



THE KEYSTONE

A BIENNIAL NEWSLETTER
PUT PEOPLE FIRST! PENNSYLVANIA

Fall/Winter
2022-23



Put People First! PA has been organizing in Pennsylvania for ten years! In this issue of *The Keystone*, PPF-PA members reflect on our 2022 Organizing Drive, the Summer Study, and other organizational activities. Read about our **Tenth Annual Membership Assembly** on page 16.



Clockwise, from top left: **Jamie Blair** and **Jacob Hope** from the Southeast PA (SEPA) Healthcare Rights Committee (HRC) emcee at a protest in Delaware County, PA; **Sefi Schiller** from the SEPA HRC speaks at a Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival (PPC:NCMR) event in Philadelphia; **Jae Hubay**, pictured with their dad, leads a chant at a PPC event in Philadelphia; **Tammy Rosing** from the South Central PA (SCPA) HRC speaks at a PPC event leading up to June 18th; **Jacob Butterly** leads chants during the PPC march in Philadelphia alongside **Jamel Coy Hudson** from the New York State PPC.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Personal Reflection: The 4 C's | 4

Rebecca Reitenbach

Reflecting on our Summer Study | 5

Rachel I.

Cancer is Expensive, Can You Afford It? | 7

Sofie Yavorsky

Why So Many Cancers? | 8

David Greene

Personal Reflection: June 18th | 9

Brittany Wright

Reflecting on the 2022 Organizing Drive | 11

Healthcare Profiteers Devastating Small-Town America | 14

Ron Moose

PPF-PA's 10th Annual Membership Assembly | 17

PPF-PA in Cuba and Venezuela | 29

Madeline Burrows, Nijmie Dzurinko,
Zevi Koretz, Stacey

Arts & Culture | 34

WHO ARE WE?



Put People First! PA gives voice to everyday people who are struggling to meet our basic needs. We define our basic needs as things we need to live healthy and fulfilling lives—things like education, housing, health care, jobs with living wages, food, and a healthy environment.

We're a membership organization made up mostly of people who know from our life experience that poor and working people need to unite and have a voice.

We're building, county by county, all across Pennsylvania. We're urban and rural. We're multiracial. We're politically independent. Until we unite, we don't have the power to change things.



Cover illustration by **Raphaella Huff**,
Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee

PPF-PA's 10-Year Anniversary

10 YEARS Organizing in PA

Wow! 2022 marks 10 years since Put People First! Pennsylvania's (PPF-PA) founding in 2012. Our founders knew that we wanted to build a statewide organization, uniting poor and dispossessed working class people across traditional lines of division like red/blue, urban/rural and black/white. We knew we wanted to employ a human rights framework that looks not at access but at outcomes—like the guarantee of healthcare as a right—and what it will take to make that so. We knew we were deeply committed to base building and developing clear, competent, committed and connected leaders.

What we couldn't know back then was what a beautiful struggle it would be or what we would have achieved 10 years later. We couldn't know that we would even still exist today. Through the struggle for Medicaid expansion to the fight to restore the adult dental benefit in Medicaid and implement Medicaid For All through the de-commodification of healthcare. From fighting coal ash and toxic prisons as a public health issue to calling out the state's approval of skyrocketing insurance premiums and winning public hearings and town halls. From targeting profiteers to holding all power holders accountable and maintaining political independence through the fight for a Public Healthcare Advocate. From call-in days that make clear that the problem faced by one is shared by millions, to People's Clinics across the state as a Project of Survival. From the Mother Jones Leadership Program, to Leadership Institutes, to yearly Membership Assemblies.

We've done our best to apply our human rights principles—equity, universality, participation, accountability and transparency—to our campaign demands as well as to ourselves as an organization. We've committed to a posture of continuous learning and then adapting and evolving based on our lessons. We've always learned even more from our challenges than we have from our successes. As our mentor Willie Baptist says "let's make NEW mistakes!"

Moving from Organizing Committees to Healthcare Rights Committees. From a Campaign Advisory Board to a Steering Committee. From a Coordinating Council to Root Coordinators. From Healthcare Rights Committees based in particular cities and towns to Regional Committees. From periodic studies to seasonal winter and summer studies. From periodic communications to twice monthly enews and the twice yearly member-written and produced Keystone newsletter. The development of a Leadership Pathway, Community Care practices, a Leadership Across Difference methodology and a New Member Enlistment process. Taking the Nonviolent Medicaid Army from Pennsylvania to nationwide. Building the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival and coordinating with the PA Union of the Homeless. And last but not least—in our 10th year becoming completely STAFF-FREE!

We wouldn't be where we are today without the leadership of many hundreds of everyday Pennsylvanians who over the last 10 years dared to dream and take action to tear the system up by the root and turn the soil over. As we look back, and forward, we give thanks for **everyone** who is and has been with us on this journey.

Where will we be in 10 years from now, in 2032? Perhaps one of our favorite chants holds the key: "We're urban, we're rural, we're working class! When we get organized, the system won't last!"

— **Nijmie Dzurinko**, PPF-PA Co-Founder
(Central Appalachia PA HRC)

Rebecca Neidig | NEPA



Personal Reflection

PPF-PA's 4 C's of Leadership



This reflection was adapted from a speech made by the author in 2022 at a protest against the closure of First Hospital in Kingston, Northeast PA.

I wanna share how Put People First! PA has built me as a leader. PPF-PA believes that leaders should aim to develop four key qualities: clarity, commitment, competency, and connectedness. Leaders who are clear understand our strategy and how it shapes the actions we take to organize our class. Our Theory of Change says (1) the fundamental problem of our time is poverty and the global system that produces it; (2) those most impacted by poverty are the ones best equipped to change it; and, (3) we must develop leaders in order to build a social movement capable of making these changes. Commitment involves understanding that we are in a marathon not a race, and the struggle for our human rights will take a lifetime of dedication. Competent leaders are those who have the wide variety of skills needed to organize our class. Being connected is important to know how and where to meet our base.

When I first came to PPF-PA, I was fully committed to ending poverty, but that was the only leadership skill I had. I didn't even want to be a leader. I wanted to feel like I was a part of changing the world, but all I expected to do was mobilize occasionally. At school, at work, at church, in every aspect of my life, the ruling class narrative that I should blindly follow orders because I wasn't qualified to lead had been reinforced and I fell for that completely. I wasn't clear on our Theory of Change and how valuable the perspective of each member of our class is. I had never been part of a united social movement of the poor and dispossessed of every background, gender, ability, age, and religion before. I also wasn't clear on what PPF-

PA meant by the word "leader." When we use the word "leader" we mean "someone who chooses to be responsible for serving the organization and our members," not "someone who bosses around others and makes them do all the work," like I assumed. The more time I spent in PPF-PA spaces, the more clarification I got that our way of doing things was fundamentally different from the ruling class' power structures. One of the most revolutionary aspects of our Theory of Change is our goal to develop all members into leaders.

Since joining PPF-PA, I've developed confidence in my leadership in particular—y'all, when I joined I had social anxiety to the point that I couldn't even make a phone call. I had zero understanding of Zoom, Google Docs, and many of the other computer programs that we regularly use. In spite of this, my Healthcare Rights Committee Coordinator met me where I was at. She gradually asked bigger and bigger tasks of me that slowly built my competency and confidence. Whenever I had questions, she was quick to respond and guide me without making me feel like I should have already known the answers. Learning is often collective in PPF-PA, so I never felt singled out as the only one who needed to develop my competency. Mistakes were not met with punishment or shame, but were greeted as a learning opportunity that should be analyzed to determine a better strategy. Every PPF-PA space reinforced the concept that the struggle is a school, meaning that the skills and political lessons I was learning were immediately applicable to actions we were taking to improve the material conditions of the poor and dispossessed. My competency increased dramatically during these strategic struggles for our human rights. Which brings us to the next step in my leadership development. Before I joined PPF-PA, I wasn't really connected to my community either.

I was passionate about a lot of social justice issues, but I didn't know how to connect those issues to the everyday struggles that folks were most concerned about. In fact, when I tried to, I often alienated folks with my radical positions. For example, during a union organizing drive at my workplace, I would often preach to my fellow workers about how "workers should run the world" since we were doing all the work. This would bring up all kinds of mental fortresses (ingrained ideas from living in our society) for

folks, and I would end up arguing with them about issues that had nothing to do with the union. A better tactic would have been to discuss our shared desire not to see our benefits slashed and our healthcare costs soar, and to agitate around those issues. Then, as we deepened our relationship, we could slowly get at the root causes of our mistreatment and grave imbalance of power in the world.

Put People First! PA taught me how these seemingly unconnected struggles were interrelated. Gaining clarity on our Healthcare is a Human Right Campaign (HCHR) was a huge turning point for me. The HCHR Campaign provided the bridge that I needed to connect with our base. Everyone is impacted by the denial of healthcare that we need. The HCHR Campaign unites our class across those lines of division that I had previously stumbled over. It's an issue that is easy to agitate around because the ruling class has no solutions for the healthcare crisis. I love that Put People First! PA is able to offer folks those solutions and hope.



Rachel I.

Summer Study Healthcare and Class Struggle: Wall Street Profits vs Our Human Rights



As members of the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA), we all have experienced the failings of our healthcare system. We've experienced this in hospital closures, debilitatingly large bills, and piling chronic issues. As members of the NVMA we also understand the importance of channeling our rage and hurt towards organizing our class.

To organize our class, we also know the importance of understanding the why. While we can feel how the healthcare industry affects us, we must study to understand why we got here and what we're going to do about it.

This past summer, the Nonviolent Medicaid Army embarked on a rigorous course of study to answer some of that question. Over six weeks we studied how healthcare became both a site of capital accumulation and class struggle. We collectively read Gabriel Winant's *The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America* along with other texts. The study culminated in final presentations in which participants shared lessons they would take into their building of the NVMA.

Before getting into some of the takeaways from this study, it's important to note the significance of this particular study. Put People First! PA and the organizations within the Nonviolent Medicaid Army have collaborated on studies in the past, however this was the first co-coordinated study that included a core group of organizers hailing from Texas, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Vermont, and Florida. The diversity of this coordination committee not only speaks to our growing capacity as a network, but also to our collective hunger to heal the roots of our healthcare system.

In the weeks following this study, the coordinators got together several times to reflect on some of the takeaways from the eight weeks. We noticed that this study deepened our political stance as the NVMA. It helped clarify our understanding of what we're up against—both historically and today. By analyzing the rise and fall of the steel industry, and how for-profit health care stepped in to fill the gap, we better understand why the medical industry has come to look the way it does today. By studying the ways medical conglomerates formed, we better understand the hospital closures that happen today. By learning about the history of healthcare as a site of class struggle, we can learn lessons to strengthen our own struggle today.

In this study, we also saw our leaders develop in big ways. Participants practiced a high level of discipline as they rallied around understanding a challenging main text. We saw this demonstrated through one-on-one conversations, a collectively co-constructed audio book, and study tip swaps. We also saw this through powerful discussion groups and strong leadership within these groups that resulted in incredible final presentations. This study was a success! It showed us what we're

capable of, and is shaping how we plan our future studies. Below are some reflections from participants in the study:

I believe that the main takeaway for me from this study is the importance of deep study in a community and just how valuable it is knowing that others are committing time, energy, creativity, and dedication to collective growth is energizing, and empowering!

**— Rev. Neil Tellier
Georgia PPC/NVMA**

Through the course I feel more connected to NVMA leaders. The Vermont Workers' Center and PPF-PA have a long history together, but I now feel more connected to leaders in Wyoming in particular. It was also meaningful for me to hear from PPF-PA members who grew up in steel country and to have a stronger sense of what life there was and is like.

**— Ellen Schwartz,
Vermont Workers' Center**

This was all really helpful as we study and organize around what is happening in health care and with hospital closures, private equity, etc. across PA and particularly in our region in Southeast PA. I will be carrying all we've learned into our organizing around the closures in Delaware County, the sale to private equity and other closures and threats to health care across our region, including in my own community hospital in northwest Philly.

As Philly is like Pittsburgh, a big eds and meds town, and a big union town, there are a lot of parallels historically and currently. This study has helped me to understand better a lot of the history of the economy, working class conditions and struggle and our health care system here, including understanding more about different players, such as the massive university hospital systems, 1199 and other unions, the Democratic Party, etc. It also clarified and confirmed what I knew through experience and some study about the destruction of community and public hospitals here and the building up of the mega university hospitals. This has helped me to better understand PPF-PA's work across the state, and the conditions and struggles we are engaged in.

This study will help guide and inform our organizing in this region, both by enhancing our understanding of what is happening in our healthcare system and by reinforcing how the struggle for health care can unite our class. As we see how dramatically material conditions have changed in Philly and throughout our state, we see the many new possibilities that this opens up for organizing and uniting our class, including in Delaware County, where we are organizing and uniting an impoverished and historically divided county in the face of hospital closures that are harming people across multiple lines of difference—a place where, as in so many places, deindustrialization and economic changes have created multiple possibilities for unity for our class that didn't exist before. 🍷

— Jen Cox, PPF-PA SEPA HRC



Personal Reflection

Cancer is Expensive, ✨ Can you Afford it?

The word *toxic* is the hottest adjective these days. *Toxic* masculinity, *toxic* positivity, a *toxic* workplace. Slap the *toxic* label in front or behind some noun and you got my attention. But have you heard of *financial toxicity*? The blanket term describes any financial burden endured from a serious illness. Anyone can experience financial toxicity, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Just get one life-threatening diagnosis and enjoy the ride.

I'm familiar with financial toxicity. For the past year, I have worked as a social worker in a clinical setting providing emotional support for people impacted by cancer—those with the diagnosis, their family, friends, caregivers, neighbors, and communities. I have seen incredible leaps, bounds, and hoops people have had to jump through in order to receive life saving care. People perform these Olympic feats while enduring debilitating health problems and unimaginable stress and fear. *Financial toxicity*.

The contribution insurance companies make to cancer care is inconsistent, often minimal, and straight-up confusing. The insurance systems are built for those with high-paying employment. You're lucky if you are employed with a job that provides accommodations and protections for you and your family god forbid you get sick. Yet even those with expansive health coverage through their employers are often denied their claims for imperative treatments. Worse, low wage workers, domestic workers and independent contractors most likely don't even have those specific protections and accommodations.

Overall, health insurance coverage is slowly but surely becoming less robust and premiums are getting higher. But don't worry—you can always buy private disability insurance to cover the gaps. *Financial toxicity*.

I have attempted to help people who are sick navigate their financial burdens by seeking reimbursements, grants, scholarships, anywhere I can find them. The other day I got too excited to learn a client of mine had sepsis—I found a grant for that! Too bad he had it three months too early to qualify. Financial navigation is a skill in itself, and even those very familiar with the system often find themselves at a loss. Imagine having to shop and compare health plans while you are on chemotherapy. Imagine not even having that option because you can't afford the privatized care. *Financial toxicity*.

This roundabout experience is infuriating for clients and myself. Personally, I feel stuck when people come to me having faced barriers to healthcare. I'm walking through a pitch-black tunnel hoping someone gives me a flashlight because I realize I don't know anything about this confusing system. Yes, I can educate myself until I am blue in the face about different coverage, gap plans, HMOs, PPOs, etc. etc. etc. It won't matter at the end of the day when a person's savings account is drained from a single MRI. The system is the problem.

This is what led me to join Put People First! PA, an organization that believes healthcare is a human right and that systemic change is possible with grassroots organizing. We campaign for accessible, universal healthcare for all, regardless of financial status. PPF-PA has reinforced my belief that American healthcare is a for-profit system that deeply impacts the poor and working class. The system's confusing leaps, bounds, and hoops serve a clear purpose—to weed out those not rich enough, or those who have been deemed not worthy enough of receiving care. Its priority is inflating the commodity, not caring for the people who need care.

So ask yourself—if you were diagnosed with cancer today, would you be able to afford it? I know I wouldn't be able to. *Financial toxicity*. 🖤



Personal Reflection

Why So Many Cancers? ✨

At this writing I have had three different cancers. In 2009, I was diagnosed with lymphomas (large diffuse B cell) lymphomas. It was in a late stage and was killing me rapidly. My weight dropped from 185 to 132 pounds, and my bones hurt from rubbing against each other. I looked like a survivor of the Nazi's Death Camp at Dachau and was told that I had three months to live without chemotherapy. Like so many other people, I was devastated by the diagnosis of cancer and I said "Why me?" As I talked with neighbors and friends, I became more aware of cancers. I realized that most people either know others who have cancer or they have it themselves. Millions of people have cancer in the U.S. and the official figures hide the epidemic of cancer.

Equally true is the fact that medical institutions, systems and pharmaceutical corporations see the disease as a chance for huge profits, much like corporate America made hundreds of billions in profits from COVID-19, while most poor and low wealth people suffered and died. Cancers attacked people of every color and nationality. The lower your income, whether you were poor and White, Native American, Latinx, African American, or Asian—the more likely you'd die from cancer.

Every year in Newark, Ohio and Columbus where my wife and I previously lived, a cancer survivors day was celebrated. In Newark, the local hospital sponsored the event and in Columbus, corporations like Chemical Abstracts and the James Cancer Center were the sponsors. For my lymphomas, thyroid and blood cancer, I was treated with chemotherapy, radiation and surgery. I wondered throughout my treatment what caused my cancers. The survivor's day picnics and events boast wonderful treatments and the brave stories of cancer patients, but there is nothing about the

causes of cancer. When my wife asked doctors (oncologists) whether cancers could be the result my work in the coal mines, auto and chemical plants they always said they doubted that.

The treatments for cancers are expensive and rewarding to giant pharmaceutical, chemical, industrial, insurance and medical corporations and institutions. The treatment for my lymphomas alone cost over half a million dollars, not covered by insurance. These profit hungry corporations benefit from giving victims of the disease a fancy buffet.

After listening to the cheerleading approach to cancer survivorship and mindless entertainment, I thought it would be good for patients to discuss the possible causes of cancer together. I spoke with the hospital staff leading the event and they seemed uninterested or nervous. I called the hospital and suggested a meeting of cancer survivors that I wanted to hold, and asked if they could inform cancer patients about that get-together. They said that they would get back to me. They never did, so I called persistently and finally they set up a meeting for me to explain my idea. Basically, since patients have the most invested in stopping cancer, we would be discussing what causes cancer or where these deadly diseases come from. They weren't sure this was a good idea, and would get back to me. They never did, so I called them repeatedly and finally got another meeting with administrators and department heads.

When I met with them, they were concerned that patients would be depressed if they knew the causes of their cancers. What an arrogant position and view of patients. I began meeting other victims of cancer to organize and fight for our needs. The Medicaid Army and Put People First! in Pennsylvania are fighting for Health Care as a basic human right. People directly impacted by a crumbling health system can organize, fight back and get to the root causes of all of our problems. ▼



June 18th ✨ Reflecting on the Mass Poor People's & Low-Wage Workers' Assembly and Moral March on Washington and to the Polls

On June 18th, the largest gathering of poor and low-wage workers in our nation's history commenced with 150,000 people in attendance and millions watching via livestream.

These record breaking numbers represent the 140 million poor and low-wage workers in America, 33% of the electorate, whose voices will no longer go unheard. 140 million humans who deserve equal rights, access to affordable healthcare, clean air & water, a living minimum wage and safe environments to raise their families.

Members of Put People First! PA from across the state made their way to Washington D.C. in a show of solidarity with poor and dispossessed people across the nation. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, this was the first time many had met face-to-face. Some members, such as South Central PA Healthcare Rights Committee Co-coordinator Tammy Rosing, arrived a day before the rally and had a chance to share their testimony at various momentum-building events.

At the assembly, in front of a crowd of tens of thousands of rally goers, Put People First! PA Co-founder Nijmie Dzurinko shared their extremely powerful testimony of how she and her family have been hurt by systemic neglect and violence in our country.

"I come to you this morning humbled and grateful, and I also come to you angry for all the people I've lost to this poverty producing system. People for whom this beautiful life, granted to us by God, has been debased by a society organized around profit for the few, over abundant life for the many!"

(Clockwise from top left) Central Appalachia HRC co-coordinators **Brittany Wright** and **Ron Moose** gearing up for June 18th; **Jen Cox** and **Jessica Boyles** at the march; **Stacey, Briann Moye**, and **Frederica Phillips** in the crowd in DC.



The June 18th Mass Poor People's and Low-Wage Workers Assembly and Moral March on Washington and to the Polls with the Poor People's Campaign was a grounding experience for me. To be surrounded by so many people who are in this fight for basic human rights for a variety of reasons that plague the poor and dispossessed was a blessing. It was my first time being in a powerful space with so many PPF-PA leaders that I had never met before, but had been dying to connect with! I was even able to meet up with someone from the Poor People's Campaign in Illinois that I had done unhoused outreach with in St. Louis. It meant so much to me to see the connection between my previous and current organizing work. But what really reaffirmed my place in the movement coming out of this event, was hearing the panel of speakers who are in the fight for a livable wage. Each spoke of how hard they've worked to unionize, for better pay, for better benefits, and safe working conditions. Hearing their personal experiences and how they raised their voice for more, in jobs such as fast food, that are often sneered at, reminded me that I am surrounded by everyday people willing to put in the work for a better tomorrow for our class. It reminded me that with commitment and clarity of what it takes to hold power holders accountable that I am capable and deserve to be here surrounded by all of these amazing leaders. 🖤

— **Brittany Wright**, Co-coordinator, Central Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee

The 2022 Organizing Drive ✨

Projects of Survival People's Clinics, Base Building Blitzes, and the Nonviolent Medicaid Army Week of Action



This summer, Put People First! PA hit the streets again with People's Clinics, Base Building Blitzes and actions. While PPF-PA held People's Clinics in past years, with the leadership of the newly formed statewide Projects of Survival Team, Healthcare Rights Committees (HRC) were able to hit the ground running, equipped with services to help meet people's basic needs, and tools for organizing conversations to build a movement for the long haul. Put People First! PA held fifteen People's Clinics across the state this year and did base building at three Mission of Mercy Free Pop-Up Clinics. Healthcare Rights Committees also held four coordinated door knocking pushes, or Base Building Blitzes, across the state in August. These blitzes and clinics led up to the National Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) Week of Action in September. As part of the NVMA Week of Action, actions took place across the country, raising awareness and demanding action around profiteering, hospital closures and the upcoming Medicaid cutoffs. Put People First! PA held four actions in Pennsylvania. The Southeast PA and Central Appalachia HRCs teamed up for a virtual teach-in on private equity in the healthcare system; Southwest PA HRC held a People's Clinic in Butler; South Central PA HRC took action at the State Capitol in Harrisburg; and the Northeast PA HRC targeted profiteers and hospital closures in Wilkes-Barre. Through this coordinated base building, PPF-PA grew in new areas: Delaware County, Schuylkill, Huntingdon, and Butler, PA. All of these activities map closely to PPF-PA's 2022 Campaign Plan, which guides HRCs activities across the state. The three pillars of the campaign are (1) Build the Nonviolent Medicaid Army; (2) Hold all Power Holders Accountable to our Demands; and (3) Expose and Target Profiteers.

All of this intensive activity led to Put People First! PA's Tenth Annual Membership Assembly in October! That's right, Put People First! PA has been organizing statewide in Pennsylvania

for ten years and counting! It's been an exciting year for PPF-PA with plenty of accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned to be even stronger as we enter into year eleven. Here's a deeper dive into these different base building efforts and actions from member reflections.

✨ Projects of Survival People's Clinics

"Throughout the summer when folks were able to get out and about more, we set up our People's Clinic in Wilkes-Barre outside of the regional transportation center. It is a well traveled area with plenty of foot traffic to make connections. The area near Public Square is a transit hub which historically has been used to rally people for change and local social movements have rooted themselves there, making it a fitting location for us. The repetition of being in the same location benefited us because we began to touch base and deepen connections that we made in previous weeks. While being in the same location definitely had its benefits, our HRC has also spoken about broadening our variety to dive into the more rural areas of our region, as well!"

Our People's Clinics are vital to our region as sometimes there is a barrier to further involvement in Put People First! PA when people have immediate needs like access to Medicaid, SNAP benefits, and basic health care. By providing support with these things through our clinics, we help get people over the bar so they can start to think about joining our Healthcare Rights Committee. Health care is an issue that...

affects us all and can bridge the divides of our NEPA region. The clinics make concrete improvements in people's lives while helping us base build, which get us closer to a goal of healthcare as a human right!

— Elizabeth Glunt, Northeast PA HRC



"The Southwest PA Healthcare Rights Committee held People's Clinics through the summer in Butler, PA. When the Southwest PA HRC decided to organize in Butler County, none of our members were from there or had significant knowledge of the area but knew it was an important area to meet with people who were struggling to meet their healthcare needs. After trying to work with a local charity focused nonprofit that became hesitant to collaborate after learning about our movement-building goals, we ended up organizing our People's Clinics independently. These were first on main street and later in a nearby neighborhood park that we discovered while door knocking. At the People's Clinics, we provided help with state benefits, blood pressure screenings, referrals to local resources, and more. We also collected healthcare stories and offered information on hospital closures and Medicaid shut-offs within our state.

In August, the SWPA Healthcare Rights Committee also talked with community members at the Mission of Mercy Clinic in Pittsburgh. Mission of Mercy Clinic is a large-scale pop-up clinic that offers free dental, eye, and hearing services. The HRC encouraged people to 'Come on down and get free care that you need—but we know we must organize to secure healthcare and dental care for everyone, every day of the year!'"

— Southwest PA HRC

Base Building Blitzes

"The third door that we knocked on, we didn't even knock. There was an older lady outside, studiously wiping the Pottsville city grime off her white porch banister.

'Do you have any issues accessing healthcare ma'am?'

'Oh, not at all. My husband is a veteran. Everything is covered through the VA.' This felt like a conversation that was going nowhere fast, but we pressed on nonetheless:

'Do you have a couple minutes to help us fill out this survey?'

'No. As you can see, I'm very busy.' Making apologies, thinking it's best to disengage, move on to the next house...

'What are you doing out here anyway? Selling some kind of insurance?'

'More like the exact opposite! We are everyday people, organizing to secure healthcare as a human right for everyone in Pennsylvania!'

That got her attention. She asked us a flurry of questions about how we expected to accomplish our goals. Then she asked a strange question: 'Do you help with transportation?' Her husband (who had joined us out on the porch by now) told us of a time that he had been on doctor's orders to keep his foot elevated, but the Veterans Affairs specialist he needed worked in Philly. Lacking any other options, he made the two hour drive himself with his foot un-elevated. This made his condition much worse by the time he got there. This illuminating conversation drove home that many of the struggles our class faces (even lack of public transit) are connected to healthcare. I'm glad that we took the time to talk with these folks at length. We really do all need the same things!

— Rebecca Reitenbach,
Northeast PA HRC



(Top to bottom) Members of the Northeast PA HRC protest hospital closures in Kingston for the Nonviolent Medicaid Week of Action; members of the Southeast PA HRC partner with Movement of Immigrant Rights in Pennsylvania (MILPA) for a People's Clinic in Upper Darby; members of the Central Appalachia HRC hold a People's Clinic in Altoona during the week of their BreakThrough News visit.





"In August 2022 Put People First! PA restarted door-knocking as part of our effort to build our base in Pennsylvania. Here in the Southeast HRC, Delaware County was facing closures of hospitals due to the malevolent profit seeking of Prospect Medical Holdings, and our door-knocking blitz was focused in the neighborhood directly to the South of Delaware County Memorial Hospital, a working class neighborhood with a high rate of Medicaid enrollment. The face-to-face interaction was something I feared from door-knocking in college but we prepared at our home base with groundings, base building exercises, and pairing off to support each other at the door. The event itself went quickly, with several wonderful organizing conversations (including showing off scars), and several fresh contacts were made and followed up with in the following week. For a first run since the pandemic, it was a resounding success in developing our leaders, and having doorknocking as a tool of base building has the potential to unite more leaders in Pennsylvania for the Nonviolent Medicaid Army mobilizing."

— **Anita Knisely**, Southeast PA HRC



Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) Week of Action

"On September 13th, the two-year anniversary of the killing of Ricardo Muñoz, we gathered on the State Capitol steps for the Nonviolent Medicaid Army Week of Action. We had a mock graveyard with 50 tombstones, each representing 20,000 people as a visual representation of the ONE MILLION people who will lose their Medicaid in 2023 as well as the over

ONE MILLION people who have died from Covid-19 in the United States. With statistics, facts and personal testimonies we called truth to power to the massive impending Medicaid cutoffs and showed how our different fronts of struggle are interconnected. We showed how the denial of our human rights to healthcare, housing and food affects the poor working class and the connection to police violence and how they are all acts of state violence against our class. We called out healthcare profiteers for profiting off our pain, sickness and death and the record billions in profit made during the pandemic.

We take action to highlight the injustices we face and to stand in solidarity with one another. We come together with our stories to show the hypocrisy in an inhumane and unjust system and to make the invisible visible. Everyone had a role in seeing the action succeed, from making phone calls as a part of the outreach, making signs and other visuals, sharing testimony, and documentation of the event. The Healthcare Rights Committee Coordinators worked with each speaker on writing their testimony by having 1on1s and asking them questions to prompt them to think about what they wanted to say as well as review the drafted remarks and share input. Our action was a two part action. First part being at the Capitol and the second part we gathered at the resting place of Ricardo Muñoz with the Muñoz family in a remembrance ceremony honoring Ricardo. This was a bonding experience with the Muñoz family that will live in all our hearts for a lifetime. The responses we received by those who passed by during the action at the Capitol followed by the outpouring of respect and admiration of our action shared on social media posts showed the solidarity amongst our class."

— **Matthew and Tammy Rosing**,
South Central PA HRC



"This year Put People First! PA underwent a regional reorganization so this was our first Week of Action organized by region across the state, and I think that is really something to lift up because it is reflected in the urgency, breadth, and depth of our actions. We directly connect our organizing in Pennsylvania to what is happening in the healthcare system under capitalism. We see a commodification of every aspect of healthcare, and the effects of this are record profits by insurance and healthcare corporations, closing down hospitals deemed 'not profitable,' eroding mental healthcare services, and expanding prisons. We need to organize not only in our towns and cities, not only across our state but in our region, and sometimes regions encompass multiple states. We need to understand our enemy to win and what we are seeing are sweeping assaults on our healthcare by the ruling class who seek to profit off our pain and sickness. Our class is the most disorganized. Even as the majority, we will lose if we don't get organized and exercise our power in a coordinated way. Every day we build leaders in the Nonviolent Medicaid Army is a victory in our struggle to kill the system that's killing us. There is so much violence in our society. The ruling class has and is and will continue to use and escalate every possible tactic of coercion—we are at war. Our enemy is not only powerful and smart but brutal. Chemical warfare, psychological warfare, nuclear warfare: this is what we are up against. On top of that they have us stuck fighting each other. We are crying out, we are angry, we rose up in the summer of 2020 after the police murdered George Floyd, and we are not saved. We need to start asking questions, and getting clear on things, together. Who is our enemy? Why are hospitals closing? Who owns the hospitals? Who owns the companies that own the hospitals?

Who owns the land that hospitals sit on? Why can't power-holders do anything to stop it? What is it going to take to ensure that healthcare is a human right for all, forever?

The Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee partnered with the Private Equity Stakeholder Project to organize a teach-in about how private equity dismantles our healthcare while extracting as much money as possible. This is what we are seeing right now in our region; specifically in Delaware County where a four-hospital system is undergoing closures and cuts of essential care. After holding speakout actions against the closures that got us local media coverage, we were approached by the Private Equity Stakeholder Project—a national watchdog organization that studies the impact of private equity on people's lives.

The Central Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee also joined us for our teach-in because the Conemaugh Health System is owned by Duke Lifepoint Healthcare which recently merged with a Private Equity Firm. We broke down what's happening in a basic way that was still very deep. We know there is a problem but we need to understand why and how it continues to happen, because the only way to win is to out-manuever our enemies. As we followed the developing situation it felt like peeling back layers of an onion. Even though we had researched all the profiteers involved, it took us time to grasp the transactional dynamics of corporate ownership, following the money to Wall Street. We understand why the ruling class closes down lifesaving hospitals, but we also need to understand how they do it—not to needlessly beat our heads against a wall trying to rationalize an inhuman system, but to be in a position where we know our enemy's next move."

— **Harrison Farina**, Southeast PA HRC



The Northeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee held a speak out to make visible the “invisible violence being done to our community by the CHS [local hospital] closures” during the NVMA Week of Action:

"I was present for the protest against the closure of First Hospital in Wilkes-Barre, PA. I was excited to see strong showings from the NEPA HRC, as well as from the local press. Everyone was eager to help put up signs and get loud for the cause. Coordinators Jessica and Rebecca were very attentive and encouraged everyone to get involved. Enthusiasm makes a big difference in engagement and morale, and there is plenty of enthusiasm among our PPF-PA leaders. Esther, in particular, has been an inspiring figure in the group, and she has been a fixture at our action events."

— **James Glatz**, NEPA HRC

Here's an excerpt from one of the several articles the NEPA HRC received in the local news:

"Outside of First Hospital, thirty-six pillowcases hung, symbolizing every ten hospital beds that would be lost with the announced closures of regional healthcare facilities."

Through Put People First! PA, the Nonviolent Medicaid Army has gone into motion to call attention to the crisis of hospital closures and the coming purge, as the organization calls it, of more than 15 million people across the country from Medicaid.

'The burden of this is going to be borne on the people who can least afford to carry it and what's going to happen is that they are just going to have to go further to get their healthcare. The ones who can't, the ones

*who don't have a vehicle, or don't have a family member or a friend with a vehicle just won't get the healthcare they need' says **Jessica Boyles**, Co-Coordinator of Put People First! PA.*

Some former patients of First Hospital were in attendance and spoke about their experiences in the hospital and how it helped them.

Esther Crook of Nanticoke says that she came to First Hospital when she was 16 years old and credits the care she received to her still being alive to this day. Esther feels that the community needs to rally together in order to make an impact.

'We the community need to do it, the government is not going to do it, they're showing us. They're not going to do it. It is up to us.'" ([FOX56](#))



As a part of the NVMA Week of Action, independent news outlet *BreakThrough News* interviewed and documented the Central Appalachia HRC's organizing drive activities. The following excerpt is from a reflection originally published with the [University of the Poor](#).

"This [video](#) filmed by BreakThrough News was a culmination of weeks of planning, hundreds of miles traveled, and many, many clear, competent, committed, and connected leaders of Put People First! PA. Our journey to create this video began when Put People First! PA members from the Central-Appalachia and Southeast regions participated in a May Day delegation to Cuba with the International People's Assembly. On that trip, our members connected with Kei, a reporter with BreakThrough News, sharing a copy of The Keystone, our bi-annual member-produced newsletter. Within that publication are the stories of everyday...

people in our struggles to get the healthcare that we so desperately deserve, as well as our statewide efforts in the fight to make healthcare a human right. By changing the narrator, we changed the narrative that rural people in Pennsylvania are not willing to fight for change, or that we don't see the systemic problems plaguing our class. ...

Our story begins at our door knocking event in Huntington, PA. The Central-Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee made intentional plans on neighborhoods to focus on, and our Base Building Team created a survey to understand residents' healthcare needs. We were also joined by a member of the Southwest PA Healthcare Rights Committee and a tri-chair of the Georgia Poor People's Campaign.

As you will see when we hit the streets with a plan and the training to carry out that plan, members of the community wanted to talk with us about the precarious situation of their healthcare. But it's not enough to go out and knock doors – that same day when we came in off the streets we ran a debrief session to understand what worked and what could be improved, as well as talked about next steps with every person that we connected with.

The next action that you'll see was held with the Northeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee around the closure of area hospitals. Hospital closures are a reality not only for many people across the state, but the country too—it's estimated that over 800 rural hospitals are in danger of closing. In a commodified healthcare system, hospitals are being shuttered across the rural and urban communities. What you'll see in the video is the state of a hospital that the Tennessee-based Community Health Systems—the largest for-profit hospital corporation in the country—has deemed unprofitable. This is the result of a nation that has allowed

healthcare to become a source of profit for the ruling class and not a human right.

Finally, our Healthcare Rights Committee held a People's Clinic at a public housing complex in Altoona PA, where we have been building relationships with residents all summer. There, our members provided blood pressure screenings and helped folks sign up for Medicaid and other state benefits. We also raised awareness about the upcoming ending of the Public Health Emergency when up to 1 million Pennsylvanians may lose their Medicaid coverage. Put People First! PA, along with the national Nonviolent Medicaid Army, will be holding a massive organizing drive with people facing the loss of their Medicaid – using the tactic of helping people file appeals and clogging the courts.

The week-long visit from BreakThrough News was also a huge leadership development opportunity for our members. Every one of the active members of the Central-Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee participated in some way throughout the week of activities, which also centered political education. The Political Education and Leadership Development Team took the lead on developing People's History curricula so that we could be grounded in the terrain and history of our region. We learned about the 1889 Flood, the 1919 Steel Strike in Johnstown, and the 1922 railroad strike in Altoona. Through the week we deepened our connections to each other and emerged as a stronger Healthcare Rights Committee. We're grateful to Kei and Breakthrough News for spending the week in Central-Appalachia in order to produce this video that is being shared throughout the U.S. and the world, revealing the plight, fight, and insight of the 140 million poor and dispossessed people in our country." ▼



— Ron Moose, CAPA HRC

MA 2022

Highlights from PPF-PA's 10th Annual Membership Assembly

Put People First! PA held our milestone 10th Annual Membership Assembly from Friday, October 7th to Sunday October, 9th, 2022! After three years, we finally gathered together again in person, albeit in an adapted version of our traditional large annual statewide assemblies. Due to the ongoing pandemic, instead of bringing 150+ people to one main location from across the state, this year, we held three smaller regional assemblies in different parts of Pennsylvania.

Each Healthcare Rights Committee (HRC) hosted or co-hosted one of these regional Membership Assemblies: Southeast PA HRC at a camp in Horsham, Montgomery County; South Central and Northeast PA HRCs at a camp in Berks County bordering the two regions; and Southwest and Central Appalachia PA HRCs at a conference center in Johnstown. At each in person assembly, there was COVID testing, masking protocol, and an online option for those who couldn't attend in person. On Sunday, October 9th, we all returned home for a statewide (and national) all-online final day of the Assembly. Through assessment of the terrain and some struggle with one another, the two dozen coordinators who make up PPF-PA's Steering Committee, or core leadership body, decided on this format to best achieve our organizational goals while mitigating risks.

This regional approach really helped us strengthen our Healthcare Rights Committees. The regional assemblies were an important step in this year's regional reorganization in which our local organizing bodies transitioned from an HRC designated as one city or town to HRCs that cover a whole region of the state. This shift further enables us to break down barriers and divisions in our organizing, such as urban, rural, racial, cultural, religious, or political divides.

The three assemblies also contributed to strengthening our HRCs through the sheer number of leaders it took from every region to carry out a three day gathering! All volunteer members coordinated: meals, transportation,



housing, meeting space, COVID safety, childcare, accessibility, energizers and transitions, tech, A/V, arts & culture, materials, interpretation, militant work, timekeeping, note taking, facilitation, content and more! Dozens and dozens of members developed their leadership and made the assemblies possible through taking on a division of labor. One of our Community Agreements in PPF-PA is "We are all responsible for the success of the PPF-PA space." That agreement shined bright through each assembly!

The Membership Assembly is a core element of PPF-PA's annual program—the one time a year when all the members of our statewide organization and partners from across the country come together to learn, reflect, strategize and build relationships with one another. We study and discuss crucial aspects of our Theory of Change and work, including the history of our movement, the economic and political conditions we face, our Health Care is a Human Right Campaign, Base Building and Leadership Development, Leadership Across Difference, our own Pennsylvania People's History and more!

We also look back at all the work we've done over the last year, and we begin to plan our Campaign for the coming year through our organization-wide democratic process. And finally, it is a time for us to be together in person, bringing us together across all of our lines of difference and across various fronts of struggle from 10 states, including with siblings from the University of the Poor, the Poor People's Campaign, the Kairos Center, the Nonviolent Medicaid Army, the National Union of the Homeless, Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), ACT UP, United Workers, and other organizations, to study, strategize, celebrate, mourn, play, and share in the arts and culture of our movement and the creativity of our leaders.

★ MA 2022

As always, we were committed to bringing together our class across all lines of difference, and ensuring that our assemblies were welcoming, accessible and inclusive for all to participate fully. To that end, we worked to ensure things like Spanish interpretation and translation of materials, stipends for folks with barriers to getting to the MA, online participation, and childcare.

Read on for some reflections from members of PPF-PA who were able to attend an assembly, as well as from some participants who joined by way of partner organizations.

— **Jamie Blair & Jen Cox**, Southeast PA HRC



Reflections from Partner Organizations

"It was a privilege to join the SEPA PPF-PA 2022 Membership Assembly in October. There was a lot to admire about the assembly: (1) the care with which the planning process was undertaken; (2) the attention to safety and accessibility in the age of COVID-19; (3) the high premium placed on collective study and political education; (4) the decision to bring in strategic partners; (5) the integration of arts and culture into every part of the weekend; (6) the time taken to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year and project into the year ahead, and more.

But the main thing that has remained with me from the assembly is PPF-PA's unmistakable dedication to developing leaders who are clear, connected, committed, and competent. Throughout the assembly, I marveled at the breadth and depth of leadership in the room. It was tremendously moving and encouraging to be surrounded by organic community leaders who were able to hold the space with such grace and groundedness. It is clear that PPF-PA is serious about developing leaders who in turn are able to develop the next generation of leaders. In a time of so much uncertainty and crisis, we will need many leaders all across the



country who embody the 4 C's. PPF-PA is a model for that kind of leadership development process."

— **Noam Sandweiss-Back**, Kairos Center & The Poor People's Campaign, attended Southeast PA MA

(Top to bottom) Members from partner organizations (**Kenneth Blackwell** from ACT UP, **Echo Alford** and **Joshua Carson** from the Party for Socialism and Liberation) participate in the Southeast PA (SEPA) regional MA; **Harrison Farina** and **LT Talarico** lead a workshop during the SEPA MA. (Following page, top to bottom) Group photo from the SEPA regional assembly, Southwest/Central Appalachia PA regional assembly, and South Central/Northeast PA regional assembly.





Reflections from Partner Organizations (continued)

"I really enjoyed myself with Put People First! PA. I am thankful for them inviting us. They made us feel welcomed from the time we arrived until the day we left. It was very organized, especially with the community care and safety around COVID-19. Also, I was introduced to some new friends and heard some amazing stories. Throughout the Membership Assembly we learned more about Pennsylvania history. What stood out to me was the history that Tammy shared about the bridge being burned down. It was a great assembly. I can say if ever invited again I will love to attend and learn more. Thanks for having me."

— **Nadiyah Patterson**, United Workers, Maryland, attended SCPA/NEPA MA



Danielle Thai (DT) and **Natalia Fajardo (NF)** write about their experience representing the Wisconsin Poor People's Campaign (WI PPC) at this year's assembly:

DT: "I was so excited to be invited to attend this year's assembly because I've participated in several PPF-PA meetings and presentations and have been incredibly impressed with the depth of understanding

that PPF-PA members have regarding the root causes of poverty and injustice as well as what it takes to build leaders in the movement. I was grateful to have the opportunity to participate virtually since it would have been difficult to travel with my work and family commitments."

NF: "I've become zoom-bound lately. My plan was to attend virtually, but when PPF-PA reached out to Language Warriors (folks that bring Unity Across Language for our movement) to help with interpretation, I overcame mental barriers and came in person."

DT: "What sticks with me from the Put People First! PA Membership Assembly is the dedication, commitment, and love it takes to build a movement and the necessity of grounding ourselves in the theory of change. I heard loud and clear that to make real, sustaining change, we need leaders who are clear, connected, competent, and committed."

- To be clear is to fully embody our beliefs and shared vision, to understand ourselves and recognize what we know and what we don't know so that we can approach this work humbly but with a clarity of purpose and passion.
- To be connected is to build strong and meaningful relationships with each other,

★ MA 2022

Reflections from Partner Organizations (continued)

- ...with all who are impacted by the interlocking injustices, and with developing leaders and to truly know and care for each other, recognizing the incredible strength and power in community.
- To be competent is to continually educate ourselves and each other on the nature of the struggle, offer mentorship, and gain experience through regular action.
- To be committed is to stay focused and accountable for the long haul and to support each other through life's joys, sorrows, and stressors by respecting boundaries and limits."

NF: "From the beginning, you can tell Put People First! PA does justice to its name - everything from availability of retreat materials in various formats, language considerations, and room set up, it's made for all people. And PPF-PA does this not for inclusivity sake, but because since the rich and powerful affect us all, whatever our color, language or (dis)ability, it will take everyone to not just fight back and resist, but take power to establish the society we all dream of and deserve.

This was Language Warrior's first hybrid event. An opportunity to fine-tune technological somersaulting for our work, we learned a lot from PPF-PA's tech team!"

DT: "The PPF-PA Assembly was an opportunity to be re-energized and to recommit myself to this movement and to those who strive to build it. One of the many lessons that I take back to the WI PPC is the importance of developing clear and consistent messaging about why we organize, how we organize, and what we know to be true based on dedicated study and experience."

NF: "The main lesson I take back to the WI PPC and to Language Warriors is that the Fundamental problem of our time is the accumulation of wealth in a few hands, while many suffer. This applies to everything,



healthcare, ecological devastation, militarism, where you see a problem, follow the money trail and you'll find the source.

Also grateful for the invaluable experience of being with PPF-PA leaders of my same class struggle, in the same classroom."

DT, NF: "Forward together!" 🖤

Photos from the **Northeast & South Central PA** regional Membership Assembly held in Berks County.

Reflections from Members

"I attended the South Central PA HRC/Northeast PA HRC (SCPA/NEPA) Membership Assembly and had an amazing time. I loved the leadership development part of it. I have begun to implement it on so many different levels personally and professionally. We got to meet members of United Workers from Maryland, which was awesome because I live in Maryland [...] I'm hoping to try to bridge some gaps there, as well as with PPF-PA, to create strength and solidarity down the East Coast. So there's big things happening, and the Membership Assembly was a crucial part of that. I am so grateful for everyone who participated and put it together. I can personally say that I am better off after attending!"

— **Leslie Sabatino**, South Central PA HRC



"First of all, it's amazing—ten years of doing this and ten years of fighting, ten years of grinding and doing all we need to do. And this is all volunteers, which makes it all the more amazing. People really stepped up to accomplish the SCPA/NEPA Membership Assembly—I saw people taking on roles that didn't make them comfortable, people taking on responsibilities and actions that they didn't find fun but they did it, and that's what it comes down to. It all came together! And we all learned from each other, that's the biggest thing in these Membership Assemblies: what we can all learn from each other and from the collective. And when we see each other struggle, we pick each other up; and when we see each other succeed, we show them appreciation. We show so much appreciation for each other, that's my biggest takeaway from the MA."

— **Matthew Rosing**, South Central PA HRC



"When I got a call and was asked to come to the Membership Assembly, I didn't know how you got in contact with me. We met at the People's Clinic in April but I don't remember giving out my phone number. But it's good! I never give out my phone number, so I am very glad I did. The Membership Assembly was great. I like everything because it's like a network. When I first came to this country I went to school, but then I had to leave because I got sick and I joined a network. It was more connected to work. ...

Photos from the **Southwest/Central Appalachia PA** regional Membership Assembly held in Berks County.

★ MA 2022

Reflections from Members (continued)

When you joined, you had to pay \$500 and then afterwards you would get connected to a network. There were presentations you had to write and present to people in the exact way that the company wanted. You have to teach and have classes but the model was all being imposed from the top.

The network of PPF-PA is very different. This is free. People are looking for people, and helping people. We are helping people with no payment. We are talking, sometimes over the internet, and being with people and it's good. Everybody at the Membership Assembly was so nice and positive. They are so positive, I could see it. I didn't know anyone before but everyone was friendly. This is a good network. I loved the food. It was so good, and I loved the way we all got our own food and ate it together. We can always cook and bring food to meetings. That's why I like it, we are sharing with people. I also loved the music. The guitar playing and singing was so nice and relaxing. We are not only teaching and learning, but enjoying ourselves too, relaxing and talking and sharing ideas in the between."

— Tibelets Yalew, Southeast PA HRC

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The Membership Assembly in SEPA was really great—it was small and intimate, which I really liked. There weren't a ton of people, but it worked to our advantage because it felt like we could all really connect with each other. We had tons of people from partner organizations, we had people online, some people who were new to the organization, etc., so it really felt like an integrated and connected experience.

I felt really proud to be in a facilitating role, especially alongside people who really inspire me to develop my own leadership. I also really enjoyed the People's History section—it was inspiring to learn about movements in the past and why we're doing what we're doing, how we got here, and what our history is. What's next for SEPA is more base building, of course, as well as following up with our people who came to the MA who were either totally new to PPF-PA or folks from partner organizations, holding People's Clinics, and organizing around the Medicaid Shutoffs. ▼

— Cassandra Hill, Southeast PA HRC



Zevi Koretz | SEPA

Personal Reflection Arts & Culture Night at the 10th Annual Membership Assembly ★



Put People First! PA Arts and Culture nights hold a special place in my heart. The first time I really felt like I had something to offer the organization was when I performed a song I wrote (inspired by one of my first Healthcare Rights Committee meetings) at the 5th Annual

Membership Assembly in 2017. I remember being pretty nervous beforehand, but everyone was so attentive and appreciative. It felt good to be able to share a part of myself with an organization that was still new and a bit intimidating to me.

At the 10th Membership Assembly this October, I co-hosted Arts and Culture night in Southeast PA. Thinking about those two nights five years apart, I see a lot of change, both in myself and the organization. I've grown so much as a leader, nurtured to do things I'd have never thought possible like knock on strangers' doors, run meetings, talk to legislators, form relationships across difference all over the state,

★ MA 2022

and so much more. PPF-PA has also grown, with new members and evolving ways of engaging in our struggle.

On the other hand, I also see a throughline between those two nights. At both events – along with all of the Arts and Culture nights I've participated in over the years – it felt like something magical happened. Part of me always wonders whether this next Arts and Culture night is finally going to be a dud, because surely they can't always be wonderful, but it hasn't happened yet.

A special thing about Arts and Culture nights is that from the beginning, we are clear that our definition of “art and culture” is very open. We push back against our society's notions of art as something only created by professionals or certain special, “gifted” people. Instead, each one of us creates, builds, expresses, and otherwise participates in culture in all kinds of ways, and we're encouraged to share the breadth of it. Some of what people shared was lighthearted, making us laugh and dance along. Some of it was heavier, about loved ones we've lost, about militarism and cancer and struggle.

Most offerings had both threaded through: the sweetness of our lives all mixed with the pain of it. There were songs, poems, paintings, and videos. There was the beauty of people getting up to share, nervous usually, making self-deprecating comments before launching into the most lovely, heartfelt thing you've ever heard. There was also the beauty of everyone sitting around in their folding chairs, listening with utmost care and attention and gratitude.

We are an organization committed to building a society that puts people first; there is a care for people at the heart of our work. I see us infusing that care into everything we do in all kinds of ways, but to me, Arts and Culture night is a particularly concentrated dose of it. At these events we lean into the reality that all of us are worth knowing, that what we carry with us and create matters and is a delight to experience together, even when it's hard. I am grateful to get to experience this reality firsthand, in the face of so much messaging that tries to deny it. Arts and Culture nights deepen my understanding of what it is exactly that we're fighting for. ▼



Phil Wider | SEPA

MA 2022 The People's History of Pennsylvania



This year Put People First! PA (PPF-PA) introduced a “Regional People's History” workshop at our 10th Anniversary Regional/Hybrid Membership Assembly. Our thinking was that this workshop would help to politically ground those gathered at each of our three regional assemblies in the histories of struggle in their regions. We also thought it would provide historical and political leverage useful for the immediately subsequent workshop dedicated to understanding the major

“My granddad worked the coal mines starting in his early teen years and spent his final months hooked up to a breathing machine because of how badly it affected him.” — Erica Caldwell at the South Central & Northeastern PA Regional Membership Assembly

Leadership Across Difference lessons from PPF-PA's 10 years of organizing. This thinking was based on shifts in our organizing work over the past year and, in particular, on our recent experience of organizing for the August Breakthrough News visit with the Central Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee (HRC).

In 2022 PPF-PA moved towards the regional reorganization of its HRCs. As part of transitioning to five regional HRCs (each consisting of a number of counties), we conducted landscape assessments to better understand the economic, social and cultural conditions, and the nonprofit and organizing terrain in these regions. While the landscape assessment tool used in this research process asked our leaders to investigate the people's history of their regions, this aspect of the assessment was really an initial foray into regional people's history.

In preparation for the Breakthrough News visit to Central Appalachia, local PPF-PA leaders took on the task of organizing a Regional People's History tour for the film crew and our members who would be participating in the visit. The tour began in Johnstown where it visited the Johnstown Flood Museum and then visited what was previously the Bethlehem Steel factory where it studied the 1919 Steel Strike. The tour also made a stop in Altoona where it visited the Railroad Museum and studied the 1922 Railroad Strike.

The study of history, and Pennsylvania history in particular, is not new to PPF-PA. Our leaders have participated in, coordinated, and led various studies for both PPF-PA and our broader network (University of the Poor, Nonviolent Medicaid Army, etc.). These studies have included, but not been limited to, the following historical experiences:

- **The Abolitionist Movement, Civil War and Reconstruction**
- **The Labor Movement** of the 1930s
- Late 1960s and early 1970s organizations of the poor such as the **National Welfare Rights Organization, the original Poor People's Campaign, the Black Panthers, the Young Lords** and the original **Rainbow Coalition**
- The **National Union of the Homeless** of the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s.

Various early developments in PPF-PA's work signaled an appreciation for Pennsylvania history, including:

- The Logo of our 2nd Annual Membership Assembly in 2014 in Philadelphia featured the Liberty Bell – which actually got its name from abolitionists who in the late 1830s adopted it as an iconic symbol of the movement to end slavery due to its

- inscription from Leviticus 25:10 that speaks of a Jubilee year: "... proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family."
- Our Winter/Spring 2015 inaugural issue of the Keystone Newsletter lifted up the political significance of Pennsylvania as the keystone in the colonies' fight against the British Crown, and the continuing political significance of Pennsylvania's placement at the intersection of the Northeast, South, Appalachia and Rust Belt regions of the United States.
- Our launch of the Mother Jones Leadership Program in 2016 recognized Mother Jones (who in the late 1800s and early 1900s fiercely and creatively assisted various labor struggles across Pennsylvania and the country) as the kind of leader our class needs today, particularly lifting up her commitment to the unity, organization and social leadership of the poor and dispossessed.

We've also engaged in numerous moments of studying the history of various regions of Pennsylvania, some of which included:

- At a January 2017 Healthcare Rights Committee Leaders Day, which was held the day before a Winter Strategy Retreat in Gettysburg, we did a session on local history, looking particularly at the Abolitionist history of Adams County. We focused on the last meeting of Frederick Douglass and John Brown which happened in August of 1859 in Chambersburg. We also looked at the significance of the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1863) and the Gettysburg Address (November 1863).
- Also in January of 2017 one of PPF-PA's members co-founded Anthracite Unite, a collective dedicated to studying the history of the Anthracite Coal region of Pennsylvania in a way that "revisit[s] the past and [reflects] upon the present from a perspective that is unapologetically pro-working class and anti-racist." Its larger goal is to "empower members of our community and build unity despite our differences, rendering us capable of standing up to modern day coal barons."
- In March of 2017, at a Johnstown Healthcare Rights Committee meeting, we studied the 1919 Steel Strike, noting how Johnstown was a major epicenter of that strike.

MA 2022

Inspired by the rich history of struggle in the various regions of Pennsylvania and PPF-PA's experiences with studying this history, in the first half of 2017, PPF-PA took steps towards creating a People's History Institute and Blog. Unfortunately we lacked the capacity at the time to bring this project to fruition.

This year's Membership Assembly marked a political maturation in our commitment to and capacity for studying the people's history of Pennsylvania. Our regional reorganization and re-commitment to organizing the poor and dispossessed in all regions of the state has elevated the necessity of studying the regions in which we are organizing. PPF-PA's decade-long focus on leadership development has provided us with leaders across the state who could take point on exploring the histories of struggle in their regions, and then in a coordinated way identify six specific historical experiences covering abolitionist, labor and homeless organizing history. Each of our regional Membership Assemblies then focused on two of these historical experiences.

In the preparation for our regional people's history workshops we identified the long overdue need for us to dig into more serious study of the Indigenous history of Pennsylvania. We also deepened our appreciation for Mother Jones (and her autobiography) as she made an appearance in half of the regional historical studies at the MA.

The fight for universal healthcare and broader social transformation is a long uphill battle against formidable opposition. In this fight we know we must learn from not only our own experiences as an organization, but also others' experiences. PPF-PA and the network we are part of root ourselves in the long line of historical development of the poor organizing the poor in the United States and around the world. Yet mainstream historical accounts (both liberal and conservative) too often make invisible this history of the poor organizing the poor, and thus obscure the real lessons for us in our work. We need a Pennsylvania people's history project that digs beneath the prevailing and misleading accounts of Pennsylvania history and extracts valuable lessons for our actual struggle today.

We believe our study of the people's history of Pennsylvania will contribute to the development of our leaders through: 1) deepening their ideological commitment and conviction; 2) advancing their political clarity and competency; and 3) equipping them with a deeper understanding of their region's historically constructed mental terrain and a greater ability to reference and draw upon the regional history of class struggle in their organizing. We believe such study will contribute to developing leaders in every region of the state who know how to fight for the unity and political independence of our class within and across Pennsylvania's regions.

As we head into 2023 we are excited about our upcoming annual Winter Study which will continue our study of the people's history of Pennsylvania. We are keenly aware that we are still at the beginning of knowing this history in such a way that we can wield it in organizing our base and applying it to the organizing and leadership development challenges we face. We are clear, however, that the lessons from these histories belong to the organized poor and dispossessed, in Pennsylvania, the United States, and beyond. 🍷

Jessica Boyles | NEPA

MA 2022 **The Great Coal Strike of 1902**



Phil Wider's article, "The People's History of Pennsylvania," outlines beautifully why we need to take seriously the discipline of studying history together and applying the lessons we learn to the challenges we face in our organizing. In this piece, I'll attempt to do just that using The Great Coal Strike of 1902 as an example to explore together. Strap in, it's gonna get spicy!

Throughout the 19th century "King Coal" was the fuel that moved the capitalist machine and drove the industrial revolution. Anthracite is the King of King Coal; the purest form of coal, it

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burns the hottest and cleanest and commands the highest price. Just so happens, under our mountains here in Northeastern Pennsylvania sits the largest deposit of anthracite coal in the world and American capitalists couldn't move their money-grubbing fingers fast enough to begin exploiting it.

Paternalistic bastards like John D. Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan proclaimed the divine right of the rich to own everything and bought up the land, the railroads, and the steel mills thereby consolidating major infrastructure and industry into the largest monopolies the world had ever seen. Nestled in the isolated valleys of Northeastern Pennsylvania's mountains, they built coal towns with company housing, company stores, company banks, transportation, medical facilities, and sometimes even company churches. In short, these capitalist fat cats monopolized virtually all aspects of public and private life for the miners and their families—all in an effort to extract as much profit from the land and the backs of the workers as possible.

Meanwhile, neither political party in the United States took any meaningful action to protect workers or the land from these market-frenzied robber barons. The accurate historical record demonstrates that both parties of our government were in the pockets of industry and had no interest in nor use for serving the needs and desires of the poor and working class unless their interests happened to align momentarily or their hand was forced.

As I began researching the 1902 Anthracite Coal Strike, I started coming across headlines such as, "Major Turning Point in US Labor History" and "First Federal Intervention in Labor Disputes." President Teddy Roosevelt was hailed almost universally as the hero who saved the day for the coal miners by threatening to seize the mines and turn them over to the miners. The whole affair was overwhelmingly billed as Roosevelt vs. the Mine Owners. To be honest, I fell for the false narrative and got caught up in hero worship of Roosevelt the Rough Rider! Rookie mistake! When I dug deeper, beneath the propaganda, it became clear the ruling class narrative was incomplete and fundamentally flawed.



Breaker boys sorting coal. Young boys were subject to the same dangerous conditions as the men working in the anthracite mines.

The years leading up to the 1902 strike were dark ones in the anthracite coalfields. Prior attempts at organizing had been repeatedly and brutally quashed by mine owners. Mining disasters were frequent and between the years of 1870 and 1900 over 17,000 men and boys died in Pennsylvania's anthracite mines. One of the worst disasters, The Avondale Mine Fire, killed 179 men and boys as a result of mine owners refusing to expend resources to dig emergency exits. During this time, the United Mine Workers of America had established themselves and organized miners across the bituminous coalfields of Western Pennsylvania and several neighboring states. As the turn of the century approached, they had their ears to the ground and saw the time was right to start organizing the anthracite miners in Northeast Pennsylvania as well. Two full years before they launched the strike, they sent teams of organizers to embed themselves in the anthracite mines and coal towns, building relationships, learning new languages, developing leaders, and establishing an organizing culture of militancy and discipline.

As the 1902 strike matured, strike leaders had an accurate assessment of their terrain and took smart tactical actions informed by their analysis. They recognized the value of the

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commodity they were sitting on and were tuned to the whispers of coal riots in the streets. They knew the mine owners had overplayed their hand due to ego and malicious greed and that public sentiment was ripe for shifting in the miner's favor. They knew Roosevelt's entire image was built on championing the common man but also that what he really cared about was asserting the primacy of government over industry. And they knew that the President and the mine owners had no idea what they were really up against; that standing between them and their coal was a wall of miners, arm in arm, immovable, and wildly underestimated.

With winter setting in, coal stores running low, public sentiment shifting and elections approaching, Teddy Roosevelt and the mine owners were backed into a corner. The miners had successfully navigated a complex terrain and placed themselves in the best possible negotiating position and essentially maneuvered Roosevelt to do the work of negotiating for them. And they won!

And yet, even these remarkable conclusions only lead to more questions! How did 147,000 miners maintain their discipline in the face of intense opposition? How did they maintain solidarity under relentless divide and conquer tactics? How did they hold the line and keep out scabs for six long months? One lesson stands out for us that helps answer all of these questions. The coal miners established a core value similar to what we call Leadership Across Difference as a foundational principle in their organizing. To illustrate this point, I'll share one beautiful example involving Mother Jones.

One of the many divide and conquer tactics mine owners used during strikes was to turn wives and daughters against the miners to get

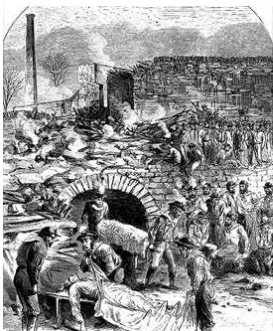


A MINING TOWN. (1,600 feet above sea level.)

at them through guilt and desperation at watching their families suffer during the strike. Under the brilliant leadership of Mother Jones, bringing insights from organizing in Southeast Pennsylvania textile mills, the women collectively countered the false narrative that they were mere bystanders and victims of the strike. She organized and empowered them to play a central role in it themselves. It cannot be overstated that, if the women had not been empowered to stand up under threat of starvation, eviction and violence, the men may never have had the courage and fortitude to hold the line themselves. Only solidarity between the miners and the women could accomplish this.

According to Mother Jones, *"I told the men to stay home for a change and let the women attend to the scabs. I organized an army of women housekeepers. On a given day they were to bring their mops and brooms and 'the army' would charge the scabs up at the mines. The day came and the women came with the mops and brooms and pails of water ... From that day on the women kept continual watch of the mines to see that the company did not bring in scabs. Everyday women with brooms or mops in one hand and babies in the other arm, went to the mines and watched that no one went in. And all night long they kept watch. They were heroic women."*

I can't help but leave you with one final lesson. What did these women come to the fight with? Brooms, mops, and pails of water! Please don't miss this entirely mundane point; what they had at hand was enough to hold the line and win the fight. Broken, desperately poor, with their babies in their arms, they were enough. Take heart in that. We are enough too. 🍷



(Left) Images depicting the Avondale disaster; (above) a mining town.

Proletarian Internationalism

PPF-PA Abroad: Cuba and Venezuela



Everything we do in Put People First! PA (PPF-PA), we do to **develop clear, competent, committed and connected leaders**. One way we do this is by visiting other countries to connect with the organized struggles of poor and dispossessed people all around the world. These experiences develop our **clarity** through learning about the stages that movements in other societies have gone through in order to achieve working class power and win human rights. They help us to see the common roots of our struggles and to develop awareness about the distinct histories, processes and relationships in different contexts. We expand our ideas of what is possible when we visit countries that have won certain victories for our class (e.g. healthcare as a human right), and we get to see beyond biased media depictions of these places. We also build **connections** through these trips, with leaders in our host countries and with those traveling with us from other organizations. (For example, PPF-PA's recent collaboration with Breakthrough News came out of the connection some of us made with Kei Pritsker on our brigade to Cuba.) We also build our **competence** and perhaps above all our **commitment**, understanding that we are part of a global struggle.

Through these trips and our daily base building, political education, leadership development and campaign work to organize and unite our class in Pennsylvania and in the US, we are building proletarian (working class) internationalism: the unity of the poor of the entire globe - not divided by nation or other lines of difference - fighting in the interest of humanity against global capital. The vast majority of us on earth have a common interest in ending this system that is dispossessing and killing us while benefiting only the very few. That system is global - capital moves across borders freely, but we as workers cannot. The multiracial, multinational, multiethnic ruling class is constantly sharing, connecting, and exchanging resources across borders; it is necessary for us to do the same if we want to take them out of power.

So far this year, PPF-PA members have participated in two international trips. In May, Maddy, Stacey, and Zevi went to Cuba on a week-long brigade of 100 young people from North America, sponsored by the North American branch of the International People's Assembly (IPA), an assembly of movements of the poor and dispossessed from around the world. We marched in the giant May Day parade and had a jam-packed week of exchange with Cuban doctors, workers, students, artists, educators, LGBTQ leaders, Afro-Cuban activists, community organizers, labor and religious leaders, government officials, and more, in order to learn about Cuba's current reality.

Additionally, Nijmie was invited to participate in the International Feminist Brigade "Alexandra Kollontai," also organized by the IPA and hosted by the Simon Bolivar Institute for Peace and Solidarity Among Peoples in Venezuela. She joined with 30 women from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the U.S. Some of the goals of the brigade included: "strengthening the internationalist struggle of the Venezuelan revolutionary and anti-imperialist feminist movement; sharing experiences of the struggle of Venezuelan women, their resistance and victories; and to creating opportunities for concrete exchange between the feminist struggles of the different peoples of the world, favoring people-to-people cooperation."

There is so much to share and learn from these experiences. Here are some reflections and excerpts from journal entries we kept there, to share a taste of what we learned and experienced and how we developed.



Today (June 29th) is the two-year anniversary of the launch of the national Nonviolent Medicaid Army. It's fitting because I'm just returning from an amazing Feminist Brigade to Venezuela. I was late to join this brigade and travel was a beast. The night I arrived there was no power in our location, I sat in a dark room for several hours, grateful to be there and to be alive in this time. I meditated and reflected and read and fasted and went to sleep. The next day, early, we left for a rural comuna (commune). Communes (both urban and rural) have been central to the revolutionary process.

The trip took all day but when we arrived we spoke for more than two hours on healthcare as the topic that naturally emerged out of the discussion. The struggles and gains that have been made in the areas of women's health, a new rural hospital that is being built, and the fight against discrimination that the poor face seeking medical care. Health and healthcare are central fronts of struggle in the revolutionary process. One of the victories of the process is the existence of Centers for Diagnostic Intervention across the country which are completely free and provide preventive care. Several of the members of our brigade were treated at these centers.

The next day at the Mayor's office which was alive with local residents coming and going and various programs in a way I've never seen, I got to share a brief statement of solidarity and talk about our organizing on the basis of health across the U.S. and the responsibility we have as U.S. people to build here, unite the poor and dispossessed across all lines of division, heighten the contradictions in this society and build true proletarian internationalism.

The U.S. working class is not horrible and we are not backwards. We are subjected to a form of internal sanctions through vicious austerity in the neoliberal era. We are subjected to a kind of hybrid warfare of the mind through our media system.

We have a huge tradition of waging class struggle to transform society in our country. Every effort to do this was mercilessly crushed by the ruling class through the state apparatus. But we are not taught this history. So we feel badly about ourselves and wonder why we are not farther along, or what is wrong with us. We have a responsibility to learn our history and come out of our internalized hopelessness.

The other thing that keeps us in chains is dependence on the corporate parties and foundations of Wall Street. Engaging with the system pending a better alternative is not the same as being subject to it — which is a DEAD end and I mean that literally.

The path forward in the U.S. is through building politically independent, state based formations that cross urban/rural and racial lines. The local Mayor in the region of the commune we visited who I had the pleasure of studying with in Brazil said that Chavez was the first person in his lifetime who gave rural peasants the confidence to believe that they were good enough and smart enough to transform and run society.

Can we organize our people - all of the poor and dispossessed in the U.S., if we do not have the same confidence in them? If we do not love them? No we cannot. Do they have contradictions? Of course they do. So do oppressed and marginalized people the world over. But they are objectively revolutionary and that is what matters. Everything else is a process of human development."

— Nijmie Dzurinko, Southwest PA HRC



May Day

"Today has been lovely. I just was in the ocean for the first time in my life! We marched in the parade and a wave of extreme anger hit me. The U.S. blockade is strangling these people. Making their lives as hard as possible. Doing its best to reverse the gains of the revolution. There's a necessity for solidarity between us young North Americans on this brigade and the Cuban people. Solidarity of the poor in the U.S. could shake this blockade. But what would it look like to make that a reality?

One of the organizers of the brigade made a great point the other day, the first night we were here. That we are not to go home and just make the Cuban flag our profile picture or make a few posts. That does nothing for the Cuban people. I appreciate this reminder that performative B.S. isn't the key to what we need to do when we get back. The enemy of the Cuban people is the same enemy of the 140 million poor in the U.S. I'm really trying to dig into what it means for us to continue when we go home."

May 11th

"One of the first things that happened after I came home from Cuba is that my water was shut off because I can't afford to pay the bills. The same ruling class that is making it nearly impossible for Cubans to have good access to water is the one that is denying me water on the account of profits and the fact that water in the U.S. is treated as a commodity and not a basic human right.

Willie Baptist likes to say that he is still a student of Watts — and in a similar way I'll continue to be a student of this brigade."

— Madeline Burrows,
Central Appalachia PA HRC



"A group of brigade members was eating lunch and discussing the panel we had just listened to, and questions that came up from it. One person confidently spoke about how US policy demonstrates imperialism and neoliberalism. They were energetic and passionate and ready to keep the conversation rolling. I paused. 'I've tried to understand for a long time, and I've tried to read about it and listen to others, but it just hasn't stuck. What is neoliberalism?'"

The person stopped, mused on how to explain it, and ultimately slowed down to reveal, 'I'm not sure.' They turned to the person next to them and asked if they could define it. That person had a few comments to add, and quickly also landed on 'I'm not sure.' We thought quietly for a moment and saw a familiar face walking past — so we stopped them to ask, 'Do you know what neoliberalism is?' They thought for a moment and shared 'It's like Obama, or Hillary Clinton... I'm not sure either.'

The hard surface of the original conversation cracked, and now we were all on the same level, trying to understand together. A leader of the trip happened to be making his way past our group, and the latest person stopped him to ask if he knew how to explain this complex idea. He smiled, mused for a moment, and replied, 'Okay, I'll try.'

This is a delegation of young people, some new to organizing and others with multiple years' experience in political spaces. I notice a tendency to use big words, complex phrases and lingo, like they're trying to prove something — their intelligence or experience or worthiness. In conversations where I listen to people's grand assertions, nothing particularly interesting comes up. But in showing some vulnerability or backtracking the conversation to get on the same page about fundamentals — those conversations have been deep. Patience and humility are key to connection.

— **Stacey**, Southeast PA HRC



"There is a thing where when I first learn something about Cuba, it feels like sci-fi, unreal... and the next moment it feels like the most obvious thing in the world, like of course. Things like: you walk into a health clinic and everything's free. The medical system is

embedded in the community, the doctors and nurses have a list of everyone in the neighborhood, their relationships, their medical conditions.... The right to healthcare, like other basic needs, is guaranteed in their Constitution.

Things like: the government did a survey to see which neighborhoods were struggling. And then... poured more resources into those neighborhoods! Even during a horrible economic time! That's where the resources go!

We visited one of these 'neighborhoods in transformation,' and saw what they'd built: a clinic and pharmacy, green space, a playground for kids with an area for families to sit and be together. The playground was simple, painted tires and wood; they don't have money, but someone just cared and thought it through, put some effort into making it nice.

This theme of making the best of what you have come up in so many ways. The kids at the national music school making incredible music on second-third-fourth-hand instruments because they can't afford new ones. Inventors always making new parts for cars, for medical equipment, out of old parts because they can't import what they need due to the U.S. embargo. On the one hand, it's sad, infuriating - it's the ingenuity all poor people are forced into using. Why do we have to struggle to meet our needs when all the resources and technology we need exist, they're just kept from us?? Cuba is poor because the U.S. has been deliberately strangling their economy ever since the Revolution. They shouldn't have to be so resourceful.

On the other hand, there's something inspiring about it: a willingness to engage with reality, as it exists right now. To look at reality, assess it, struggle within it to do what needs to be done, instead of being perfectionists and idealists about it. It's how they tackle material problems with limited resources (how do we fix cars? Stay healthy? Minimize damage from hurricanes?). It's also in the way they think politically. Over and over Cuban people admitted that their state, revolution, socialism weren't perfect; they're "full of contradictions." And yet, they threw themselves into their revolutionary project fully, because they believe in the foundation of it, which is "putting people at the center of the action - putting people first!" (These were real phrases that revolutionary Cubans used.)

Love is a thing I keep coming back to. It's different from the 'all you need is love' sentiment I grew up with in songs and movies because it's based in material reality, in how

resources are distributed. This is a society oriented around love and care for people. It's possible to do that — to at least try! It's not a naive dream or science fiction! Stacey pointed out how the young people we met seemed so confident, like they could be passionate about things without being embarrassed. Maybe this is what it's like when you're treated from day one like you have inherent worth...

It's also hard, personally, to be here, around so much love. I feel my own coldness, my walls up, built over generations of learning that you have to close yourself off and look out for only yourself to survive...

There was so much about arts and culture. We went to a queer art space in Santa Clara, after visiting Che Guevara's ashes... Ramón Silverio, the man who founded the place, had fought in the Revolution, and, like many Cubans we met, had a lot to say.

He said: Culture is a right and should be by the people! Culture is fundamental. Even in economic crises our state doesn't cut the culture budget. It's how people fall in love with the revolution.

He said:

*luchar y luchar y luchar
resistir y resistir y resistir*

*fight and fight and fight
resist and resist and resist*

*no se canse
van a lograrse de a poco
la lucha es difícil pero no imposible*

*don't give up
you will achieve it bit by bit
the struggle is difficult, but not impossible*

I want to hold it forever — the spirit that Cuban revolutionaries shared with us so generously, their faith that together, all of us in our struggles, can build a more beautiful and just world oriented around meeting people's needs." 🍷

— Zevi Koretz, Southeast PA HRC



(Top to bottom): Stacey, Zevi, and Madeline at a gathering prior to participating in a May Day parade; pharmacists at a newly-built pharmacy; a newly-built neighborhood health clinic.



Arts & Culture



Vote Tammy Rosing

Vote. But it doesn't matter who we elect. Both Political parties support the system, i.e the root of ALL of OUR problems. Choose your opponent wisely.

Don't panic! There's still a way to get the change we need. Change comes from below not above. You, me, us, must...organize!

Organize! Organize! Organize!

Organize to develop Leaders who are Clear, Competent, Committed and Connected. The 4 C's.

The key components: Base Building, Leadership Development Across Difference, Political Education....

We need leaders. We Base Build to pan for gold and identify leaders.

The struggle is a school!

We develop the leaders with the four C's of leadership. We develop them to Base Build and develop other leaders.

Political Education, A School for the struggle!

We unite the poor and dispossessed into a new and unsettling force!

Three paintings David Greene



Welfare Mothers Help Striking Coal Miners (2020)

Joan White, Shelva Thompson, and Ethel Brewster were leaders of the West Virginia Welfare Rights Organization in 1974. These unemployed 'Welfare Mothers' fought for their rights and the rights of others, including those of coal miners, who needed food stamps during their strike for better wages and working conditions. When these unemployed women on welfare reached out to share their knowledge of the welfare law with employed miners, they also shared their understanding of the importance of unity between employed and unemployed members of the working class.



Arts & Culture (cont.)



Three paintings (cont.) David Greene



In Memoriam: Calvin Myles and David Greene at the Museum of the Literacy Campaign, Havana, Cuba (2020)

David Greene and Calvin Myles were friends and leaders in the Grassroots Literacy Coalition in New York City.

In this painting, they stand outside the Museum of the Literacy Campaign in Havana in 2008 during a tour of literacy programs in Cuba, Venezuela, and Mexico. The Museum contains one hundred thousand essays written by men and women who learned to read and write during the two-year campaign.

Upon their return from their travels, Calvin suffered a massive heart attack and died. A month later, David fell ill with non-Hodgkins lymphoma.



Why So Many Cancers? (2021)

Of this painting, David says, "This painting shows me and seven other patients getting chemotherapy together in 2009. We supported each other during this fearful time. Unbridled corporate capitalism and profiteering have poisoned our workplaces, our homes, and our communities as well as our bodies. My painting here is aimed at promoting our collective effort to end this violence against all peoples."





Stay in touch!

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