

The Philadelphia Partisan

The Journal of Philly Socialists



Photo by Alaura Garcia



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A note from Alaura Garcia: "Hello! I am a photographer and art student currently based in Pennsylvania. In May I attended a protest organized by the Philadelphia Free Palestine Coalition, calling to #SaveSheikhJarrah. It was a beautiful experience to witness the city of Philadelphia coming together in support of Palestine. We marched from Rittenhouse Square down to City Hall."

Cesar Viveros

Community Action Relief Project

Philadelphia Survival Collective

Service Worker's Treatment During COVID-19



Organizer Profile: Cesar Viveros

By Partisan Contributor



Photo by Partisan Contributor

Almost nine years ago, Cesar Viveros began taking walks around the area where César Andreu Iglesias Community Garden stands today. He came across Philly Socialists cleaning around the gardens for the first time, and asked to help clean up. But Viveros also wanted to contribute some of his sculptures to the community garden. A visual artist from México, Viveros creates large sculptures that are related to his culture, and his personal relationship with and perspective on his culture. As he began to place some of his sculptures in the gardens, he saw that something bigger than just cleaning was happening. Art, cooking, and mutual teaching of skills were also taking place. Participants in the garden’s life began to get to

know each other more and more, and the community began to grow bigger and bigger.

Art, cooking, and mutual teaching of skills were also taking place. Participants in the garden’s life began to get to know each other more and more, and the community began to grow bigger and bigger.

Viveros says that recently, he has been proud of the fact that people from other parts of Philadelphia are also making trips to the gardens to connect with everyone. People see that the gardens have provided them the freedom to choose, clean, and transform the lot to grow their own vegetables and eat healthier. Most

importantly, Viveros says, “We are part of the workforce, but we also have a voice. It’s a public, open kitchen for the people.” The gardens provide a symbol of personal agency and humanity that can be challenging to find in daily life. With the gardens, Viveros and the community strive to educate the youth as well. Exploring every corner of the land can be an adventure, but it can also be an opportunity for the children to learn about how their foods are sourced. Viveros says, “They’re curious enough to get closer. Kids want to be with their parents because they see their parents doing something positive, something out of the ordinary.” From painting signage for the plants to writing down their scientific names, the gardens offer opportunities to cultivate the educational aspect of the process of growing our own food. 🍅

To follow and support Cesar Viveros, go to either muralarts.org/artist/cesar-viveros, or follow him on instagram @cesarmural

Letter from the Coordinators

Dear Readers,
Needless to say, quite a lot has happened since our last print edition in the Summer of 2019. We are living through the worst pandemic in a century, and many of us have lost a loved one or know someone who has. Last summer, we saw the largest mass rebellion that this country has seen in decades, in response to the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Walter Wallace, Jr., and many other Black people. Philadelphia police responded to protests by using chemical weapons and violence against residents within their own neighborhoods. Houseless Philadelphians and their allies banded together to claim space on Benjamin Franklin Parkway for months, fending off waves of police threats and harassment. Through it all, The Philadelphia Partisan has been out on the streets and publishing on our website. We’ve continued to meet online to tell the stories of Philadelphians that most news sources ignore or misrepresent.

We’re proud to return to ink and paper, bringing more of these stories to an even wider audience. In this issue, you’ll hear about Cesar Viveros, who has brought beauty and bravery to the

César Andreu Iglesias Community Garden, and Ben Fletcher, a Black Philadelphian who organized dock workers in the early twentieth century. You’ll hear how the Community Action Relief Project and Philadelphia Survival Collective have helped Philadelphians help each other during the pandemic. We hope you learn from the conceptual breakdown of the exploitation that all workers experience. We hope the art and poetry in this issue inspires and moves you.

The fight continues. The police continue to harass and attack Philadelphians. Many Philadelphians remain unhoused and unprotected. With rising COVID cases and a second lockdown looming in the near future, many working class Philadelphians are still struggling to recover financially, emotionally, and physically. We’re committed to telling the stories of Philadelphians fighting for a better future, and we are excited to hear from you. Be in touch. 🍅

Send us letters to the editors at partisan@phillysocialists.org

Find us online at PhiladelphiaPartisan.com, Facebook and Twitter

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Cover photo and Cesar Viveros portrait by Partisan Contributor

“Not Just Giving Out Resources, But Building Community”:

The Community Action Relief Project

By Maddie Rose

It’s early on a Saturday morning, and Tim Adams is methodically spreading peanut butter and jelly on an assembly line of dozens of slices of bread. That is task number one on a busy weekend of divvying out portions of chili, prepping hygiene packs, and hosting community conversations under a tent alongside Kensington and Lehigh Avenues in North Philadelphia. Today, Tim’s routine is scrambled because his phone service was turned off. But it didn’t keep him from being the first arrival for solidarity work with the Community Action Relief Project (CARP), a project that has become central to his life.

Dozens of people in the heart of Kensington who struggle with poverty have also found this project central to their lives. Many depend on the support of the anarchist, socialist and communist-led CARP. CARP keeps weekly volunteers moving with the help of a “coffee and cigarettes” drawer run by Tim — who encourages folks to leave a tip per cigarette — and portions of the meals they distribute twice a week under an assem-

bly of tents.

CARP is not funded by a nonprofit, or by the city—but it isn’t a typical community food distribution program, either. CARP stocks a mini free library with books by Black radical authors and convenes regular political education sessions after supplies distribution. Nurses regularly show up to offer wound care and basic first aid. A sign alongside the distribution tent reads “Ask us about safer injection supplies.”

A little over a year ago, none of this existed. Today CARP is blossoming.

A COVID-19 project turned community staple

At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, a few members of Philly Socialists with disaster relief experience jumped into action. Grocery deliveries were hard to come by for those who were elderly or otherwise high-risk, and a delivery network sprung up to meet the need.

From there, the Community Action Relief Program was formed, in an attempt to get food and supplies to those with-

out the ability to leave home — or who couldn’t afford groceries after the sudden job loss that mid-March brought to many Philadelphians.

The program has since developed to focus on the pressing needs in its own Kensington backyard. The Philly Socialists office, sitting empty while it was unsafe for large groups to meet, transformed into a supplies distribution center. Hand-made wooden shelves carry bulk packages of peanut butter, donated clothes, medical supplies, literature and even clean needles and injection supplies.

The deserving poor

According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, Kensington is the center of the worst urban opioid crisis in the country, and the city health department estimates that tens of thousands of Philadelphians are addicted to opioids. Some people who are dependent on drugs here in Kensington are housed, while others are living in tents alongside major roads—staying together in communities both for camaraderie and for safety. One reason for CARP’s growth from food delivery to a larger project was the urgent needs left unmet right outside its front door, and its response is safer injection kits.

This aspect of their work is called harm reduction. If people need to inject drugs, and are going to do it anyway, harm reduction advocates explain it’s better they do so with safe access to drugs and to clean needles. Those can be hard to come by.

“There’s always a difference,” Sal Hamerman explains, “between those seen as the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. Because so many people living in extreme poverty in Kensington are criminalized, the state has viewed them as the undeserving poor.” Drug users and those in deep poverty are frequently denied needed aid because “people assume they’re going to use aid for nefarious purposes, rather than to stay alive.”

Sal is a CARP member of nearly a year, called to the work upon her ar-

rival in Philly right after the Black Lives Matter uprising in summer of 2020. As a Kensington resident, she wanted to get connected to work that was “really intentional about not just giving out resources, but building community.” She sees safer drug use supplies, and the relationships built among CARP members and drug users, as a tool to strengthen community.

While CARP isn’t only focused on harm reduction, like the nearby Prevention Point program, the project seems to thrive from its connection to the people of Kensington. Direct communication with those up and down Kensington Avenue about each person’s needs, and finding a way to meet those needs, is a point of pride for CARP members.

First aid for the people

Those conversations are essential for connecting with people who are often failed, or avoided altogether, by government services. At CARP, hygiene kits and medical supplies are in high demand. Shelves hold stacks of menstruation products and condoms. But the first aid provided offers safe access to critical resources that many marginalized Kensington residents are barred from. Some have seen all too intimately the ways that interacting with healthcare and social work systems can lead to violent interactions with cops or institutionalization.

Healthcare worker Ethan Cooksley backs this up from experiences providing wound care and other basic first aid at the headquarters. Ethan joined CARP after focusing on street medical care during last summer’s uprising, and stayed plugged in to the work because so many people ended up in need of medical services who couldn’t get treated elsewhere.

“Lack of insurance is a big thing,” Ethan explained. “There’s also a lot of racism inherent to emergency room care. There’s a negative connotation that people are drug-seeking, when they have chronic pain or substance-use issues.”

This was a familiar problem to the members of CARP who supported or lived in the unhoused encampment of the summer of 2020, when the city negotiated with protesters by offering the same shelter and health services that had already failed to provide housing or substantial support. CARP members saw the gatekeeping aspects of social and health



Bertrom, Devan, and Tim work a sandwich assembly line, photo by Maddie Rose

services. The city classified some as eligible and others as ineligible: the city policies the boundary between the deserving and undeserving poor.

At CARP, no questions are asked. No paperwork is required. Treatment is given to those who need treatment.

From rad literature to relationships

CARP stands out for its weekly political education programming, reading groups, and community member involvement in its workshops. These political conversations ask the bigger questions: how do we move from individual aid to changing the systems that keep people down?

The problems CARP addresses, the problems residents of Kensington struggle with, are all systemic. CARP strives to connect with the people it serves and to plug them into its regularly held conversations on prisons, gentrification and capitalism.

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versations on prisons, gentrification and capitalism.

Perhaps some of the most important political work, however, happens outside of those official sessions and in the casual conversations between CARP members and Kensington residents. Members hang around under the tent’s many tables and chairs without a clear supplies assignment, simply looking to chat with anyone nearby.

Christina and Frankie, residents in Kensington, stop by the CARP tent for chili and to talk for over an hour. For them, the reliability of meals relieves some of the stress of food insecurity. Frankie insists he doesn’t do politics, but has plenty to say about politics all the same. He likes to share the knowledge he gained from his time reading in prison as his way of giving back — mostly psychology and sociology.

To Frankie, it’s starkly apparent that the services offered by churches and mutual aid programs to feed people are areas where the city has failed. Hannah Kanick of PhillyVoice reports that Mayor Jim Kenney’s city budget for the 2022 fiscal year will provide “\$727 million” to the Philadelphia police. Frankie suggests that the city funding that goes to the police might not be needed if people were properly fed and given money.

“Most people steal for a reason, they need to. The city is reactive. They tackle problems after they already happen. They could be proactive instead, make it so people don’t gotta steal.”



Tim preps sandwiches, photo by Maddie Rose



Lizzie, Bertrom, Rebeca, Ethan, Ben, Akhil, Ethan, Devan and Sal gear up for a distribution day, photo by Maddie Rose



Christina and Frankie enjoy food shared with their friends at CARP, photo by Maddie Rose

Frankie notes the dangerous streets of Kensington haven't been made safer by the police. Instead, Kensington has its own ways of adapting. "Communities can police themselves. Some already are. People here getting high in places they shouldn't — community members go in and move them, without calling the cops."

What makes mutual aid, mutual aid

As conversations about whether mutual aid has the potential to build working-class power unfold across many socialist groups, CARP points to the early possibilities of a group that could develop mutuality in its own right — where the receivers of support become also providers of support.

"I tell people who criticize mutual aid that it's a first step. It might look like service work at first, but once you start becoming part of the community, it builds up."

CARP member Akhil Kalepu's eye is on the bigger picture. Mutual aid, Akhil explains, is a stepping stone that develops connections and builds up strength within the community. The next steps are scaling upwards and connecting it back to Philly Socialists' other projects, like tenant and prison support.

"I tell people who criticize mutual aid that it's a first step. It might look like service work at first, but once you start becoming part of the community, it builds up."

CARP's community dreams expand beyond distribution of services and supplies. The relationships it builds appear key to those dreams. In only a year it has developed a firm community presence in a working-class area in Kensington with twice weekly distribution, emerging as a powerhouse of a project that won't slow down.

You can help grow CARP

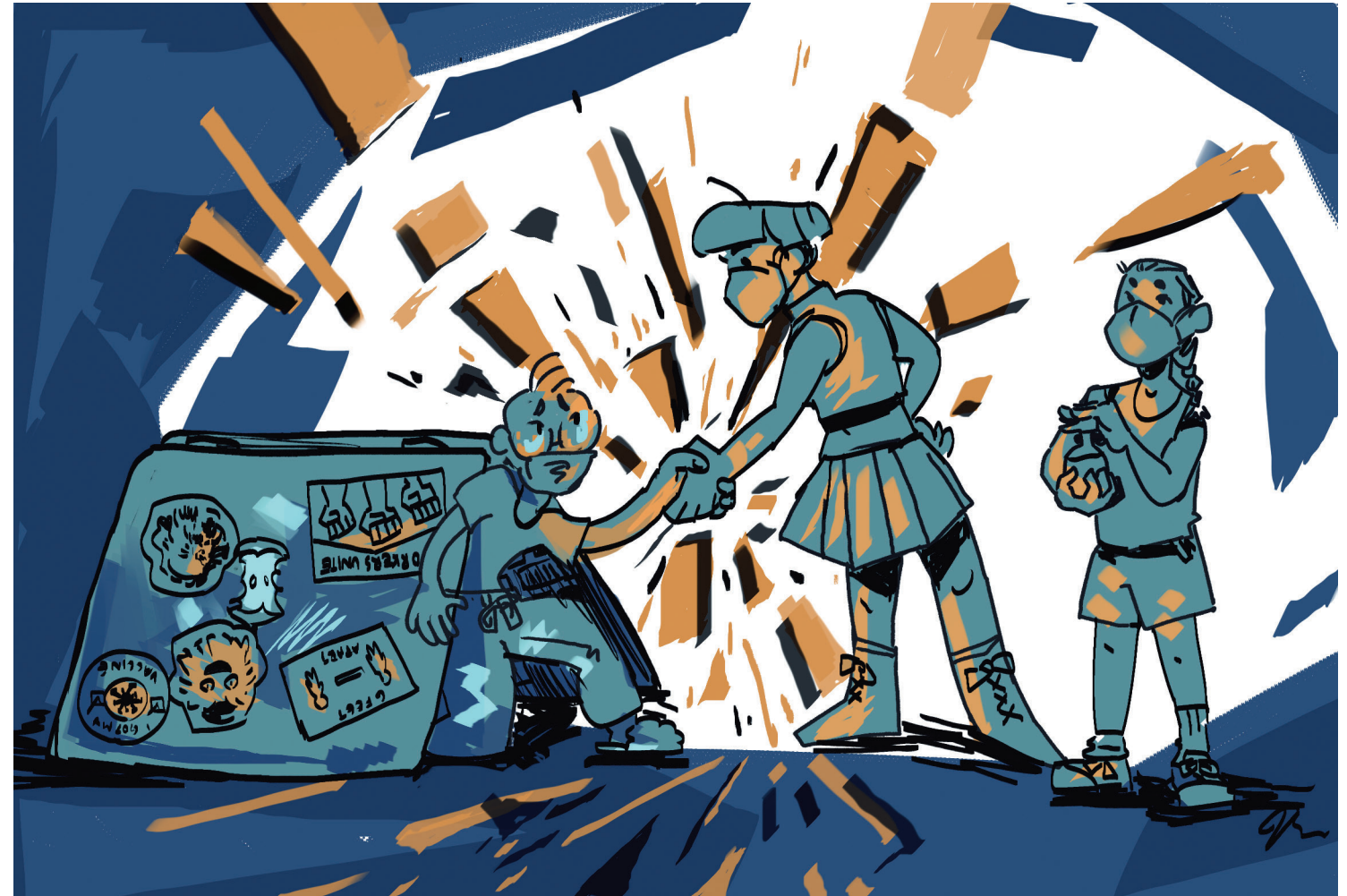
Get involved with CARP by checking out phlcarp.org/get-involved or reach out on Instagram [@communityaction-reliefproject](https://www.instagram.com/communityaction-reliefproject). Current needs are people to help with distribution, cooking hot meals, nurses or anyone first aid trained, or people familiar with housing systems. Distribution days are Saturday and Sunday, mid-morning to mid-afternoon at 2659 Kensington Avenue. Show up early to help Tim make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. 🍌



Ethan, Devan, Sal and Akhil at a slow moment while handing out soups and literature, photo by Maddie Rose

Philadelphia Survival Collective Feeds Hundreds of Families Impacted by Pandemic

By J.M. Rizzo



art by JS Wu

"A lot of people felt pretty powerless," recalled Francesca Fiore, thinking back to March of 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S. and the world started shutting down. That moment of despair didn't last long — Fiore and her fellow Philly Socialists quickly found something they could do to mitigate the damage in their communities. They started the Community Action Relief Project (CARP), a mutual aid initiative designed to help one another navigate the pandemic's cascading crises.

"At first it was just a way to make sure that other comrades in the Philly Socialists network were supported," Fiore said, "because suddenly a lot of people lost

their jobs and a lot of people were immunocompromised, unable to go to the store." Fiore started helping out as a driver, going on grocery runs and delivering food to people's homes.

The project "blew up really fast," Fiore said. CARP got the word out through the Philadelphia Tenants Union, and over the first few months, the project delivered food to approximately 700 households. To better handle the volume of foodstuffs and to save money, CARP then shifted to a supply hub model. They bought in bulk and packed delivery boxes at the Philly Socialists' office in Kensington.

During the summer of 2020, CARP shifted its focus to its Kensington home

base. Members set up tables in the neighborhood on weekends, offering soup, sandwiches, and "radical discussion," Fiore said. The Philadelphia Survival Collective (PSC) emerged as its own project and continued delivering groceries to households all over the city. In the fall of 2020, PSC began sourcing supplies from food pantries served by anti-hunger organizations like the Share Food Program and Philabundance.

"It's a valuable thing," said PSC member Jeremy, who preferred that only his first name be used, "because these sites are not super reliable. You might go and they don't open on time, or they don't have food any given week, so you have

continued

to do a grocery run instead, or you might end up waiting an hour or two. So especially when you're an elderly, immunocompromised person, that's not ideal."

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Jeremy works for PSC as a dispatcher, determining which requests need to be filled each day, finding drivers, and creating routes for them to drop off supplies. He also built an online system using the platform Airtable to manage the project's logistics.

Another group of volunteers serve as organizers, communicating with people requesting food to ensure that everyone gets what they need. PSC members refer to these food recipients as "requesters." Samantha Powell has been a PSC organizer since April of 2020 and estimated that she has spoken with 100 families.

"Part of the work we do is to get folks groceries and to help build food security," she said, "but it's also about relationship building. A lot of our requesters are living alone and don't really have anyone to talk to or maybe just to complain a little bit. I think it's helped a lot of people over the past year with their mental health, just knowing that there's somebody who will listen."

One elderly requester recently reached out when her mother died. "We had a conversation and she kind of cried it out a bit," Powell said. "We're here to help people survive, but we also develop meaningful relationships over time."

Powell has also helped requesters navigate practical challenges. "I developed a tight relationship with this woman who was undocumented," Powell said. "She was struggling with whether she should apply for unemployment because she was a housecleaner and didn't have any other means to make money." Powell did some research and encouraged the woman to apply. "She ended up getting the government assistance that she needed," said Powell.

Other requesters are ready to start giving back. Powell is working with one man who is excited about getting more

people involved in PSC. "He wants to hold community meetings once a month and he's ready to start making changes in his neighborhood," she said. "That's important, because not only do we want to help people meet their basic needs, we also want to get people to realize that they deserve better."

The group is nudging people towards that realization with political education. "It's kind of hard to talk to people about socialism right off the bat as a first conversation," said Powell. "I know some groups really lean in strong, but we're taking a slow and steady approach. We want to build relationships, build trust, and then we want to let people understand that capitalism isn't going to work for them and that there's an alternative."

"We now have this zine with information about organizing happening in the city," said Jeremy, "and we just include it with the deliveries." The first issue includes, among other things, a section explaining the ways in which the powerful Fraternal Order of Police blocks progressive change.

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In part, PSC has been such a success because it has drawn a huge number of first-time volunteers. "A lot of people had a lot more time than they had before — this was not necessarily something people wanted," said Fiore, "but I think a lot of the drivers at the beginning were people who had lost their restaurant jobs and were looking around and thinking, 'How can I support my neighbors? How can I support my comrades?'"

Jeremy noted that it was a good proj-

ect for beginners. "A lot of the tasks you could do without a lot of experience," he said. "If you have a car or even just a bike, you could do deliveries."

Fiore said that many were motivated to volunteer because "the entire system of government in this country failed its neediest citizens. In all of the choices you saw being made in every city, it was always capital over people's lives." The question of how to maintain the economy seemed to take precedence over questions of how to keep people healthy and safe. "That was really scary," she said. "People were looking around and thinking, 'We could do this differently.'"

Now that the worst of the pandemic appears to be over, PSC has scaled its operation down. They have recently been focusing on providing sustained support to a smaller core group of regular requesters, but the infrastructure is in place should they need to scale back up. "Now we have this big pool of volunteers who can step in, the tech system, the coordination," said Jeremy. "We don't know what's going to happen next. Maybe some natural disaster? With the state of the world, who knows?"

PSC is always looking for more volunteers to join the team. Sign up to volunteer at phillysocialists.org/philly-survival-collective if you think you might be right for one of the following roles:

Delivery drivers Delivery drivers pick up food boxes from city food sites and deliver them to households that request assistance (right now this happens on Wednesday and Saturday mornings). Occasional grocery store trips might be required.

Remote dispatchers and organizers Remote dispatchers help coordinate deliveries and remote organizers connect requesters to resources and build relationships through organizing conversations.

Coalition building PSC wants to develop a network of resources across the city and needs folks who can help them reach out to other organizations and build coalitions!

Social media / tech / fundraising If you have tech skills, are interested in building resource databases, or are interested in helping with social media and/or fundraising PSC could use your help!

Political education If you are interested in political education or working on the zine, let PSC know! 📌

We Were Always At Risk:

Service Worker's Treatment During COVID-19 and Why It's Nothing New

By Teresa Rodriguez



illustration by Teresa Rodriguez

This article was originally published in full on August 1st, 2020 on The Partisan's website, philadelphiapartisan.com. What follows has been downsized for print.

Few have been left more vulnerable in this crisis than service workers. 60% of the country's newly unemployed in March were workers at bars and restaurants, according to The Bureau of Labor Statistics. The New York Times reports that 52% of low-income workers have lost work as a result of virus containment measures. It is estimated that the current national unemployment rate is around 12-15%, which is not far off from the Great Depression rate of 24%. In Pennsylvania, 20% of the workforce has filed for unemployment

over the course of the crisis.

Despite the sweeping uniformity of financial devastation resulting from government mandates, relief from the government has been hard to come by. Half a million people in Pennsylvania are still waiting for unemployment benefits, WHYY reports. What's more, workers in the service sector are particularly susceptible to being laid off due to the nature of their jobs being that of heavy face-to-face interaction, an element that simultaneously precludes the option to work from home. Many businesses are not providing support, financial or otherwise, to their employees, even when law requires it.

So, the low-wage employees of these businesses, including in major part

those who work in Philadelphia's expansive service industry, are left to fend for themselves. And when workers have been paid poverty wages and systematically denied a financial safety net, they are often forced to seek work risking their lives for the sake of meagre pay as grocery store workers and deliverers. Many more are left to grapple with a future that is completely uncertain and possibly filled with the imminent peril posed by their employers prematurely ordering them back to work. All of this is compounded with the preexisting chaos of precarity.

However, in this exceptional time, we find ourselves in an unprecedented moment of self-reflection for service workers, as well as acknowledgment of their value by the general public. Some acquire

an increased sympathy towards a group that is now obviously at risk, some protest in the streets for the “right” to be waited upon in a chain restaurant; all are forced to reckon with the prominence of service workers as staples of daily life — even, and perhaps most potently, in light of their widespread absence.

Eight of Philadelphia’s laid-off service workers speak out here, sharing their experiences and the conditions that formed a precedent for their employers’ response to an unprecedented event.

Shutdown

D, who wishes to remain anonymous, was a server at Louie Louie in University City, of local restaurant group Fearless. He got an email on March 15th informing staff that the restaurant was closing, and might have reduced staff or hours upon reopening. Since then he has heard nothing from them, but has seen the company post that they are hiring.

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Maggie was working at the Roxy Theater, a movie theater owned and operated by the Philadelphia Film Society. In early March, Maggie pressed for information about sick pay. She was told that an addendum would be sent out to employees concerning their rights. That addendum never came. What did come was an email abruptly announcing that the theater would be closed starting the following day and telling staff to apply for unemployment.

RS, who worked as a cook at a restaurant in center city before being laid off, has not been paid out any paid time off (PTO). She is living off of the savings for her wedding. She asked for leniency on rent, but her landlord refused.

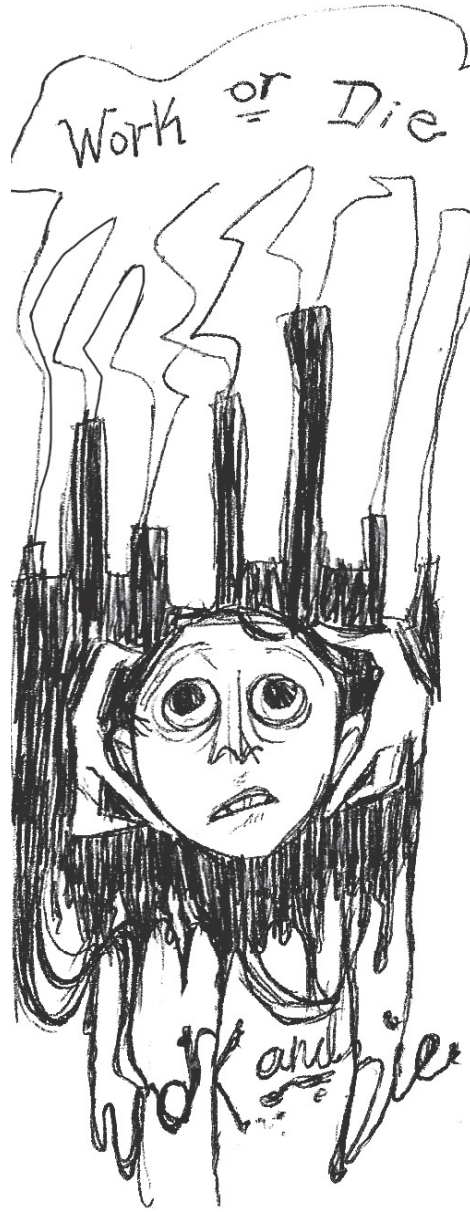


illustration by Teresa Rodriguez

“Normal” Conditions

When asked if his job had ever offered paid time off, D laughs at the notion. “No,” he says. “Restaurants, they just don’t.” When asked if he’s had to come in sick before, D replies without hesitation. “Absolutely”.

“We get hourly pay when we are there and only when we are there,” E says when asked about sick leave at her job at a Philadelphia restaurant. “If you miss a day you’re just not going to be paid that day”. She says that servers would often come in even if they didn’t feel well because of this. E adds that there is a “gross stigma” surrounding calling out sick that management perpetuates. It is implied that any-

one doing so just doesn’t want to work.

Whenever Roe, who worked at a South Philly coffee shop, was sick, finding coverage was her own responsibility. Employees were shamed for staying home when sick, with management often mocking them and implying that such employees were lazy. Roe says she worked through a bout of walking pneumonia last summer just to avoid the “ordeal” of trying to find coverage and facing abuse from management. Management, fully aware she had pneumonia, made jokes about it.

When Maggie developed a disability and had an increasing number of doctor’s appointments, upper management discussed laying her off for 6 months without pay and possibly replacing her. “It wasn’t as important for me not getting paid sick days until I started developing a sickness,” Maggie says, adding that “month after month year after year it starts eating away at you saying well, you know, am I not important?”

The schedule for D’s job came out late every Sunday night for the very next day. He says that working extra hours is common because base wages aren’t guaranteed. Servers have to overextend themselves to make up for slow days and satisfy their financial needs. It’s an advantageous system for restaurant owners, who get more labor by paying workers less. Breaks were rarely provided. At his last server job, he said staff were working doubles every day with no break until an employee reported them. After that, breaks were provided, but only for doubles—regular shifts, which were 9 or 10 hours long, still did not have breaks.

“I’m coming in at 3, getting out at 2 am, coming back at 9 am and working a 16 hour shift,” E says of her job, adding that “it’s not uncommon for people to be working a 16 hour shift one day and again the next day”.

Roe tells of one instance when a refrigerator was emitting a “horrific, smelly gas” and employees were made to work through it. There was also, Roe says, a perpetually-leaky refrigerator, which created a daily slipping hazard.

“They get away with a lot more than what other places can get away with,” D says of restaurant workplaces. Louie Louie provided staff meals. Staff meals were made up of old food that could not be sold to customers anymore. D says consuming these expired goods made him

and other employees sick on numerous occasions. Bringing meals from home was prohibited. Staff had to take what was offered or go hungry. They also weren’t permitted to bring water bottles and were not provided adequate time to drink water during their shift. “I work all day, no break, I’m starving”, D says, speaking of an instance where he was chastised for eating a handful of nuts.

“People don’t conceive of what they really deserve...” asserts RS. “That’s something I hear a lot from people who have been in the industry a long time — ‘well this is how it is’...I’ll take what I can get”.

“Uphold these standards — that’s the terminology, uphold these standards — which is really just coded language for follow the fucking rules and stay in your lane and keep with the order,” E says of the strict expectations restaurants have for servers. She also notes that restaurants are not very inclusive of queer people, women, or people of color. She calls it “an old white man’s game” and says this is reflected in the fact that different demographics are segregated accordingly: bussers and dishwashers typically being “black and brown folk” while higher level positions are typically white.

Why do we take it?

For those previously unfamiliar with the plight of service workers, such testimonies might beg the question: why do workers accept these conditions?

“Bad gas travels fast in a small town, and the service industry is a small town,” explains RS, saying that workers face the danger of essentially being blacklisted if they organize. “People are terrified”, constantly “beat down by their employers” and told they are replaceable, according to Maggie. “It’s hard to voice any dissent...because so much of your livelihood is dependent upon a position in which your supervisor...can affect the treatment you get at work” adds E. “It seems like...managers make the decisions and we’re at the whims of their choices”. Many workers emphasize that the generally poor conditions of these jobs make

them reluctant to jeopardize any providing even the most rudimentary benefits. “People don’t conceive of what they really deserve...” asserts RS. “That’s something I hear a lot from people who have been in the industry a long time — ‘well this is how it is’...I’ll take what I can get”.

Maggie was unaware of Philadelphia sick pay law until she googled it after being laid off with no pay. D’s experiences have led him to assume that labor laws may simply not apply to restaurants. RS says she attempted to organize with her coworkers digitally after being laid off but hasn’t had much success. “Most people are just concerned that they will lose their jobs”. E says “I could very easily see people just getting fired and replaced” if workers organized at her job.

Many of the workers who spoke out for this article admitted they were nervous about participating. At the same time, many knew their criticisms to be justified. “We shouldn’t feel so afraid to organize,” RS says. “We’re not asking for a lot, we’re not trying to drive our owners out of business, we just wanna be treated equally”.

Sparks

“A lot of people...are living in abject poverty even though they are working 40 hours a week”, says Emilio, a Philly barista. “When you’re doing that it’s just mentally hard to even think about organizing.” But after the unexpected success of a spreadsheet he created for baristas to compare wages, Emilio came upon Philly Workers for Dignity, an organization that aims to bring workers together to fight for better conditions. Through that, he formed a Citywide Barista Union.

...after the unexpected success of a spreadsheet he created for baristas to compare wages, Emilio came upon Philly Workers for Dignity, an organization that aims to bring workers together to fight for better conditions. Through that, he formed a Citywide Barista Union.

Jack Thornton, the secretary for Philly Workers for Dignity (the labor or-

ganizing project of Philly Socialists) says that the idea of an organization like Dignity is to expose abuses and keep bosses on their toes. Dignity takes on typically overlooked industries, especially those without union representation. “Service workers, food service workers especially, are a huge contingent of people who are untapped, essentially, as organizers” Jack says. In the year and a half since Dignity’s inception, the organization has helped multiple local workforces organize, including Cake Life, a Fishtown bake shop. “When people hear about the kind of stuff we’re doing,” says Jack, “it usually grabs people’s attention really quickly, because you’re like ‘oh this bougie bake-shop unionized — what?’”.

Jack says that the pandemic has Dignity inundated. The organization has seized this as a historic opportunity to “harness this energy” and get unemployed people ready to organize once they go back to work again. As Jack puts it, “we’re training the army right now”.

RS found Dignity while searching through Instagram for any organizations taking action during this crisis. RS says that working with Dignity has made her feel empowered.

Rallying Cry

At a moment when large numbers of people put out of work by city mandate declare that they don’t even have enough in savings to pay their rent two weeks later, when corporations are forced to deliver pseudo-heartfelt thank you messages to their previously “expendable” workforce, when people once labeled “unskilled workers” are suddenly referred to as “essential”...well, we start to see the stirrings of a shift in perspective. We see that when they said they thought of us as “expendable” they weren’t kidding. There is no quick solution to this disillusionment. There is nothing left to do about this but stand up and fight for an equitable future. It does NOT have to be this way, and now’s the time to prove it. 📌

More information on Philly Workers for Dignity can be found on their website at phillydignity.org.

Sick leave law applies to the majority of workers in Philadelphia. Most employers with 10 or more employees operating in Philadelphia are required to provide paid sick time. Report a sick leave violation here: phila.gov/services/working-jobs/paid-sick-leave.

What?

By Jonathon Todd

Used to drive 15 miles to swallow God
Back out of an agreement
Arrange the text as meaning
The first half of the blue book
Reads like a novel,
Until we start demanding the linear
And material.
Did you ever sneak away from ritual
For a cigarette?
Plant your hands on something older than a thought?
Days staring at the wall
I want a tongue delirious of language
Jumping the fence and boredom
Which is just time to breathe, time
Away from movement.
Some of the early ideas of prison
Were to cure idleness
As if you took a breath you might see past
The illusion.
You might, for example:
Pass out flowers to strangers,
Spend vast amounts of time naked in bed,
Refuse to click on the clock.
You might even quit your job,
Laugh when someone asks "What's next?"
Ordinary and ordained by a long fall night. 🍷



"Portrait of a Sad Woman" by Lauren Doyle



"Miss You" by Lauren Doyle

Birds

By Jonathon Todd

Sunset says "normalize" parameters / cropped from
excess / tear gas, crop dust, sky fascists, nature collapsing
and music on silence / groups of atoms condense for
stance (call it) transmit / ageless my cowardice just ego /
all spirals / old geometry sirens aren't music/ repurposed
conditioning & intoxicants / we believe in the collective
/ pulling shutters / say fuck silence / read lips covered
in cloth / distribute food & water & information / whole
structures dissipate / as a slogan / as communion / junk
birds scatter as sirens / as what is the state / as mutual aid
/ as language of murder / belief dries out on a rooftop /
don't talk about excess or work / as a brick / as it's always
money / capital stuck to the roofs of their mouths. 🍷

Lauren paints and draws using watercolors, ink, and a variety of muses; a combination of artifacts and mementos which surround her daily life. Objects that hide in the corner of your eye and are hidden from plain view interest her. She received her BFA in Painting/Drawing from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn NY. She currently lives in Philadelphia. / IG: [Lauren_doyle](#) / website: [lauren-doyle.com](#)

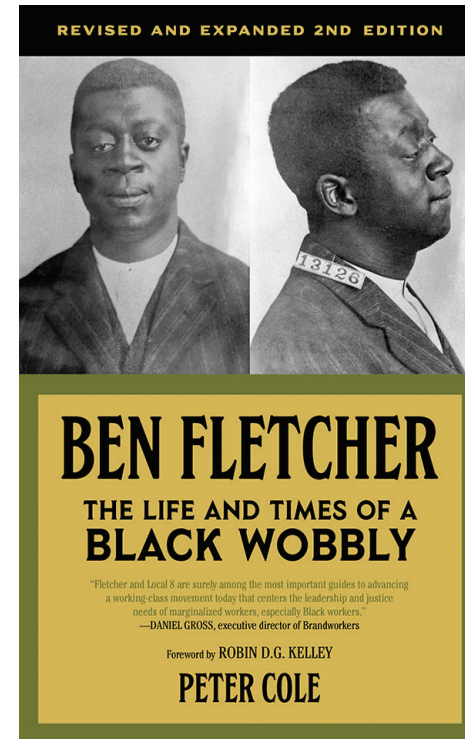
Jonathon Todd is a poet and musician, living in South Philadelphia. His work deals with observations mainly written between breaks, trying to find humanity outside of and within labor. His work has been featured in Philadelphia Stories, Prolit mag, and Protean mag among others. His chapbook *Over/time* was recently released from Moonstone Press (2019).

Review

Ben Fletcher: The Life and Times of a Black Wobbly

By Peter Cole. Second Edition. PM Press, 2021.

By Herbert P. Caine



Peter Cole's *Ben Fletcher: The Life and Times of a Black Wobbly* is an excellent work of Philadelphia radical history, and very relevant work for today's political environment. Cole gives numerous insights into IWW organizer Benjamin Fletcher, a previously obscure but important historical figure, offering a concise biography of as well as an exhaustive compilation of writings by and about Fletcher. Cole's book is well-worth reading for its depiction of the Philadelphia working classes during the early twentieth century, its historical account of the African-American community in the city, and the lessons it provides for activists today.

The book traces the career of Benjamin Fletcher, an African-American union organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), popularly known as the Wobblies, in the Philadelphia area. Fletcher was one of the primary organizers of Local 8, which represented the city's longshoremen, a group largely composed of Irish immigrants and African Americans. During the 1910s, Local 8 successfully

fought for the interests of these workers as one of the few multiracial unions of the early twentieth century, combining multiracial solidarity with a willingness to go on strike at a moment's notice. However, when the first Red Scare erupted with America's entry into the First World War, Fletcher's career was interrupted. He was swept up in the mass persecution of Wobblies on false charges of interfering with the war effort and sentenced to ten years in federal prison by Judge Kenesaw Landis (as an interesting sidenote, Landis would go on to be the first commissioner of baseball). Although Fletcher's sentence was eventually commuted, Local 8 never recovered from the absence of him and other union leaders, its problems being further exacerbated by conflicts with the local Communist Party (CP), who wanted the IWW to pursue a more explicitly pro-Communist agenda.

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Cole's book offers a good example of the difficulties of chronicling the lives of those traditionally perceived as outsiders: the working class, racial and ethnic minorities, and dissidents. Although the book collects well over a hundred primary documents about Benjamin Fletcher, there are still numerous unavoidable blind spots, particularly regarding his personal life. We know little of his childhood and education, nor is there much information to be found about his marriages. All too often, the letters and documents of those on the margins are simply disposed of af-

ter their deaths, and they rarely receive the attention of newspapers. The Philadelphia Tribune never deigned to mention Fletcher until they published his obituary. Fortunately, he left a better than average record behind him, in part because he came under surveillance for his political activities. Furthermore, Cole's account of Fletcher does a commendable job of filling in the gaps in any record of Fletcher's life with educated speculation. While at times this lack of evidence forces him to draw conclusions based on little evidence, as when he suggests that Fletcher met Joe Hill based largely on Hill's passing through Philadelphia and their mutual membership in the IWW, such leaps of faith are forgivable given the dearth of primary material.

Fletcher's life holds lessons both for historians and for modern-day activists, first and foremost of which is the key role of African Americans in reform movements. Over the past few decades, historians such as Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh have focused on the role of blacks and indigenous people in reform movements across the world. Cole's book furthers this scholarship with its examination of Local 8. The support of black dockworkers was essential to the success of Local 8, as employers often exploited racial divisions in order to undermine labor activism. (One common tactic of bosses

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Readers don't simply want to learn more about this man; they actively root for him and want him to overcome the challenges that he faced. The reader silently applauds when Local 8 wins a strike, and they feel Fletcher's despair when he is imprisoned and Local 8 weakens.

What is Exploitation?

By Tommy McGlone

Many contemporary economic injustices seem impossible to ignore, especially for the people who experience them every day. Most workers are paid very little to work long hours, very few people get rich, rich people usually stay rich, poor people usually stay poor, and so on. Even if you do manage to get a job that pays enough to live on, you still don't really have any control over your workplace. If you work for a big corporation, the decisions that affect your day-to-day job experience are made by executives hundreds of miles away.

To explain why all of these different effects take place, it can be helpful to look for causes. These examples of mass suffering have several sources: White supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and colonialism all play a major part in political injustice. One type of oppression which socialists believe is at the center of the economic suffering workers face on the job and in their everyday life is *exploitation*.

Exploitation is a social relationship that defines how we work, how much money we make, and how *commodities* (the

products we buy and sell) are distributed.

In the capitalist economy, *value* — the measure of the worth of commodities — is the result of certain social processes. Under capitalism, the value of products is decided by the labor that creates them. This doesn't mean that the labor individual workers put into the things they make decides how much that individual item is worth — you don't pay more for a sandwich at Wawa based on how quickly or how well an individual worker made it for you, and the worker doesn't make more money if they make a particularly great sandwich. Value is built on *social* labor, which means that the value of a product is decided by the *socially necessary* amount of work it takes to create that product under normal working conditions. The amount of work it takes the average worker to make a product determines the value of that product.

Workers don't get to make whatever products they want, for whoever they want, at whatever pace they want, whenever they want. Some of these limitations are due to the characteristics of the human body (we can't work for 24 hours straight without rest whether we want to or not, and we need some way of acquiring food and shelter for ourselves). Some of the restrictions on what workers make and how they make them are due to the need for some minimum of cooperative behavior in any community. But under capitalism, it isn't a community's collective needs or wants that decide what workers make and how they make it, but the profit motive. Workers have no choice but to participate in this system. The tools, machines, land, and buildings that people use to make

different things are almost entirely owned by a specific class of people. This owning class makes workers use these tools to make products to sell on the market, so that they can make more and more money to reinvest. We call the money this class invests to make more money *capital*, and we call this class the *capitalist* class.

Exploitation is the name for this relationship, where the capitalist is able to grow their business because their workers create more value than they receive. Exploitation happens in all kinds of workplaces, and you don't have to make a product that's sold at a grocery store or Wal-Mart in order to be an exploited worker.

If a capitalist wants to remain a capitalist, they have to run a business that makes more money than it loses—that's common sense. However, the way that capitalists make money isn't always obvious. It's not just that capitalists jack up prices, or manipulate the market, or cheat workers out of paychecks. Many capitalists *do* jack up prices, manipulate the market, and cheat workers out of paychecks, but capitalism works so that even the most honest capitalist can still make money off of their workers.

Karl Marx argued that under capitalism, capitalists pay their workers for their capacity to work. We call this capacity *labor-power*. Labor-power is a commodity, something that can be bought and sold, like coffee or a t-shirt or a bicycle. What makes it different from these other products is that it *creates value*. Workers are (usually) paid by capitalists for the value of their labor-power, which, in theory, allows workers to buy the things they need to scrape by. However, even though capitalists pay enough for their workers to stay alive and keep working, their workers produce more value for the capitalist than



illustration by Daniel Abary

they're paid in money.

For example: Let's say you work at a McDonald's. Throughout the course of the day, you make enough food that, just from your work, the company nets \$800 in sales. But if you work an eight-hour shift and get paid \$10 an hour, you only make \$80 that day, even though you made the company ten times that amount of money. Now, your labor wasn't entirely re-

sponsible for that \$800 — the equipment and food supplies you use to make each meal also contribute to that amount. Still, even after you get your paycheck and the supplies you used are paid off, the capitalist makes sure that, although *your work* made that \$800 possible, you're only getting paid more or less what it takes for you to keep yourself sheltered and fed every day. The company makes more money that they can use to build more restaurants or give big bonuses to CEOs *because* every worker creates more value than they're actually paid for. Capital can only grow because workers create value for capitalists.

Exploitation is the name for this relationship, where the capitalist is able to grow their business because their workers create more value than they receive. Exploitation happens in all kinds of workplaces, and you don't have to make a product that's sold at a grocery store or Wal-Mart in order to be an exploited worker. Uber and delivery drivers, city employees, restaurant waitstaff, telemarketers, nurses, and teachers are exploited just like traditional factory workers, even if they don't make products for sale on the market. Capitalists rely on all kinds of workers to keep making profits,

and some kinds of work make other kinds of work possible — a bus driver might be responsible for driving the worker who helped manufacture the bus to the auto factory every morning.

Everyone who works for a living without owning their business is exploited, and even though our specific jobs might be very different, exploitation is a relationship we all share. Here in Philadelphia, our city is defined by different histories and kinds of domination. Racist violence, the ongoing effects of colonialism, gendered oppression, and prison/police-related institutions all play a role in keeping the powerful in power. Exploitation is one kind of domination shared by everyone in our city who works. We all sell our labor-power to capitalists, creating value so that capital can grow and take over our neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools.

Philadelphia's future depends on workers coming together in organizations like **Philly Dignity** to fight back against exploitation. As we do, it's important never to forget that without our labor-power, capital can't grow and loses its power. Capitalists' power is rooted in our power — as soon as we start to take it back, we grow stronger together and they grow weaker without us. 🍷

Ben Fletcher | from page 13

was to hire African Americans as scabs during strikes.) This issue was exacerbated by the refusal of unions such as the American Federation of Labor to accept black workers into their ranks. The IWW, in contrast, was fully integrated and encouraged members of all races and ethnicities to work together. The IWW would serve as a good model, in many respects, for the intersectional activists of today.

The book also offers a case study in the dangers of divisions within activist movements. Already weakened by the imprisonment of organizers like Fletcher, Local 8 was further undermined by controversies related to the Russian Revolution, as the Communist Party and sympathizers within the national IWW organization such as Secretary-Treasurer James Scott sought to increase Communist influence over the union. Fletcher and the other Local 8 leaders ultimately rejected communism and grew increasingly hostile towards communist attempts to

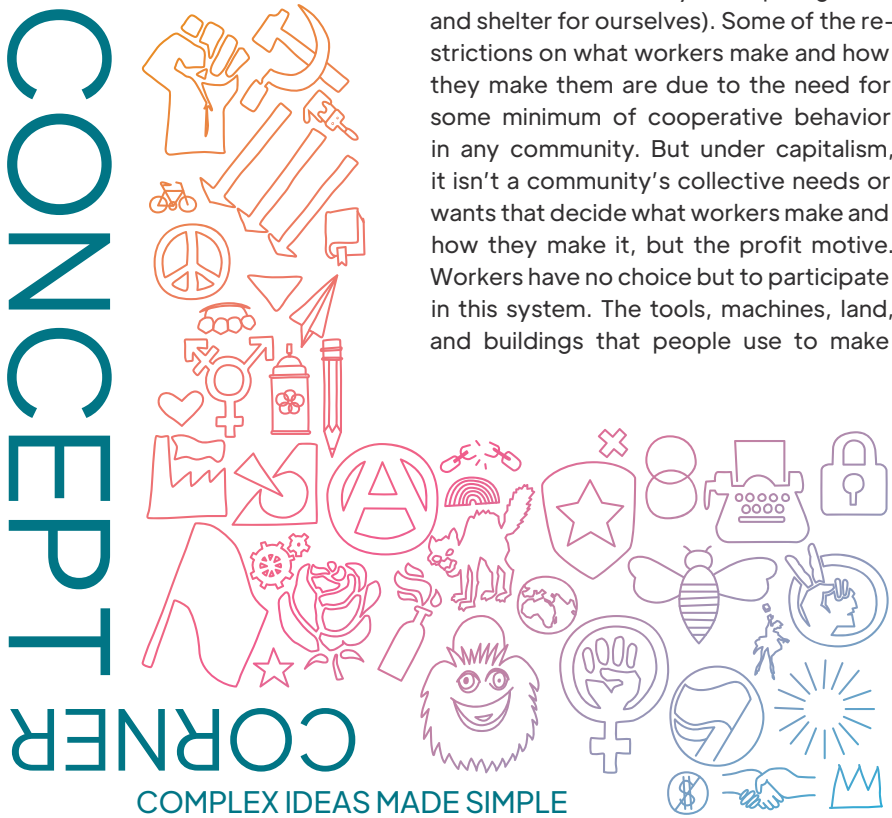
gain control. Local 8 itself was temporarily suspended from the IWW due to allegations that Philadelphia longshoremen had loaded weapons for anti-Soviet forces, a charge Fletcher and Local 8 firmly denied. These controversies combined with demographic changes in the Philadelphia working classes, particularly the arrival of black southerners as part of the Great Migration who were often suspicious of unions, to undermine the strength of Local 8. In this age of social media-driven controversies, activists should be alert to the dangers of such divisions.

Beyond its historical and political significance, this biography is noteworthy for the skill with which its author, Peter Cole, paints Fletcher as a man. As presented in this biography, Fletcher is not only admirable for his life and activism; he is likeable as a human being. The collected documents include anecdotes of his charm and good humor, even under adverse circumstances. For example, upon being sentenced to

ten years in prison, Fletcher turned to another prisoner and stated that "The judge has been using very ungrammatical language. His sentences are much too long." Readers don't simply want to learn more about this man; they actively root for him and want him to overcome the challenges that he faced. The reader silently applauds when Local 8 wins a strike, and they feel Fletcher's despair when he is imprisoned and Local 8 weakens.

Ben Fletcher: The Life and Times of a Black Wobbly is a good buy for activists and anyone interested in Philadelphia, working class, or African-American history. It shines needed light on a crucial but unfortunately obscure figure in the labor movement and shows how the past is relevant to modern struggles. 🍷

Herbert P. Caine is the pen name of a frustrated academic and writer. He currently lives in Philadelphia.



COMPLEX IDEAS MADE SIMPLE

continued