

Poor People's Campaign goes to the statehouses

By the Rev. Dr. Monica Cross
(a revolutionary)

At noon local time Saturday, March 2 in at least 30 state capitals, the Poor People's Campaign, A National Call for a Moral Revival will hold Mass Poor People's and Low Wage Workers State House Assemblies and to-the-Polls rallies. The goal is to bring the demands of 140 million poor and working-class Americans to the attention of state legislators and have them advocate for public policies that challenge poverty.

The Rev. William J. Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign has said that American poverty "spans every race, creed, color and sexual orientation." He points out that the 140 million Americans in poverty make up 43.5 percent of the population – almost half the nation. "Any nation that ignores half of its people ... is in a moral and economic crisis that is constitutionally inconsistent, economically insane and morally indefensible."

And, as James Baldwin wrote in 1961 in *Nobody Knows My Name*: "Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor; and if one is a member of a captive population, economically speaking, one's feet have simply been placed on the treadmill forever."

Baldwin's words still resonate. The poor pay more for banking through higher interest rates, overdraft fees, check cashing outlets



The Laney College chapter of the Poor People's Campaign marches in Oakland, California.
PHOTO / LANEY COLLEGE PPC

and payday loans, unaffordable rents, transportation, education, healthcare, and public safety.

The Poor People's Campaign A National Call for a Moral Revival is part of a progressive movement that shares the struggles of people impacted by the ruling class's unjust policies around poverty. The Poor People's Campaign pursues a strategy with legislators in state capitals to ensure that:

- Legislators and their staffs see and hear what goes on in the lives of their

constituents

- The campaign advocates for legislation such as the Third Reconstruction which addresses the needs and concerns of their constituents
- The campaign humanizes their constituents
- The campaign shifts the moral narrative
- It advocates for policies and elections at every level of government and builds lasting power for poor and impacted people.

Poverty could be eradicated were it not for the public policy choices made by the ruling class, their politicians, their military, their corporations, and other interests which benefit from their policies.

This is what the Poor People's Campaign means by a moral crisis in which the richest

nation on Earth cuts budgets for social services while spending billions on endless wars. The campaign is an urgent call for a revolution of values in a time of late-stage capitalism, its politics, the rise of fascism and the emergence of artificial intelligence undergirded by an economic and social system that makes poverty unbearably expensive.

SLAVEHOLDER RELIGION

If we look at the American church, we see that it is an important part of a discussion on the strategies the ruling class uses against those in poverty. Many of the loudest voices in American Christianity today – right-wing evangelicals aligned with Christian fascism – spew Biblical interpretations that are antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its values that uplift those in need who have their backs against the wall.

Mindful of Jonathon Wilson-Hartgrove's 2018 book, *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion*, about the perpetuation of racial injustice and white supremacy and the institution of slavery in the name of Jesus. He writes: "In America, racial politics has always been 'Christian' – has always cloaked itself in the language of redemption and morality. **Co-opting the poor refugee Christ to defend white supremacy**, we have crucified him on a gilded cross, turning our most revolutionary symbol of our movement into a talisman to finger when we're anxious. ... In all of this, we miss the basic message of the gospel and the wisdom of untold millions who've shown us a better way." (Author's emphasis).

The right-wing evangelicals' rhetoric is authoritarian, mean-spirited, divisive and appalling. It is contextualized in the apocalyptic. It is the contaminated soil from which

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Gaza war machine is ... 'Made in the USA'

The United States could stop the ongoing Gaza massacre of Palestinians by the Zionist government calling itself "Israel" in 24 hours, but it refuses to do so, even though the majority of Americans demand this.

Retired Maj. Gen. Yitzhak Brick admits: "All of our missiles, the ammunition, the precision-guided bombs, all the airplanes and bombs, it's all from the U.S. The minute they turn off the tap, you can't keep fighting. ... Everyone understands that we can't fight this war without the United States. Period."

The Zionist entity has received almost \$4 billion a year from the US in military aid for decades, the most of any country. This means that its military is an organic part of the vast U.S. global war machine. Just like in the Ukraine, the United States does not support a cease fire, nor any serious diplomacy.

Both the United States and its so-called Arab allies have it in their power to stop this

war immediately. Arab states cut off oil production to Europe in response to the Zionists' 1973 Yom Kippur War. The failure to act reveals the long-term goals of the ruling capitalist classes which hold power, especially in the United States.

The U.S. government spends untold billions for war, yet tells us that there is no money to take its people off the streets, no money for housing, health care or mental health support. Yet even the meager family relief funds provided during the pandemic lifted five million children out of poverty. Child poverty doubled when it was eliminated last year. These are all government choices, supported by both political parties, made in defiance of the will of our people.

Find the full article at:
rally-theleague.org



In Chicago, a contingent of protesters wearing white lab coats carries a banner reading: "Health Care Workers Against Genocide in Gaza."
PHOTO / LRNA CHICAGO

2024: The war for democracy

By the League Basic Needs Electoral Committee

Turnout in the 2024 elections will be decisive for at least temporarily stopping American fascists from destroying the little democracy we still have left. Would-be corporate dictators are organized, well-funded, and have plans to seize power at every level, from cities and towns to the federal government. Their blueprint is the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025. Donald Trump is just the figurehead for a much larger, long-term movement for the domination of private property over people. Contributions to the Heritage Foundation jumped by 26 percent in 2022, and the group distributed over \$2 million in support of its fascist goals.

As a result, voting in 2024 is both more urgent than ever and more complicated than just selecting candidates, especially when all the major candidates are unacceptable. In the face of fascism, however, non-voting is not an option. The great 19th century abolitionist Frederick Douglass called the vote "the keystone in the arch of human liberty." Elections create opportunities to build power and defeat evil. Over time, Douglass understood that what is important is not so much the political positions of the candidates, but the opportunities their campaigns create for the growth of the social movement.

Just as in the pre-Civil War era, the 2020s are a time of increasing social polarization and "irrepressible conflict." The rising social struggle compels revolutionaries to move from understanding voting ideologically to using it as a strategic and tactical weapon. Elections are

not really about who we vote for, but what WE do and how WE build class power. Our goal has to be both political democracy – the right to choose government priorities and policies – and economic democracy – elevating the just demands of the working class for its basic needs.

The burning question today is how to defeat Project 2025. Losing even our limited democracy will make it incomparably more difficult to secure our basic needs and fight for the beautiful, better world that is possible – a world that provides the housing, health care, reimagining the police, justice for migrants, reproductive freedom, and public education we need. Losing democracy will only even more stonewall the demands of the new peace movement for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and freedom for Palestine.

ECONOMIC DESPERATION

The drive toward fascism is an inevitable result of the collision between modern, automated technology and the capitalist private property system. The spread of digital, laborless production is making life unsustainable, as more workers get separated from steady employment in the formal economy. When the people's growing resistance becomes a threat to their control, the ruling class is forced to take fascist measures to protect its corporate private property. The only way to defeat fascism permanently is to create a new system that meets people's basic needs regardless of the ability to pay. The very technology that spreads misery in the private property economy makes it possible to create peace and abundance for all in a cooperative society.

In 2022 and 2023, Americans experienced the expiration of the eviction moratorium, the end of enhanced child tax credits, the reduction of food stamp benefits for 32 million people, the end of supplemental WIC payments and childcare assistance, and the termination of the student debt moratorium. Nearly 6.8 million people lost Medicaid health coverage when federal pandemic protections were unwound. Private corporations ramped-up inflation by escalating rents, grocery prices, gasoline and other essentials.

According to the New York Times, the official poverty rate rose from 7.8 percent to 12.4 percent in 2022, the highest one-year jump in history, while the official poverty rate for children more than doubled. Actual poverty rates were even higher.

While poverty has been increasing the government has chosen to shift more funding to policing, incarceration, border oppression, and above all to the military, for supporting unpopular wars in Ukraine and especially Gaza. U.S. support of the genocidal Netanyahu regime is pushing us toward a wider war in the Middle East and closer and closer to nuclear holocaust.

RISING RESISTANCE

Recent election outcomes have proven repeatedly that people can defeat fascist campaigns when the issues are made clear. In 2023, abortion rights prevailed in Ohio, and fascist candidates were defeated for governor in Kentucky, for general assembly in Virginia, and for Supreme Court in Pennsylvania. Progressive candidates won mayoral elections in Pittsburgh, Oakland and Chicago. A pro-

gressive group founded in 2021 to push back on conservative education activism, said 19 of its 23 endorsed school board candidates won in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia.

The rising popular movement repeatedly defeated abortion controls, book banning, censorship, attacks on African American History, scapegoating LGBTQ+ folks, and other measures targeting marginalized communities. When we link our demand for political democracy with economic democracy, we win. These victories also underscore the key role of state and local elections as part of the fight for our vision of a better world.

However, fascists are using their money and political power to overturn people's electoral choices even as they make them. In Jackson, Mississippi, the majority-white state legislature stripped the majority-black city of control over its own police and court system. In Oakland, billionaires have launched recall efforts against the recently elected Mayor and District Attorney, and challenged a progressive City Councilwoman up for re-election.

ROLE OF REVOLUTIONARIES

Revolutionaries need to be clear about the dangers of a victory by Trump or any other Project 2025 candidate. These people are making serious, detailed proposals to ban books, ban abortions nationwide, drill-baby-drill for fossil fuel, strip people of their citizenship, expel Palestinians from Palestine and round up literally millions of migrants, unhoused people, and protesters.

However, we cannot defeat fascism by sim-

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they push forward legislation that makes life for many who are poor in America precarious and deadly. Such evangelicals twist scriptures like the New Testament Gospel of John 12:8, where Jesus said: "You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me." (Contemporary English Version © 1995 by American Bible Society.) This is how such evangelicals defend a fiscal policy that serves the desire of the ruling class while devastating the lives of the poor, low income and working class. Such evangelicals, along with their policies and biblical vandalism are what the

Poor People's Campaign has been called to stand against.

The right-wing rhetoric contributes to the devaluing of work and human worth by design, and putting democracy at risk. It requires a movement, exemplified by the Poor People's Campaign, based on the objective needs of those who struggle in their sorrows, meditations and intimate solidarity. Impacted people are the ground of a collective vision of a revolution in ideas, values, dignity, access, recognition and sustainability. The underlying interests of the movement are the liberation of imagination, attention and desire

from extreme and at times violent individualism and private property rights which create the conditions for poverty and deny the ever-present cry for justice.

The Poor People's Campaign is a radically inclusive prophetic space for the development of a social, religious, political and cultural consciousness with implications to public policy. Within this space, the revolutionary practices a liberated sense of attention which becomes an uncommon and invaluable form of radical generosity that undergirds a solidarity necessary for the development of fusion coalition. Rev. Barber defines fusion coal-

ition as a people united around common values. "The appeal is not about right or left," said Rev. Barber in an interview, "but rather about right or wrong. We must come together on the firm ground of truth and lift this nation to higher ground."

In the face of fascism, the revolutionary has a moral imperative to stand against the attacks on the poor, low income, and working class and end the system of private property.

Poor People's Campaign:
www.poorpeoplescampaign.org

Editorial Policy: *Rally!* is the political paper of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America. It presents a pole of scientific clarity, examines and analyzes the real problems of the revolutionary movement, and draws political conclusions for the tasks of revolutionaries at each stage of development in order to prepare for future stages. It is a vehicle to reach out to and communicate with revolutionaries both within the League and outside of the League, to engage them in debate and discussion, and to provide a forum for these discussions. Articles represent the position and policies of the League.

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Política editorial: *¡Agrupémonos!* es el periódico político de la Liga de Revolucionarios por una Nueva América. Presenta un polo de claridad científica, examina y analiza los problemas reales del movimiento revolucionario y saca conclusiones políticas para las tareas de los revolucionarios en cada etapa de desarrollo con el fin de prepararse para etapas futuras. Es un vehículo para acercarse y comunicarse con los revolucionarios tanto dentro como fuera de la Liga, para involucrarlos en debates y discusiones, y para proporcionar un foro para estas discusiones. Los artículos representan la posición y las políticas de la Liga.

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What the people demand is housing, not punishment

By the League National Housing and Homelessness Committee

Wealthy West Coast real estate speculators and their supporters in state and local governments are stepping up their attacks on poor and unhoused people in our communities. They are petitioning the Trump-appointed U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the Ninth Circuit Court's 2019 *Martin vs. Boise* decision, which blocks them from imposing cruel and unusual punishments on people who have nowhere to sleep.

Addressing homelessness requires understanding exactly what it is about homelessness that is problematic, and problematic to whom. For realtors and investors – the special interests fighting *Martin vs. Boise* – homelessness is a problem because they think the visibility of unhoused people will lower property values and discourage “business as usual.” For them, the housing system is not the problem, because it continues to enrich them every day. And since they believe nothing is wrong with the system, they necessarily believe the problem is bad behavior by unhoused people themselves. Their proposed solution is to punish the poor.

However, for the working class – the vast majority of society – homelessness is a problem because it causes untold stress, misery, destruction of families, ruination of health, and early death. Even for those who live “one paycheck away,” the threat that they, too, could lose their homes is a constant source of anxiety and dread. It deters their participation in democracy and resistance to employer oppression. Contrary to the self-serving opinions of the wealthy, objective scientific studies have proven over and over again that the cause of homelessness is unaffordable rents – rents that are too expensive for people working for low wages to afford, not to mention for families with children, the elderly, or people with disabilities.

A woman living in a car in southern Alabama explained the reality of her situation. “I can’t even get disability,” she said. “I’m homeless in a state with no programs and no Medicaid. I have a \$10,000 hospital bill. Housing First took me off the housing list because I stayed in a hotel for 14 consecutive days trying to recuperate. The hospital tried

to help me get SSI, but was told I can’t get it because I had a GoFundMe page. I started the GoFundMe because I had no income, because I was too sick to work!

“My husband died unexpectedly in February. I have been trying to get his SSDI widow’s benefits, but was denied and didn’t get an appeal in on time. I pawned my car title and now could lose my car! There are no shelters here for me to go to, no help from any organizations or churches. No food banks near me. Thank God I’m getting food stamps. I’m blown away that I can’t get any help. I can barely walk or drive.”

Max from San Jose, California, described what it is like to be unhoused: “The last two years living out of a van with my husband were pretty horrific. Deep within the pandemic and immuno-compromised, we were stalked almost nightly by a black Dodge Charger, very likely an off-duty cop. He would show up anywhere we parked within that town, and we had to stay in that town for medical disability reasons. People would look into our windows day and night while we were inside, and walk around our van threateningly. Two years of this, of having to be ready to defend ourselves 24/7, or having to move our van because a cop happened by at 2 a.m., disrupted my sleep permanently and gave me severe PTSD. I have been unstably housed for the past two years and I still cannot get a full night’s sleep.”

MARTIN VS. BOISE

The strategy of addressing homelessness with coercion is bipartisan (although there are still important differences between the parties that need to be considered when voting). According to *Vice*, the petitioners against *Martin vs. Boise* are mostly Democrats, but also include Republicans: California governor Gavin Newsom, the city of Portland, the League of Oregon Cities, Republican officials in Arizona, district attorneys in Sacramento and San Diego, the state of Idaho, the city of San Francisco, cities of Los Angeles and Phoenix, and the Goldwater Institute.

Wannabe Democratic presidential candidate Newsom championed a CARE Court bill that forces some unhoused people into mental health treatment, even though California’s mental health issues are caused by the shortage of voluntary treatment beds and facilities,

not by people who refuse to access them. The leading Republican presidential candidate has called for setting up internment camps for unhoused people at the edges of large cities, similar to the detention camps for migrants he also wants to establish.

The specific ruling being appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court is *City of Grants Pass, Oregon vs. Johnson*, which said that Grants Pass could not enact an ordinance banning the use of blankets and sleeping bags by people who sleep outside (this was their attempt to work around the *Martin vs. Boise* decision). The petitioners not only want to be allowed to ban blankets in the winter, but also want the entire *Martin vs. Boise* decision overturned, to allow them to persecute and punish unhoused people without any limits or restrictions.

Newsom claims that police sweeps of encampments actually help people by connecting them with services, but the opposite is the truth. When encampments are dispersed, people lose contact with case workers, health services and mental health providers. And when people are arrested for simply using a blanket, it only makes it more difficult for them to later obtain employment and/or housing.

UNITY, TRUTH AND VISION

The real reason so many Democrats and Republicans are fighting to remove encampments is to appease their supporters in the real estate and financial sector who believe that this will preserve the billions in profits they are accustomed to receiving. The rest of us have to ask: Is this the kind of society we want to live in, where the poor and working class are punished for the benefit of the wealthy few?

Unhoused people are answering with an emphatic NO! Javier (aka Harvey) Franco, an unhoused resident of Los Angeles’s Chinatown, weighed in: “I had a feeling *Martin vs. Boise* was going to be brought up again. The politicians didn’t like that the Ninth Circuit Court ruled against them, because their intentions are to change the laws to criminalize people for being homeless. ... I never thought that people that I voted into office will go this route with people who need help, but apparently I was big-time wrong! So I hope that the lawyers defending homeless people in the U.S. will win again and shut these bastards up!”

“What we really need to do, is to get in touch with all homeless people here in the state of California and push back as hard as we can against our government. Make them give us that housing that we need in order for them to get their streets back. ... Seems like our government doesn’t give a shit about people who are struggling in paying their rents and whatever other bills they have, like utilities, because it seems like they’re only after the money and nothing more!”

A person from Florida chimed in: “What if homeless people, unhoused people, car, van and RV people all united? Wrote and published our own articles, started a podcast? Took our grievances public and exposed the system and all these corrupt nonprofits? Let homeless people wear body cams and expose the horrible shelter conditions. Show the trauma we are faced with just to exist. Get advocates from the health care field and mental health field to talk about how being housing insecure causes premature death. Because the industrial ruling class controls the narrative, by funding and fueling the propaganda that dehumanizes homelessness, like Jesse Watters on Fox.”

These leaders have the right idea. What is needed is unity – unity of the unhoused, together with the millions at risk of homelessness, and the millions of people of conscience that are out there. This means resisting divisive attacks by special interests on those among us who are people of color, migrants, women, youth, or part of the LGBTQ community. The ongoing spread of destitution from primarily migrants and people of color to the working class at large is making unity more possible today than it has ever been before.

There is no reason, except for our own lack of vision, why we cannot treat housing as the human right that it was always meant to be, instead of the vehicle for investment and profit-making that it has become. There is no reason we cannot work for de-commodification of housing – taking it off the speculative market and preserving it as permanently affordable for people who want to use it to keep warm in the winter and cool in the summer. This would be a giant step toward a thriving, new society that values life, health, and human happiness over misery and death. **R**

Unforgivable losses: Opioid deaths and the war on drugs

By the Los Angeles Housing and Homeless Committee

Skid Row in Los Angeles has historically been an epicenter of state violence and abandonment. Whether policing “quality of life crimes” with Safer Cities Initiative or trashing lifesaving possessions in sweeps, it is a proving ground for new tactics of violence that are then exported around the country and the world. After decades of capitalism’s War on Drugs, the lives of poor, homeless and especially Black and Brown folks who use drugs

are seen as a dispensable.

During the pandemic, houseless comrades organizing in Skid Row placed a “Housing is Healing” sign over their tents. By nature of the life-or-death stakes always present in the streets, unhoused drug and non-drug users are developing models of a commons that could serve to teach and inspire all of us.

It’s no coincidence that OD deaths that spiked during COVID-19 continue to rise. Overdose deaths amount to 9/11-scale proportions every two weeks in the United States. When the Los Angeles City Council brought

back Municipal Code 41.18, a decades-old racist “no sit/lie/sleep” law to force homeless comrades into pandemic hotels, overdoses skyrocketed due to inflexible carceral rules and untrained staff. L.A.’s homeless daily death toll rose from three to five. The area where the highest concentration of poor and Black folks live on the streets also suffers the highest overdose rates: 77 times that of the Los Angeles County average.

“Los Angeles city conducted its 41.18 sweeps as the pandemic raged” said Joanna Swan, LA CAN Human and Civil Rights

Committee, Streetwatch LA. “We watched a camp where people provided Narcan to each other destroyed with bulldozers and trash trucks. Weeks later, an evicted tenant of the nearby city-run pandemic hotel was found dead in the former site of the swept camp, a newly designated 41.18 [no sit/lie/sleep] zone.

“In this zone, we organized and learned from the hotel tenants [that] many overdoses happened because people were using alone

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Unforgivable losses: Opioid deaths and the war on drugs

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in their rooms, a product of the Salvation Army's no-guests policy. Our formerly homeless comrades organized into The LA Grand Tenants Association (<https://knock-la.com/la-grand-hotel-project-roomkey-tenants/>)

"Messaging forefronted the unacceptably carceral conditions and preventable deaths. Tenants' demands resulted in more harm reduction focused inreach, but politicians continue to move for organized abandonment: warehousing people in substandard conditions, prioritizing sobriety and abstinence even if it's coerced, and defunding community resources while funding more law enforcement."

Studies show that overdose deaths increase when sweeps scatter encampments. On the ground, we understand this because our comrades outside take care of each other in de facto safe consumption sites. For example, during the pandemic there was an encampment formed mostly of drug users evicted from a nearby COVID-19 hotel (often on groundless accusations from Salvation Army staff). Los Angeles Street Watch regularly restocked their spot, alongside many others around the city, with clean needles, naloxone, and wound care supplies. California governor Gavin Newsom vetoed a bill that would have encouraged safe consumption sites, opting instead for a rebranding of coercive, forced so-called CARE Courts and an expansion of "gravely disabled" conservatorship criteria to include folks struggling with substance use disorders.

The U.S. ruling class strategy is threefold: divest from proactive, noncoercive healthcare and services; punish and criminalize for "drug crimes;" and drum up backlash against drug decriminalization and safe supply efforts.

FENTANYL CRACKDOWN

Criminalizing drugs doesn't lead to healthier communities: it produces newer, more dangerous substances. After decades of heroin crackdowns, a synthetic opioid, fentanyl, originally produced by Johnson & Johnson for

pain management and surgery, all but replaced its natural counterpart on the street. The current crackdown on fentanyl will produce new concoctions and as these take hold, we'll have less community awareness, interventions or healing modalities. For example, a new drug called xylazine or "tranq" has been found in fentanyl around the country. Xylazine makes it harder to reverse an opioid overdose and results in new health challenges.

Politicians have reintroduced mandatory minimums and homicide charges if you sell someone fentanyl and that person dies (sometimes just from sharing your own drugs with someone). Levying murder charges at fentanyl sellers or users does not reduce harm or prevent death. Policies like this disincentivizes overdose response and community care, scaring folks away who might otherwise stay with a person in medical crisis.

There is clear evidence that pharmaceutical companies fudged numbers, bribed doctors and academics, lobbied elected officials and targeted children to push their painkillers. A few "bad apples" are fined (or mythologized) in TV shows. Poor and working class people continue to be punished. Now it's nearly impossible to receive a legitimate pain pill prescription if you are unhoused due to stigmatic assumptions about how the poor use these medications.

Los Angeles politicians call homeless constituents "service resistant" for refusing inadequate shelter to homeless comrades who then died of neglect. These politicians' strategy is life-resistant.

When unhoused people overdose, it's used to justify encampment sweeps and forced treatment. When newly housed folks overdose, it's used to denigrate Housing First models as if the answer were more forced treatment and denial of human rights rather than augmenting permanent housing with adequate resources. Warehousing humans in subpar shelter is not housing. The destruction of community spaces – a commons – is a cause of much harm for housed and unhoused.

Overdose death is used to increase funding

to police departments and justify coercive and forced treatment or conservatorship. From cop shows to "streets of shame," the mass media often portray people who use drugs as individual moral failures or as helpless, powerless patients who need forced intervention. Addiction is thus either a choice or a disease, without proof of either claim. The more difficult claim, perhaps, is that addiction is a human response to suffering, to capitalism and to unmet needs.

Harm reduction and drug user organizing fronts serve as a foil for the bootstraps-based approach to wellness, sobriety and substance use. Before sanctioned by public health agencies, groups like Clean Needles Now had to break the law to practice harm reduction. Groups like the Drug Users Liberation Front (DULF) have organized to provide clean, tested cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin to their people, shining a light on the need for safe supply rather than crackdown. Fentanyl is especially dangerous as street supply is not tested, has variable potencies, and needs more community education.

Both housing and healing are hoarded by the capitalists as economic privileges.

Mainstream politicians mask systemic cruelty with moralizing, false compassion, or what's known as "concern-trolling" – undermining genuine discussion about this issue by weaponizing it in the service of another motive. If we want to differentiate our thinking from the traditions of conservative, colonizer paternalism, we have to examine accepted mythologies around drug use, addiction and substances themselves.

MYTHS VS. FACTS

While think pieces and copaganda would have us believe otherwise, the majority of people using drugs aren't struggling with addiction. Words like "illicit," "hard" or "street" precede drug-related discussions because these terms are inextricably tied to racial capitalism and criminalization of certain practices, ideas or subjects. Laquan McDonald, Rodney King and George Floyd were all accused of in-

curing police violence due to drug use: PCP, crack cocaine and fentanyl. Myths about drugs that give Black folks "superhuman strength" have long driven and justified deadly police violence. Fear mongering becomes a shield and permit for anti-Blackness and state violence. These myths are meant to undermine a growing recognition that such violence is an attack on the whole working class and the health and welfare of society itself.

Use of opioids is being weaponized against the poor and working-class. People sell drugs because there aren't good jobs. People need adequate housing and healthcare in which these things aren't an afterthought, falling far behind police and military budgets every year. A society that pathologizes substance addiction without acknowledging the driving force of racial capitalism upon such behaviors will never solve them.

As preventable death ravages our communities, wealthy people's money addiction rarely makes headlines. State powers addicted to fossil fuel and wars of aggression normalize certain addictions – fame, success, money – while demonizing those most impacting marginalized communities. Politicians on both sides of the aisle choose the same failed approaches to killing our people. Even when presented with the facts – that harm reduction saves lives – their political calculus chooses criminalization over compassion.

We must fight with and in honor of our comrades whose lives are deemed disposable under capitalism – a disposability driven by fear mongering, stigmatizing language, bootstraps mythologies, and the cruelty of all-or-nothing thinking around sobriety and abstinence.

Organizing against this fatal cowardice means to love our neighbors with radical insistence: to ask someone what they need rather than prescribe it; to educate ourselves and dismantle stigmas and not to remove autonomy. Everyone deserves pleasure, joy and healing. End this war on drugs once and for all. **R**

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ply paying lip service to democracy. We cannot defeat it by talking about the "lesser of two evils." We cannot defeat it by trying to defend the brokenness and corruption of the Democratic Party.

We cannot defeat fascism either by sitting out the election. Non-voting will only lead to fascist victory. Voting has real and immediate impacts. Otherwise, the ruling class would not spend billions of dollars in every election cycle, and try so desperately to take away the right to vote from working people altogether, especially people of color.

Fascism can only be defeated by changing the narrative. Just as the Industrial Revolution changed life in America, creating big cities and ending family farms, the digital revolution and artificial intelligence is making possible an abundant new world where all people

can have their basic needs met and enjoy life-long pursuit of happiness. The possibilities become amazing when digital production is used for public benefit instead of private profit. Voting today can help lead us to this better world tomorrow.

Frederick Douglass faced the dilemma of how to vote in the period before the American Civil War. He was an abolitionist firmly committed to ending slavery, but also worked with larger coalitions. In 1856, he campaigned for the new Republican Party that opposed expanding slavery, but refused to call for abolition. He urged people to stop seeking purity, start with what is possible, and vote for what the country could become.

There is no need for revolutionaries to endorse a candidate in 2024, especially this early in the campaign. We may be called later on to work for a campaign if effective strategy

and tactics require it. Messaging will be key to keeping the movement on track to preserve democracy, in spite of political betrayals along the way. Strategic and tactical clarity is an antidote to cynicism.

At the same time, we dare not disrespect non-voters or third-party voters. Our enemy is not each other, it is the system. We will need everyone, voters or not, if the election aftermath leads to another January 6-style insurrection, as is likely. Even as we cast our votes against fascism, we have to remember that voting alone cannot defeat fascism. We need to vote, protest, organize, and educate.

Our victory in the long run is inevitable, and in the short run it is possible. We dare not be distracted by the corporate media doom-sayers who also predicted our demise in 2022 and 2023. The defeat of Trump in 2020 helped create an enormous apparatus of unions and

progressive 501(c)(4) organizations that still exist. This apparatus is increasingly committed to the basic needs of the American people and significant sections of it have spoken out forcefully for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza.

Voting is a tool for building political power. Sometimes it can win real policy changes to benefit the basic needs of the people. It can lead to expanding Medicaid, or reproductive rights, or electing progressive district attorneys to help get innocent people out of prison.

When we connect voting to ongoing organizing around burning social issues, we transform non-voters and occasional voters into a social and political force. It is the thinking and consciousness of the rising forces of new generations, not the billionaires, that will determine the future of America and the world. **R**