Exposure and Poisoning

By Jack Grauer

You know how there's all these movies about a family moving into a house on an ancient burial ground or something similar, and then ghosts get all mad and torment them? Americans can't get enough of these, "Oh no, we've upset nature's delicate stasis and now nature spirits are coming to get us," kinds of stories.

Specifically, an example of this trope seems to have developed around lead exposure in Philly. That's fine. But it also might be skewing how media and government systems understand and deal with a serious problem.

Chronic exposure to lead hurts the brain and nervous system development and causes a host of learning and behavioral problems. It's especially harmful to kids, and Philly kids have high blood lead levels.

The line from local and federal governments, academics and national and local news is that lead paint turns to breathable dust over time in homes built and painted before anyone knew lead paint harms people. Older homes also have older plumbing, and older plumbing components sometimes contain lead.

Lead also leeches into soil over time from lead smelting factories that are improperly sealed after closure and demolition. New construction churns contaminated soil to the surface. Increased demand for urban housing has led to higher population densities near and on the former smelting sites.

This all sounds plausible. And this picture of things surely sells newspaper and website space. There's a tempting story to tell here about gentrifiers who lack historical knowledge about their surroundings and the prospect of that lack of knowledge haunting them.

There's also this idea of gentrifiers and their affinity for big old houses that harken back to a time when people valued craftsmanship, etc., and how those big old houses return their occupants' affinities by slowly poisoning them.

Again, it's all slick and literary. But it also might not be the whole explanation of the problem of lead exposure and a misconstrual of who it affects.

If dingy houses and schools and shuttered and demolished factories accounted for high blood lead levels in kids, you'd expect to see the most elevated blood-lead levels to surface in soil in Kensington, where most of the now-defunct lead smelters operated. If lead paint was the main driver, you'd expect to see the most elevated blood lead levels in an area like Germantown, which contains a high concentration of old resi-

dential construction.

But that's not what we see in the Philadelphia Department of Public Health's dataset on cases of elevated child blood levels. We don't see the highest levels in the areas with the oldest housing stock, which are most likely to have lead paint in them. We don't see them in residential areas near or on top of demolished lead smelting plants.

Rather, the highest levels surround North Broad St. in North-Central Philadelphia. This doesn't bolster confidence in the dominant theories about what drives high blood lead levels in Philly. *The Partisan* requested current blood lead exposure data from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health in the hope of finding a better explanation.

The latest report available from the Department's website summarizes the rate of lead exposure in the city as a whole through 2017. Data that specifies which areas have higher rates of lead exposure cuts off at 2015.

Via private email correspondence, the Department initially delayed and suggested the release of more up-to-date data could violate the confidentiality of survey participants' medical records. *The Partisan* supplied a lengthy explanation of how we intend to use the data for this article in accordance with a request by the Department. The Department has not since responded.

The Partisan tried unsuccessfully to test soil from the areas in question on our own. We collected 43 surface soil samples from sites across North Philadelphia.

A Rutgers University laboratory agreed to analyze those samples with a spectrometer to assess their lead content. But the lab stopped corresponding with *The Partisan* after we told them we had the samples available.

The lonely soil samples remain on file with the author. Email me if you'd like to take a look. We'll have a Philly-soil-eating party and then test our algebra skills in 30 years. 🍷

Art by Jack Grauer



Broken Promises at Community College of Philadelphia

By Matteo MacDermant



Art by Mike Chen

In 2016, contract negotiations at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) broke down between the administration and AFT 2026 (the college union). The dispute was partially over salary and benefits, but more fundamentally it was about CCP's future. The union and administration have very different visions for our city's only public two-year college. The union voted to authorize a strike over those differences on March 28th, sending the administration scrambling to reach a contract deal and avoid a shutdown. On April 12th a deal was signed, securing many victories for the workers, including pay increases and health insurance without premiums. The fight for the future of CCP is, however, far from over. The contract is a small

step on the long journey to transform CCP and give Philadelphia's residents the public college they need and deserve.

CCP as a Business

The administration envisions CCP as a business, with education designed to meet business needs rather than community or student needs. Adjuncts, part-timers, and subcontractors provide non-union labor that is "flexible" or temporary in this arrangement. James Clark, a manager from Philadelphia Aker Shipping summed up this business-first approach well. "CCP and other area colleges should collaborate or coordinate with each other to jointly meet employers' needs."

The emphasis is on employer needs. Employers do provide jobs that Philadelphians need. However, employers don't have an interest in overcoming the many obstacles to graduation facing many CCP students. Workers from the suburbs or from wealthier and more educated neighborhoods are the same to them as workers who might badly need a job but struggle to complete their education. It is easier for the administration to focus resources on high school programs for the "gifted," students who don't need assistance, or corporate training programs, which often overlook those most in need. If thousands of students, faculty, and staff must be pushed aside to lower costs and meet business needs, then so be it. That's just

continued

good business.

CCP and AFT 2026 as Working Class Institutions

The union sees CCP not as a business, but as an institution for building working-class communities and providing working-class people with opportunities for a better life. The working class and poor have been excluded from the recent economic recovery. Education is part of the solution.

To deliver on CCP's original promise of "making higher education affordable and accessible to all Philadelphia residents," the union made a call for:

- Smaller classrooms
- Diversity fellowship programs
- More counselors, librarians, and support staff
- Pay raises for staff
- Benefit Security without contribution increase

This student-first and worker-first approach affirms every person's worth. It is a promise made by faculty and staff to ensure the success of all. No student is abandoned because it is too expensive to address their needs. Faculty and staff can only accomplish this, however, if they have the resources to do so.

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More for Less

The administration's original contract proposal would have required new faculty to teach five classes per semester (10 per year), instead of four (8 per year). President Donald Generals calls this course load "industry standard" because area community college professors already teach five. Union Co-President Junior Brainard calls this an unfair comparison for two reasons.

CCP faculty teach more students per semester than area colleges. The union points out that a fifth class would add 20 more students per semester for each member of the science faculty, 30 for English, 40 for math, and 56 for computer science. This burden is at the expense of students who already pay the highest tuition in the Philly metro area for community college.

Hazim Hardeman, CCP's first Rhodes Scholar, said it best. "The students whose parents can afford it get comparatively well-supported faculty and staff at Temple, Drexel, and Penn.

The kids who can't, get overworked faculty and staff at community colleges." He asks the union to "please fight this reality." Supported staff and faculty support students.

The second reason further highlights the administration's neglect of student needs. CCP students primarily come from neighborhoods with high poverty and low educational attainment. More than 50% are over 25, many are single parents, and most are working full time. They are immigrants, first-generation students, and 70% remedial learners. These students have high needs which are routinely ignored before arrival at CCP. They require more, not less attention.

Breaking the Union

The administration attempted to break the union's collective power and increase their leverage over workers through the Management Rights Clause. This clause would have given management "The right to relieve employees from duty because of lack of work or other reasons" while ensuring that "none of the management rights shall be subject to bargaining or grievances."

Management would also have the power to:

- Control the academic calendar
- Subcontract to non-union workers
- Reorganize the college, "whether or not it causes a reduction in the working force"

This would mean that anyone could be let go at any time for any reason—and no one would be able to say anything about it. Union Co-President Junior Brainard expressed grave concerns about this arrangement. "If we fear for our jobs," he said, "We will work to protect them, not challenge and educate our students. We will censor our classrooms and research." This is a power grab that is not in the best interest of workers or students.

The union is critical to workers, especially those lowest paid, like housekeeper Paula Perry-Gable, who earn as little as \$12/hour. "I've worked full-time at CCP for 20 years," Perry-Gable said, "and still I qualify for food stamps." How can workers support students if they cannot support themselves?

Strong unions are workers' only defense against being robbed of retirement and health-care, being fired without cause, or having any control over their working life. Organized workers are also a main pillar of defense for our city's public institutions. Workers' rights are students' rights. Workers and working class students have overlapping needs. Their fight is one and the same. The union knew what was at stake—and on March 28th, they voted to strike.

CCP Votes to Strike

The strike vote acknowledged the stark choices facing workers and students. If the administration could force the union to accept an anti-union agreement, it would be devastating to all.

Students and workers of greatest need would pay the highest costs. The union therefore refused to allow this power grab. Instead they asked the administration to implement changes to unburden faculty and staff and raise wages so they can serve their students. One job should be enough.

Workers need the administration's support in carrying out the college's mission. Ever-growing classrooms, staff shortages, and long, stressful workweeks hurts workers and students alike. Our students are worth the investment. They deserve our support.

The union voted to strike until the administration restored CCP's promise of "making higher education affordable and accessible to all Philadelphia residents."

The Contract

The strike vote never resulted in a walkout or an active strike. The administration softened their anti-union tone and a contract was negotiated without student disruption. The contract included:

- \$15 minimum wage by 2020
- Immediate 5% raise for everyone earning above \$15
- 3% annual raises in 2020-21 and 3.5% in 2022
- Health insurance without premiums remains
- Co-pay reimbursement if earning less than \$50,000/year
- New faculty teach one extra class per year, instead of two (a compromise)
- The "Management Rights Clause" no longer allows non-union labor, college reorganization, or full control over the academic calendar

"The students whose parents can afford it get comparatively well-supported faculty and staff at Temple, Drexel, and Penn. The kids who can't, get overworked faculty and staff at community colleges."

The strike pushed CCP into the limelight. Councilpersons David Oh and Helen Gym responded by introducing proposals to restore full funding to CCP, and media coverage is increasing around this issue. Funding by the city for 2020 has now increased to 22%, which is still short the one-third they are supposed to pay, but definitely a step in the right direction. The gains made should be celebrated. Workers and students fought and won many victories. The fight must continue, however, until community college is accessible and affordable (free) to all who walk through the doors at 1700 Spring Garden Street. 🇺🇸

The Student Tenants Union Base-Building on College Campuses

By Alex Drusda and Noah Cote



Photo courtesy of Drexel Socialists

“Well, what are you going to do? It’s college!”

This is a fairly common response that Steven DeLucry, outgoing president of Drexel Socialists, receives when canvassing for the Student Tenants Union. For the past year, establishing and growing the Student Tenants Union has been Drexel Socialists’ foremost project. Their goals? Empower student renters and inform students about the issues tenants face.

History

The Student Tenants Union began in June 2018, as a project of Drexel Socialists. While canvassing for the Union, student organizers encountered Rebekka, a German exchange student trapped in her lease with University Crossings, a private student housing provider. UCross allowed Rebekka to sublet an apartment, and assured her that she would only be responsible for three months of rent. However, once the subletter dropped contact with Rebekka, UCross

held her responsible for the remaining rent. In the span of a month, the Student Tenants Union righted this wrong.

The Drexel Socialists’ Student Tenants Union responded by delivering a letter of demands to UCross’ leasing office. The letter demanded that UCross release Rebekka from her unfair subleasing agreement. A few days later, the Union returned to the leasing office, flyering to let students know what had happened to Rebekka. By the end of June, UCross buckled: Rebekka was released from the lease without having to pay the additional rent and associated fees.

In a different fight, a student-tenant experienced difficulties paying rent and repeatedly tried, in vain, to contact management. After two months, this tenant received an eviction notice, demanding that they leave within the next five days. The Union managed to push this date back and help the tenant find new housing. However, the tenant later learned from their former room-

mates that the developer mailed details regarding a lawsuit.

The Student Tenants Union spent the next few months fighting this injustice. Through public protests, legal support, and negative reviews, the tenant managed to secure a deal: the Union would scale back its negative press campaign, and the tenant would only be charged roughly half of the rent they initially owed.

Base-Building at the Student Level

As DeLucry expressed, it can be difficult to get students interested in tenants’ struggles. Although most students are tenants, many envision their roles as “renters” to be a transient stage in their lives.

Fortunately, simple conversations with students can raise awareness that student housing issues are a form of landlord-tenant conflict. University Crossings, for example, is one of several

“University-Affiliated Housing” buildings owned by American Campus Communities (ACC). If you are a student at Drexel, dealing with ACC is largely unavoidable. Drexel is engaged in a public-private partnership with ACC, which forces non-commuting sophomores to live in ACC housing.

In addition to rent being hugely inflated (rent starts at \$849 for a two-bed, one-bath apartment shared by four tenants), ACC’s properties come with a myriad of drawbacks. ACC requires students to pay a \$250 non-refundable application fee—with no actual guarantee of housing. Their LGBTQ policies are not up to Drexel’s standards: they require parental permission for adult students to enter co-ed leasing forms, undermining the autonomy of adult students.

Given this state of affairs, many students leap at the opportunity to talk to the Union about ACC.

“Oh no, we know everything going on [with American Campus Communities], it’s bad, we hate it;” is another popular response, according to Ariel Ge, Vice President of Drexel Socialists. “[We] just build a huge conversation around that.

Instead of making it feel like a transactional, robotic approach, trying to work with them is the most beneficial way to get more people involved.”

Collective action has provided the Student Tenants Union with two clear examples of tenant power on Drexel’s campus. Organizing around these victories and a general disdain for ACC, the Union only stands to grow.

Contextualizing Tenant Rights

What differentiates a student tenant from a tenant?

Not much. DeLucry clarifies that contrary to the beliefs of some students, renting is not a phase unique to college: “This is life. A lot of people are going to have student debt for life, so this is the time to build this movement, while you have this power and leverage.” Students are paying tuition; they are in a better place to negotiate with universities that need them to turn profit.

Students are part of the working class. Many students work part-time or full-time throughout their education. Upon accumulating student debt, it is difficult for most to surmount

this obstacle. While it is easy to write off student tenants as gentrifiers, this prevents the solidarity that could be formed amongst tenants across the city.

“This is life. A lot of people are going to have student debt for life, so this is the time to build this movement, while you have this power and leverage.”

Consequently, the Student Tenants Union acts with this bigger picture in mind. When the Union marched on UCross’s leasing office, they brought the Philadelphia Tenants Union (PTU) banner. Several members of Drexel Socialists are also involved with PTU.

So, it’s not *just* college. What *are* you going to do? The Student Tenants Union asks this question of their peers. By working to aid students in need, and preparing them for the realities of landlord-tenant conflict, the Union is strengthening tenant power in Philadelphia. 🇺🇸

Felix’s Story

A Philly Tenants Union Co-Founder Looks Back

As told to **David Thompson**

Felix contacted Philly Socialists after seeing a flyer advertising the worker-tenant solidarity network in 2014. They helped lead Philly Socialists’ first building-wide tenant organizing drive. The Winchester Tenants Association that Felix spearheaded won the firing of abusive property managers, improved extermination services, free mattress encasements to prevent bed bugs for all residents, financial compensation and back rent forgiveness, and the prevention of at least two threatened evictions. Felix was a founding member at the Philadelphia Tenants Union’s 2016 convention. That fall, Felix passed away in their home at the Winchester. David Thompson interviewed Felix in 2015 for the following statement to Philly Socialists.

My name is Felix. I’m a leader of the Winchester Tenants Association. I’ve lived at the Winchester Apartments since 2005. I want to tell you all a little bit about myself.

I grew up in Northeast Philly with five brothers. I graduated high school in 1966. I’m a fashion designer, a singer, and an activist for transgender rights. As of today, I’m also a member of Philly Socialists.

I’ve always known who I was. People ask me when I came out of the closet, but I was never in. I didn’t even know the word “transgender” for most of my life. I just told people that I was gonna be around that when I identify myself I identify as being a male in a female specimen.

I got bullied as a child, but my mom always said you can’t do nothing unless they touch you. In seventh grade, one of them hit me. I was getting ready to play baseball, and I had the bat. Luckily, the coach caught it in midair. After that, no more bullying problems at school. In the neighborhood, I found so many shortcuts to take home so I wouldn’t be harassed and bullied through the neighborhood trying to make it home. I could’ve wrote a map.

I started singing as a child. That’s what saved me. It started when I was maybe six or seven in bible school, they heard me or something. Next thing I know I’m up in the main auditorium, mic’d and everything. They said, “Sing,” and that’s what I did. Singing helped me live. I’d sing inspiration songs, old hymns.

No downers. Blues, that’s what I stay away from. I already got the blues!

All through school I did business, so that’s what I wanted to do when I got out. But Philly said, “No, you are not gonna work anywhere, cuz you’re different.” I would get the job, then they would find out about me, and then I’d get fired. I’ve been fired from 28 jobs. In 1976, someone at an employment office called me “unemployable.” I didn’t know what in the world that meant. But it was that year I got a business privilege license and set up Fashions by Felix. I got \$6,000 to help me with my business. I had a tutor teach me how to sew, and I made full-length duster coats. I was home-based. I had appointments, did flyers, business cards, word of mouth. I had to fight for my grant. That was my first contact with a lawyer. But I got it.

I opened Fashions by Felix with my romantic and business partner. We were together for 25 years. But then the church caught up with me, and the bishop told her she had to get out of there. She found God, but I always said He wasn’t lost.

She left in 2002. The mortgage on our place was in her name, so I became technically homeless. I coulda took over, but she wouldn’t let me. So I stayed squatting in the empty house. I found help from the Gay and Lesbian Law Project. They directed me to the Mazzoni walk-in clinic, and that’s when I started getting help. Therapy, counseling.

I went to Juniper Street shelter, but I told them I

continued



Art by Alex Zahradnik

can't go to a shelter for women. That's when my traumatic encounters with government workers began. They started asking me, "Why?" I said, "because I'm transgender." "What does that mean?" Then they got into personal questions like, "Well do you have a—" you know. That was the first part of my shock.

So I became the busiest homeless person they'd ever seen. I went on the warpath, with backup, for transgender homeless. We had hearings, a task force, all to fight to get us our own shelter. What came of that was the head of Juniper Street went home to spend a little more time with his family.

I finally got housing at the Winchester in 2005. At first I was still considered homeless, which meant no rental agreement. Every six months, FRP [Friends Rehabilitation Program] tried to put me out, so I got a lawyer every time. After two years we got it worked out.

The Winchester was a nice place to live for the first six years. Then in 2011 they took all our services away. They took a lift for the disabled. They took maintenance. They took our control over our heat. They took away pest control. They even took away a beautiful chandelier from our lobby. The property manager stopped showing up regularly. A leak opened up in my ceiling, a hole opened in my ceiling. When the manager would be around, they'd be disrespectful or just ignore us. They'd make and break appointments whenever they wanted. Then the bed bugs came.

I worked with my housing counselor. We made calls, sent emails – no one listened. Then we called you. The agency that employed my counselor is connected to the agency I pay rent to, and I think they fired my counselor after we got in touch with you.

When I met y'all, I decided I'd wait and see. The first meeting went well, and then we moved on the situation. Got some good results.

When we brought the demand letter to FRP, I was surprised. It was a good surprise. At first it was just us and two other people in the car, and then they just come from out of anywhere. I said, "Whoa, that's cool." We had all those people. We moved the mountain a little bit, and they didn't expect that.

There's a saying going round, "You and what army?"

"This one." It felt good. Support is good.

Now we know each other in the building. We can put a face on these apartment numbers. I think the Tenants Association will make something for the next tenants to get involved in. Even though you live somewhere, you have to work at it. You can't sit back and say, "So and so will do this for me." No. You have to make an effort. And I think people are gonna see that. I hope to see some happy people in a building that's comfortable. You see something wrong, try to fix it.

I call y'all "people who care about people." I'm the same. That's where I come from. "What do you need done? How can we help?" That's how I see y'all. 🍷

Prefigurative Politics

By John L. Hill

The bad is easy to see. Just take a look around at the country, at Philly. Gentrification forces working-class people from their homes. Schools are full of lead paint and asbestos. The criminal justice system targets people of color. Bullets rip through the bodies of our children. Politicians fold into the pockets of developers and corporations. Ecological crises and military conflicts threaten us with global apocalypse. There's so many things to stop, so many things to tear down. This is why when we fight politically, often we do so in the name of fighting *against* things. This is why we often put our slogans in the negative: "ABOLISH I.C.E.," "END STOP AND FRISK," etc. We name our enemies; we know what to attack.

It's easy to point the finger. Figuring out what to *build* instead and *how* we build it? That's hard.

Revolutionaries dream about a better future. A future where everybody's needs can be cared for, where Black Lives Matter, where decisions are made directly and democratically by *the people*. Many of us call this future dream "socialism." But even armed with these dreams, it can be difficult to understand how to get from the bad days we're in, to the good world we're trying to create.

One strategy that revolutionaries have used is called *prefigurative politics*. Pre-figure

means to shape beforehand. Instead of waiting for the bad things to come tumbling down, we start building good things now. Instead of waiting for the government to provide healthcare or ways for us to engage in politics, we organize to create community health centers and we organize to create local assemblies where people can make their own decisions. *Prefigurative* politics is about building these solutions *now*.

The term was developed within the *New Left* (1960s/70s radicals from the Civil Rights, Anti-War, Feminist, Queer Liberation and Black Power movements). During that era, a lot of that generation's revolutionaries were becoming frustrated with communist and socialist movements that were not delivering the ideals they preached. The Bolsheviks in the USSR led a movement promising power to people, only to let it fall into the violent repression of Stalinist Russia. In the US, Left organizations talked about fighting racism and sexism, but sidelined those struggles or failed to support leadership among women or people of color. The new generation saw this, and also saw the suffering and needs around them: they saw children too hungry to learn, people dying from poor medical care, police terrorizing whole communities. They realized that they had to do more than fight and win... they needed solutions and they needed them now. People could not wait.

The Black Panther Party dabbled in prefigurative politics through their Serve the People programs. Alongside their political work, they provided free breakfast to children before school, trained acupuncturists, and offered testing for sickle cell anemia. These projects served two purposes: First, they provided immediate aid to the community, building bonds of trust between the Black Panther Party and the people they served. Second, these programs *prefigured* the Black Nation that they were trying to build – they demonstrated through action how Black communities could care for their own needs without

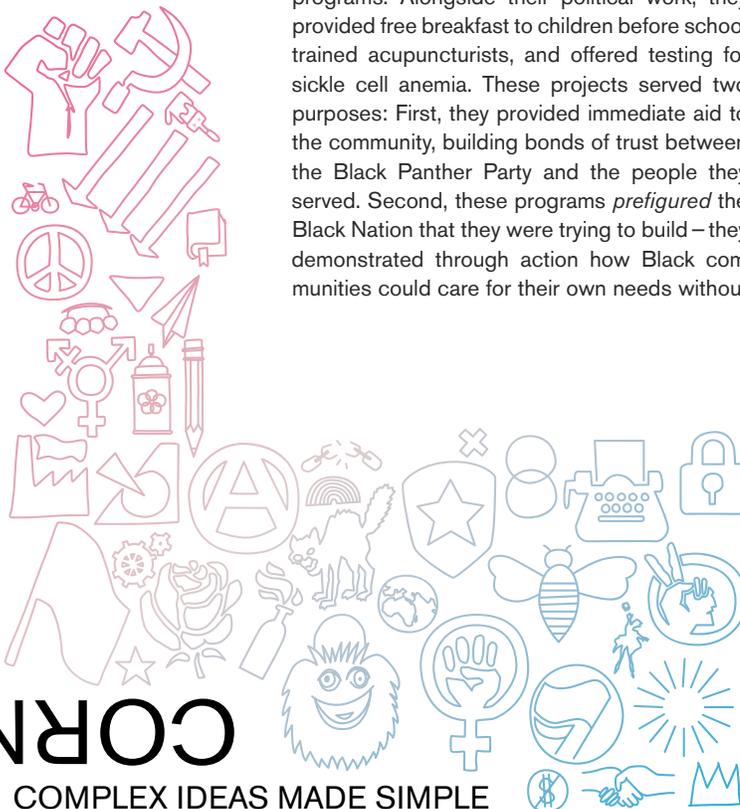
relying on the scraps offered by a white supremacist government.

Revolutionaries dream about a better future. A future where everybody's needs can be cared for, where Black Lives Matter, where decisions are made directly and democratically by the people. Many of us call this future dream "socialism."

Here in Philly, our history has been deeply impacted by prefigurative politics. The MOVE Organization is mostly widely known for the 1985 Philadelphia police-led bombing of their home, but they were also a group who mixed Black liberation struggle with prefigurative political ideas. MOVE stood for both revolutionary struggle against systems that oppressed life *and* in living in accordance with the world they were trying to build. MOVE members lived and struggled communally, and treated revolutionary struggle as a quasi-religious practice. Struggle depended not only on their resistance and armed self-defense against a poisonous/racist system, but also their individual adherence to practices of caring for each other as family, eating mostly raw/plant-based food, abstaining from smoking or drug/alcohol use, and avoiding dependency on modern technology whenever possible. Even though their revolutionary vision of living in accordance with nature was so far apart from the urban environment they operated in, they were uncompromising in trying to make their dream real by *doing* it.

Movement for a New Society (MNS) was another, very different type of group that pushed prefigurative experiments on a larger scale. Founded in 1971, MNS was a national organization founded by Quakers with deep roots in West Philadelphia. They combined large scale direct action campaigns (like successfully blockading US arms sales to West Pakistan) with building alternative institutions that reflected the world they wanted. They built cooperative households for activists and families, food co-ops, shared childcare, communally owned vehicles, and community centers. As organizers, they created and promoted consensus-based decision-making that did not involve formal leaders. Though the group disbanded in 1988, many organizations that MNS built still survive like Mariposa food co-op and the Life Center Association (a land trust of West Philly collective houses). Their work partially inspired prefigurative organizing during the 1999 World Trade

CONCEPT
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COMPLEX IDEAS MADE SIMPLE

Abolition Behind the Walls

An incarcerated writer takes on the challenge of working to end prisons

By **Stephen Wilson**

Content warning: this article discusses traumatic experiences, including sexual assault.

Practicing abolition is hard, especially behind the walls. Yesterday, I witnessed an argument between two prisoners, one of them a friend. When the other prisoner walked away, I asked my friend if he was okay. He told me that the other prisoner was pressuring him to have sex. I figured that much. The guy is known for predatory behavior.

My friend was in debt and the guy claimed to have paid it. He hadn't. My friend, feeling threatened, returned to his cell to make a shank. I knew I had to intercede. But what should I do?

I didn't want to involve the police. They won't make things better. Their answer is solitary confinement. Even if the guy were moved to another block, he would continue his behavior there. Something had to be done.

I gathered two friends and discussed options. We decided to confront him and not involve the police. Surprisingly, he didn't deny his actions. But he really believed it was okay to force another person to have sex with him if they owed him money. When I told him I knew he hadn't paid the debt, he feigned ignorance. He knew his plot was foiled and left my friend alone. But still, I was disturbed.

He was a juvenile lifer who was recently re-sentenced to a term that makes him eligible for parole in less than two years. I fear that if allowed out today, he may repeat his behavior. He is not doing the work to transform himself, to prepare himself for release. But it is not all his fault.

Transformation must be self-motivated, but formal and informal support is also necessary. The Corrections Department doesn't equip prisoners with the materials or skills to effect transformation. The programming here is based on a theory that all our problems are based on our thoughts. But, we didn't think up the neglect and abandonment that destroyed our neighborhoods. We didn't think up unemployment, sub-quality schools and health care either. Also, the skills promoted by these programs are punished by officers. Assertiveness is considered disrespect. Support is nonexistent.

Abolitionists are exerting a lot of effort to challenge and dismantle the prison-industrial complex (PIC). Abolitionists use the term to describe "the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems." But, how do we transform a system and the people living in it? Political education behind prison walls is needed. Developing interpersonal skills is necessary, too.

I was angry with the prisoner who was op-

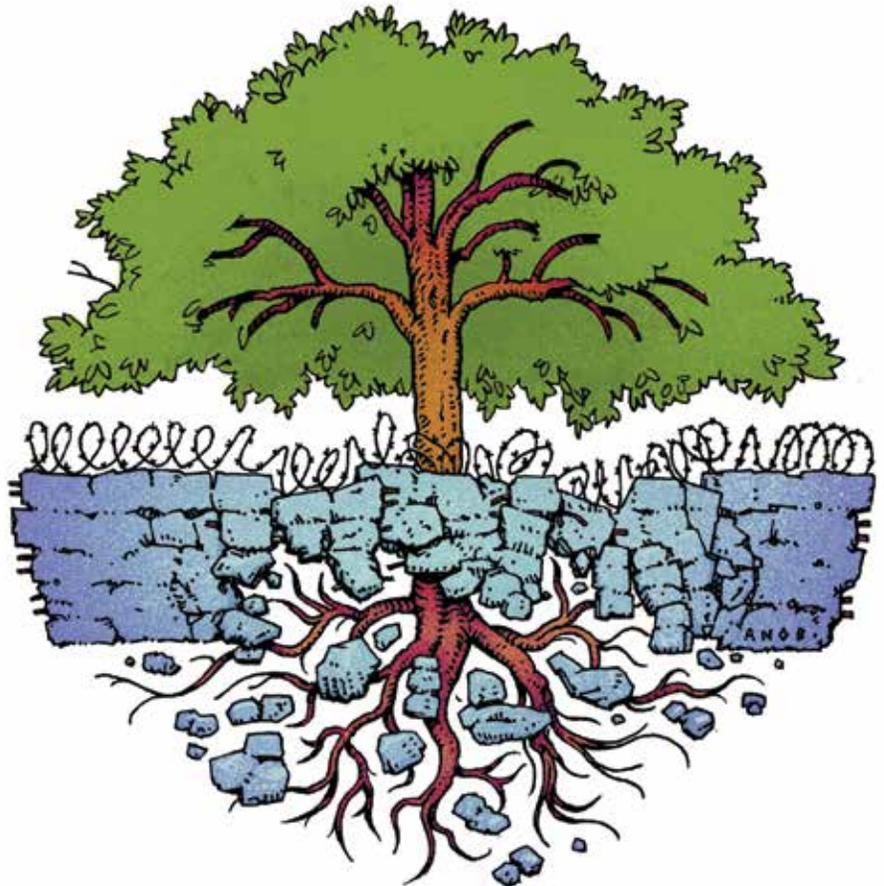
pressing my friend, but I also felt compassion for him. He has been locked away since age 16 in a violent and oppressive environment. In less than two years, he could be released. Because he has never been given the materials, skills, and opportunities to effect personal and interpersonal transformation, it is possible for him to continue his behavior upon release.

The programming here is based on a theory that all our problems are based on our thoughts. But, we didn't think up the neglect and abandonment that destroyed our neighborhoods. We didn't think up unemployment, sub-quality schools and health care either.

As abolitionists, we work to transform society by dismantling institutions like the prison. But society is not only composed of institutions, it's also composed of individuals who have been transformed by those institutions. Where are our efforts to support and guide the formerly incarcerated? Are we depending upon the PIC to provide support? Any chance the prisoner who was oppressing my friend will be transformed upon release and positively contribute to his family and community is predicated upon support we provide behind the walls.

Being an abolitionist behind the walls is hard. It requires courage and mental agility. It takes patience and resourcefulness. Defusing situations and conflict resolution are part of the job. But it is only the beginning. Enabling prisoners to learn, grow and develop new ways of seeing themselves, their communities, and the world is the real groundwork. Will you help us? 

Art by Daniel Chang Christensen



ers and volunteers, other plant life and edibles, such as sage and celandine, migrated into the garden on their own. Zef praised the garden's "unruliness," noting that the natural barrier of mugwort lining the garden keeps trash at bay.

Zef acknowledged that the gardens grow on indigenous Lenape land, and that the political connections between (de)colonization, land expropriation, and socialized gardening have not been sufficiently taken up in mainstream conversations about combating gentrification. "This garden is unique because it is also a political stronghold," Zef went on to say. After participat-

ing in the Standing Rock Solidarity Group to challenge the construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline in 2016, Zef believes the activities at the garden align with visions of decolonization. "The garden was born out of land reclamation," he claims, and its existence challenges the ongoing acquisition of collectively-worked land by real estate development and ideas of private property. The garden, according to Zef, cannot be separated from migrant, Indigenous, and Black struggles for land rights, food justice, and community belonging.

Ongoing Struggles

The César Iglesias Gardens, as well as the livelihoods of community members in Kensington, are currently facing multiple challenges from urban development projects.

In 2018, JBA Group LLC, a developer, purchased one of the garden's parcels of land. Because the parcel is vacant, it does not pose an immediate threat to the garden's operations; however, it does indicate developers' interest in land in the area. The closing of La Finquita remains fresh in the organizers' memories, and so they are currently taking proactive steps to

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Art by Mike Chen



ern Delaware, and extended north all the way up to the lower Hudson Valley in New York. This included the places where New York City and Philadelphia stand today. However, European colonizers stole the Lenape's land through violence and fraud, ultimately pushing the Lenape people west.

Initially, upon losing their territory in 1758 in the Treaty of Easton, many Lenape migrated to present-day Ohio and Canada. Unfortunately, American pioneers and U.S. Army campaigns confronted those settling in Ohio and continued to push the Lenape further and further west. By the 1860s, many Lenape who remained in America settled in Oklahoma, far from their historic homeland.

Different Lenape communities emerged in these settled areas (and even in the historic areas of New Jersey and Delaware). Each of these communities had begun to develop their own internal system of self-government and mutual assistance, and could trace their roots back to the original Lenape people. Thus, each of these communities could claim—under U.S. law—recognition as a tribe. This means the Lenape who live in New Jersey are a distinct tribal entity from those who live in Delaware.

Each have their own tribal government and laws but share a common history and right to historic land.

Lenape and Delaware Tribes Today

Although millions of people native to what is now the United States were killed by white colonizers or died of European diseases between the 1530s and 1930s, survivors proudly keep their cultures alive. Racist and colonialist narratives continue this violence by constructing the stories of indigenous peoples in America in the past tense; as if they are some bygone remnant of cultures and peoples to be celebrated, but never seen. However, many indigenous tribes and communities exist across the country, actively resisting America's continued racist and colonialist tactics. The Ramapough Lenape Nation, in New Jersey, recently received a favorable ruling in support of their lawsuit against the Mahwah township, which has sought to restrict the Lenape's installation of tepees and prayer poles on their land. Additionally, the township has limited the number of people allowed on the property for religious gatherings. In May 2018, the Ramapough Nation filed federal and state

lawsuits against the township.

The Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape of New Jersey maintain an online cultural learning center and museum. Similarly, the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware supports a tribal center and hosts many programs about their culture, history, and experiences, as does the Delaware Tribe of Indians. The Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania also runs a cultural center, which currently features a University of Pennsylvania-hosted exhibit titled, "Fulfilling a Prophecy: the Past and Present of the Lenape in Pennsylvania." The exhibit features oral histories, family heirlooms, and photographs.

Although not members of the Lenape tribe, the Northern Arawak Taino Nation are politically active in resisting pipeline projects, including the struggles at Standing Rock in 2016 and 2017, as well as opposing a local pipeline in Lancaster County and mourning the disruption of a native burial ground.

To learn more about any of these tribes and their communities, please visit their websites. Through educating ourselves on the history of this land and its people, we can begin to address and make reparations for the cruelties done to the original and true owners of this land. 🇺🇸

oppression structure the food system. "There's a deep Philadelphia history of frontline communities working to address issues related to land access, social equity and food insecurity, in part through deep-rooted growing cultures," she said. "I want to know what the world would look like if we kept creating solutions designed by the people that

in Black and Brown communities—instead of just networking with other organizations—so it could build a strong base.

Soil Generation provides community education so people can figure out how to get a lease or deed to their garden's land, which may involve targeting developers or city council in an activist campaign. In April, they held an event on how to start community land trusts, easements, and housing cooperatives as a way to fight gentrification and the displacement of Black and Brown people from their homes. And they even train community members to run their own trainings.

At one such community education event on the evening of April 11, Soil Generation member Soad Mana spoke to about 40 people in an outdoor space at One Art Community Center in West Philly, surrounded by colorful murals. "If your garden plot is owned by the city, you can go to community events and talk to your neighbors, so you can show council members that you have the community's support," she explained. Describing a protest last October at City Hall, where gardeners with wheelbarrows and pitchforks rallied to put pressure on the city's Land Bank for transparency, she said, "It's important that tactics are exciting and empowering for people to be involved."

The Philadelphia Land Bank

The Land Bank was established to make it easier

to return vacant and tax-delinquent properties to productive use. It was created to help residents in poverty buy houses and garden lots. In reality, it has done more to help developers gentrify neighborhoods.

Soil Generation started the Threatened Gardens campaign to address gentrification, displacement, and the city's attacks on gardens. As Philadelphia loses its community gardens to sheriff's sales and development, the Threatened Gardens campaign demands the following in a petition to City Council and the Land Bank:

- 1 End the 10-year tax abatement that has worsened gentrification. Use the resulting tax funds to support gardens.
- 2 A temporary end to sheriff sales of active gardens.
- 3 Provide gardens with security and pathways to community ownership.

The third demand can be met by:

- Notifying communities of property lists that the Land Bank is acquiring
- Making clear to the public who gets access to city-owned land, especially through the Land Bank
- Offering longer-term leases for gardens
- Offering leases with purchase options
- Giving out leases to unincorporated organizations instead of just nonprofits

"I want to know what the world would look like if we kept creating solutions designed by the people that are most affected. The garden, the land, and the soil, has the capacity to hold those questions."

are most affected. The garden, the land, and the soil, has the capacity to hold those questions."

Food sovereignty is about setting your own terms and making your own plans.

Breaking Ground in the City

The coalition that became Soil Generation started in 2011 with a campaign to stop a proposed zoning amendment that would have threatened 20% of the gardens and farms in the city. After winning that campaign, the group worked on building relationships with individual gardeners

ensure that the garden stays alive. They have reached out to the Neighborhood Gardens Trust for support, a nonprofit that provides legal advocacy to community gardeners to create green spaces in Philadelphia. Organizers and community members plan to do more in the future.



Photo Courtesy of César Andreu Iglesias Community Garden

Cesar Viveros, the artist whose work adorns the garden, has recently faced housing complications due to urban developers' irresponsible practices. Last March, a developer purchased a home next to Viveros' in Kensington, but the contractors dug so deep into the ground as they were working that they cracked the foundation to Cesar's home. Due to the tremendous damage done to his home, he has been forced to relocate: he no longer lives close to the garden he cared for and he has not been offered proper compensation for the damages. Organizers have started an online fundraiser to support Cesar financially. The community is rallying to support Cesar. Although the future looks unclear for both the garden and Cesar, volunteers still meet frequently at the garden, continuing to grow its plants, flowers, and political community. 🇺🇸

prefigurative politics | from page 12

Organization protests in Seattle, as well as the 2011 Occupy movements.

Prefigurative politics are not perfect. There will always be a limit to how successfully we can build a new world within the violence of an exploitative capitalist system. Prefigurative projects can be vulnerable to police attacks as with MOVE or the Occupy encampments. At worst, they can create barriers of understanding and practice between revolutionaries striving to live in their new world and communities struggling to survive in the old one. They can also be vulnerable to co-optation—delinked from mass movement they easily become cogs

in a non-profit machine that fails to challenge capitalism. History has shown, however, that prefigurative politics as a strategy—especially when used *alongside* mobilization against the current system—can be both transformative and sustaining for revolutionary movements. Prefigurative experiments continue to rise in places like Jackson, Mississippi where groups like the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and Cooperation Jackson create public assemblies and cooperative economic institutions. Prefigurative politics offer us powerful ways to demonstrate in deeds and words not only what we stand against, but what we stand *for*. 🇺🇸

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Growing Community Control

Folks at Soil Generation aren't afraid to get their hands dirty lobbying politicians, but their primary goal is community control of the land. "It's a radical act to say, 'I'm going to take this land that may or may not belong to me, and I'm going to grow something on that,'" Kirtrina Baxter explained in the presentation. "There are certain steps you have to take as a community member to create a community garden. You have to engage your neighbors, tell them this is what you want to do. And once you get those neighbors together, you have to figure out what's the skill set among those folks that you have in the room. Once you figure out who has what skills, you bring those skills together, and you teach each other. So through this process of organizing yourselves to build a garden, you learn to organize yourselves for any other thing you want to happen within your community. Those

same steps you take to build that garden are the same steps you would take to rally against a large development that might be happening in your community.

"So that's why it's community power," Baxter continued. "Once you understand that leveraging the skill sets from the people that you have in your community to come together over something—just as small as it may seem, as a garden—you can use that small thing and catapult that to larger things. And the next thing you know, your whole community is empowered to make things happen."

For a long view of Philadelphia's future, keep an eye on Soil Generation. Whether starting a garden, protecting an existing neighborhood farm, or organizing neighbors to fight developers, this work shows people don't have to be experts or activists to take back control of the land we live on. In fact, each one of us is needed to grow a city where future generations can thrive. 🇺🇸

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Every Wednesday
6–7:00pm

West Philly ESL Classes

LUCIEN BLACKWELL LIBRARY
125 SOUTH 52ND STREET

Every Saturday
3:30–4:30pm

West Philly ESL Classes

LUCIEN BLACKWELL LIBRARY
125 SOUTH 52ND STREET

Every Thursday
6:30–7:30pm

South Philly ESL Classes

GUERIN REC CENTER
2201 SOUTH 16TH ST

September 10
6–8:00pm

Prison Project Meeting

REPAIR THE WORLD
4029 MARKET ST

September 16
7–9:00pm

West Philly Working Meeting

A-SPACE
4722 BALTIMORE AVE

September 20
10:00pm – 2:00am

FISTFUL OF KISSES

Monthly Dance Party

DAHLAK
4708 BALTIMORE AVE

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