



# The Red Star-Ledger

## The Time is Now

Spring - Summer 2023

Welcome to the summer issue of The Red Star-Ledger, the official newsletter of the North New Jersey Democratic Socialists of America (NNJDSA).

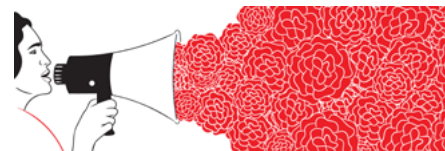
A surging labor movement has brought a historic strike to all three campuses of Rutgers University, the halting of production at many film sets due to a strike by the Writers Guild of America, and the ramping up of a potential strike this summer by UPS Teamsters. Support for unions and pro-worker legislation is stronger than it's been in decades and our members have been out in New Jersey supporting many of these picket lines.

NNJDSA has been leading the movement for Right to Counsel in Jersey City in which renters dealing with illegal rent increases, evictions, and other problems with their landlords could get free legal representation. This grassroots work has brought together a wide coalition of renters in the city and created a basis for unity going forward. Our Health Justice campaign has also been fighting for price caps on prescription drugs and Medicaid expansion.

We find hope in our campaigns at the same time that a right wing Supreme Court eviscerates our rights and congress continues to wage a bipartisan war on the working class

through the debt ceiling negotiations. Cuts to environmental protections and increasing oil drilling foretell of a harsh future for our children. It's no surprise that the mental health of young people is deteriorating during a time of multiple crises.

Now is the time to come together to create a socialist movement that offers an alternative to the cruel, predatory system of capitalism. Join us to learn and work for a better future. All are welcome.



## Historic Rutgers Strike Brings a Win

by Mary R.



On May 10, 2023, Rutgers University union members voted 93% to ratify a new contract, after nearly a year without one. Three unions bargained together, betting that this unprecedented coalition would be able to secure bigger gains for the most vulnerable educators on our campuses. The bet paid off—but only after we showed our solidarity by going on strike.

For five days, starting on April 10, picket lines marched through all Rutgers campuses (including North New Jersey DSA members, employees and alumni),

professors canceled classes and the union bargaining team and management were summoned to Trenton by Governor Murphy. Less than a month, and hundreds of grueling hours of negotiating later, the university agreed to contracts that substantially adopted the unions' demands.

Pay for adjuncts, who teach at least one-third of classes offered at Rutgers, according to their union, will increase by 44% between now and 2025. They will also have more job security as people who have taught for two or

more years will now be given contracts for more than one semester at a time, called "presumptive renewal." Previously, adjuncts were hired on a per-semester basis, which made it almost impossible for people to plan for the future.

Graduate students, who teach classes, work in labs, and conduct their own research, will see their salaries rise to \$40,000 annually by 2025. Incoming PhD students will be guaranteed five years of funding starting in 2024. Students whose research was disrupted

## RUTGERS CONT.

by the Covid pandemic are eligible for additional funding.

Full-time faculty will gain 14% pay raises over the contract's four-year term. The full text of the contract can be found at [rutgersaaup.org](http://rutgersaaup.org).

Rutgers administration did not meet all of the unions' demands. One of our boldest strategies was Bargaining for the Common Good, which linked our labor with issues affecting undergraduate students and residents of the communities where Rutgers campuses are located. In New Brunswick, for example, Rutgers is the largest landlord. Students report inadequate living conditions at the same time that Rutgers is increasing rents. While we were unable to get the rent freeze that we bargained for, we won a \$600,000 Common Good fund, paid for by the state.

Rutgers workers, like other educators at Temple University, University of California, Columbia University, and The New School, aren't only fighting for better pay. We raised our voices together against the neo-liberalization of universities. Rather than caring about our core mission—education—the neoliberal university applies capitalist ideas to running the university to increase its so-called efficiency and profit. Universities become focused on growing endowments while reducing the numbers of secure tenure track jobs in favor of low-paid, insecure adjunct positions. While our jobs may be different, university workers are fighting for the same ideals of equity, dignity, and security as our fellow workers at Amazon or Starbucks and the writers currently on strike with the Writers Guild of America.







## PRESCRIPTION DRUG CAPS & MEDICARE 4ALL by Liam P

The cost of prescription drugs in New Jersey is rising at an unsustainable and inhumane rate. People with chronic conditions who need these drugs face difficult choices, sometimes forgoing life saving medications. Those who don't end up impoverished may pay with their health—or all too often, with their lives. The Health Justice Working Group of the North Jersey DSA has been hard at work pushing for legislation to set a price cap on life-saving prescription drugs such as insulin, EpiPens, and asthma inhalers.

On February 14, 2022 a post on the official website of the state of New Jersey announced that, "Governor Phil Murphy, Senator Troy Singleton, Senator Vitale, Senator Pou, and Assemblyman John McKeon today announced their support for a legislative package to make prescription drugs more affordable." According to the New Jersey Legislature, this package includes S1614/A2839, which would require that health insurance companies provide coverage for EpiPens and asthma inhalers and would limit cost sharing for health insurance coverage of insulin; S1615/A2840, which "establishes certain data reporting requirements for prescription drug supply chain" and "requires Division of Consumer Affairs to issue annual report on emerging trends in prescription drug pricing"; and S1616/A536, which would establish new transparency standards for pharmacy benefits manager business practices. Over a year later, the bills have yet to become law.

The Building Health Justice in NJ(HJNJ) campaign has been putting pressure on the bill's sponsors, demanding that they pass the bills but also amend them to include two key protections. The first of these protections is that price caps must cover all formularies of EpiPens, asthma inhalers, and insulin drugs, not just the preferred brands of insurance companies. As it stands, our state lawmakers are crafting these laws behind closed doors, with the usual roundtable of "experts" - the state's pharma and insurance lobbyists. The only person telling us which drugs we can take should be our doctors, not the people who profit off of these life saving medications. The second amendment extends price caps to cover uninsured and undocumented folks. While S1614/A2839 does limit cost sharing for health insurance coverage of insulin, this law does not protect New Jersey's most vulnerable residents.

In the words of Assemblywoman Carol Murphy, "No one should have to go without the medicines they urgently need." But according to the New Jersey Legislature website, S1614/A2839 passed the Senate on June 29 unanimously and was sent back to the Assembly Appropriations Committee where it has languished ever since. This is deeply concerning as it is all too common for important bills to "die in committee."

For that reason, Building Health Justice in NJ urges the public to reach out to their state legislators. It is especially important to put pressure on the sponsors of this legislative package: The complete legislative roster can be found at <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislative-roster>. Our petition and calling script can be found at <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/pass-prescription-drug-price-caps-in-new-jersey/>.

In the coming months the HJNJ campaign will begin work for Medicaid expansion. We want to get the NJ Legislature to increase the state's income eligibility threshold for Medicaid to at least 400% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or higher (depending on household size). The FPL in New Jersey is woefully low given the high cost of living here. And to create a fairer cut off rate to give Medicaid Access to more working class families.

Join us to work for health justice. See QR for more info and to get involved!



**OF ALL THE FORMS OF  
INEQUALITY,  
INJUSTICE IN  
HEALTHCARE  
IS THE MOST  
SHOCKING &  
INHUMANE.**

**-- MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**



**DEMOCRATIC  
SOCIALISTS of  
AMERICA**

# NEW JERSEY MONITOR

*From Trenton to city hall,  
workers are demanding more*

## NNJ DSA'S RIGHT TO COUNSEL CAMPAIGN HITS THE STANDS

(We are reprinting this April 14, 2023 article from our member Isaac that originally appeared in the [NJ Monitor](#).)

As cities nationwide see [staggering housing prices](#) and tenants priced out of metro regions, workers are fighting back.

This week in Jersey City, residents spent five hours at a council meeting to demand that city officials give tenants a universal right to counsel to protect them from eviction, displacement, and neglect from landlords. This means if a tenant needs legal defense and can't afford it, one will be afforded to them, like in criminal proceedings.

Much of the council struggles to understand the gravity of the housing crisis, even after a [DSA-led coalition](#) spelled it out for them. A [media report](#) on the council's initial reaction to the plan suggests they do not understand how to protect tenants from eviction and hold all landlords accountable.

For residents in Jersey City — or any municipality in New Jersey — to see true housing justice, tenants' rights need to be universal in theory and in practice. In New Jersey, you need good cause to evict a tenant. We're now pushing for this to be universally administered.

This is not a fight seen in Jersey City alone; everyone is feeling the squeeze. This week, Rutgers University faculty members, who have worked nearly a year under an expired contract, began a strike to demand job security, equal pay for equal work, and a living wage. Some of the issues we're hearing on the Rutgers picket lines are the same we're experiencing in Jersey City: workers struggling to pay for basic necessities like rent in a state with an ever-increasing cost of living.

A version of the Jersey City right-to-counsel ordinance proposed by council members aligned with Mayor Steven Fulop — [a newly announced candidate for governor](#) in 2025 — would protect just those making under \$64,000. But that would mean even some public school teachers struggling to have rent control enforced in their building wouldn't qualify. For any right to be a right, it can't bank on means tests that spend more energy on [gatekeeping aid than administering it](#).

Some council members suggested that tenants' right to counsel would harm landlords from "justifiably" evicting someone, or that we should provide guaranteed counsel for landlords. While we may disagree on the politics here — I and others say housing is a human right and there are

no just evictions — the right to counsel is intended to change the existing power imbalance. The National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel found that, [on average](#), 80% of landlords are represented in housing court, while only 3% of tenants are. When tenants get representation, they get more [time and money, and can avoid an eviction record](#), as lawyers often successfully negotiate settlements with landlords.

The legislation proposed by the Right to Counsel JC coalition — legislation that could see final approval next month if enough council members vote in favor — would defend tenants at Portside Towers, a building on Jersey City's waterfront [whose landlord wrongly claims is not rent-controlled](#). This version of the ordinance would be universal, for all tenants, and cover proceedings like taking a landlord to court for rent control violations. Many Portside tenants earn significant incomes, yes, but they are being failed by the current city's tenant-landlord office. The reason council members would attempt to means test tenants' right to counsel is becoming clear: They don't want to target landlords of luxury rentals that are violating tenants' rights. We should question whether this is because many of their [donations are from the developers that build these rentals](#).

A right to counsel does not have to be cost-prohibitive. New Jersey towns and cities could use federal and state funds that have restrictions like means tests, fund the "unqualified" themselves, and still [save money in the end](#). Universal programs administered by local governments can fund the portions that development fees can't, and in the end, [would save governments a lot of money](#) in building shelters, health care, foster care, and other social safety net services. This sets New Jersey on a path to other important universal programs in the future, like statewide single-payer health care.

As workers across New Jersey demand higher wages, we here in Jersey City are demanding fair housing practices and, by extension, lower rent! When landlords know tenants have a right to counsel, [eviction filings go down altogether](#). It's as if many evictions aren't justified after all. With a deep court backlog, tenants often call it quits and scatter. A right to counsel in every New Jersey municipality experiencing increases in both rent and luxury housing development should look to Jersey City at this moment. We are bargaining for the common good, as one working class, one union in one fight.

# JERSEY CITY TIMES

## Letter: Hey, Jersey City! Pass Right to Counsel Law

### Tenants of Jersey City Demand the Council Prioritizes Renters over Landlords and Developers

(We are reprinting this April 17, 2023 article from our RTC that originally [appeared in the JC Times](#))

On Wednesday, April 12th at the Jersey City Council meeting, dozens of residents and supporters were animated enough by housing issues to spend five hours in the chamber and speak on behalf of two related

of housing organizers and co-sponsored by three members of city council, would establish a Right to Counsel office where tenants will be connected to legal services and resources. An implementa-

Evictions and landlord harassment can happen to anyone and can take many forms. It could look like landlords demanding tenants leave after missing one month of rent without any notice of rental assistance programs. It could look like a landlord shutting off heat or other basic utilities to force people out. It could mean losing special housing status. Right to counsel should cover all these cases.

Housing issues affect us all: Black and Brown communities face the brunt of development and are more likely to be evicted. Queer and trans people experience housing discrimination and homelessness at high rates. Nearly half of Jersey City households are considered "housing cost burdened." We must ensure that those most vulnerable have access to protection with no barriers, regardless of things like income or immigration status. That is why, from the beginning, organizers have been advocating for a universal program. Placing arbitrary thresholds adds time and expense towards determining eligibility instead of delivering services.

As the policy stands, service will be funded by the collection of development impact fees as stated in proposed Ordinance 23-029 (the rest of the funds collected will go towards expanding affordable housing and related programs). However, this ordinance contains a wage threshold that restricts service to only those who make 80% or below of the area median income. That's about \$64,000 a year per person. Even members of the city council



ordinances. Members of the Jersey City government have often chosen the interests of development companies and landlords over those of renters, who make up roughly 72% of the city.

After Mayor Steve Fulop and council representatives took a trip to Paris last month paid for by developers in pursuit of a major construction project, everyday people of Jersey City felt blindsided. The council has a chance to rectify past decisions at least partially by passing one of the most comprehensive Right to Counsel policies in the country and spearheading universal programs for tenants.

Ordinance 23-030, developed through a grassroots campaign

tion oversight board led by tenants would be created, ensuring people impacted by these issues are at the decision-making table. Landlords will be required to inform tenants of their right to a lawyer when signing a lease and before serving a notice of eviction.

These programs are effective: New York City's Right to Counsel helped reduce evictions by almost 40 percent overall. Before Right to Counsel was passed, only 1 percent of tenants had representation in landlord-tenant court while 95 percent of landlords were represented. Now, 30 percent of all tenants are presented, and even more striking 84 percent of all tenants who were provided an attorney remained in their homes.



## Right To Counsel Letter cont.

have pointed out that this would not cover all tenants, and we urge city council to expand funding options to make sure right to counsel is a right, not an under-funded program.

Crucially, Right to Counsel is a policy in pursuit of housing justice, but it is also a cost-saving measure. While we should expand services for the unhoused, keeping people in their homes in the first place is always less expensive.

Meanwhile real estate companies continue to push large projects forward, in particular for luxury buildings, with help from the city. The council voted last year for an affordable housing overlay that would permit developers to make 10 to 15 percent of units in new developments affordable in return for extra density. Community groups and neighborhood associations are wary that this was just another handout for developers. Without sustainable development of housing, Jersey City is exacerbating the issues of affordability seen in cities across America and prioritizing those who profit off of housing.

At the same time, the Office of Landlord/Tenant relations has not been effective in enforcing rent control or holding large landlords and property companies accountable. Fed up with irresponsible management and illegal rent increases, tenants in Jersey City have taken to organizing unions and demanding better conditions. We are asking residents of Jersey City to implore that the city council pass the most robust Right to Counsel possible by continuing to show up to upcoming council meetings.

High costs and lack of legal protections are driving working class people out of Jersey City.

To add insult to injury, the mayor has stuck Wards A-D with higher taxes by not properly re-assessing property values in an effort to make Wards E and F more amenable to commercial real estate development. The law as it stands is not "fair and equitable for all."

Tenants in Jersey City deserve much more than just expanded mediation services, they need to have housing security and the ability to fight back against landlord negligence and harassment. We hope that the Planning Board review process is swift and results in no fundamental changes to the policy.

It is time that Jersey City joins New York, San Francisco, Newark, and many other cities in addressing the eviction and affordability crisis by passing Right to Counsel. Housing is a human right, and we demand no evictions without representation.

**“  
The law as it  
stands is not “fair  
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for all.”**



**HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT**



# TO SOLVE THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS, WE NEED TO BUILD, BUILD, BUILD PUBLIC HOUSING

by Nate H.



The prolific modernist architect and urban planner Le Corbusier once said that houses are “machines for living in.” He believed the sole function of a house should be to enable its inhabitants to thrive.

For renters in New Jersey, houses are quickly becoming machines for bleeding us dry.

According to the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, over [50% of New Jersey’s renter](#) households are rent-burdened and the problem is most acute among the state’s most vulnerable. There are only 45 [available and affordable](#) housing units for every 100 New Jerseyans defined as “very low income” (making 50% of the area median income).

Once an essential part of the American Dream, housing has become just another commodity for investors to squeeze profits from. Affordable homes are increasingly unavailable on the market because investors are buying up properties with the intention of turning them into AirBnBs or hiking the rents as [high as they will go](#).

In Newark, investors account for [nearly two-thirds](#) of residential real estate sales. Hudson County recently made [national news](#) after residents complained of rent increases as high as 40%, and in 2019, AirBnB spent over [\\$4 million](#) in a failed bid to overturn an ordinance limiting short term rentals in Jersey City.

To compound the high cost of existing housing stock, new housing construction is also increasingly investor-driven

instead of community-driven. As a result, most of the new construction we see is in private, luxury developments, often in working class, minority neighborhoods (see the massive projects underway in Jersey City’s Journal Square neighborhood or the horrifying rebranding of Hackensack as ‘The Sack’). These projects are clearly being built with future, more affluent residents in mind and not the current members of the neighborhood who are at risk of displacement.

The [real-estate funded](#) “Yes In My Backyard” or ‘YIMBY’ movement argues that this is not a problem at all. They believe that we need housing policies that attract private investment into the construction of new homes to achieve what they refer to as “housing abundance.” They insist that all new housing construction, regardless of its target consumer, will lead to greater affordability through a process called ‘filtering’. The idea is that as wealthy people move into the new luxury housing, old homes become free for others to move into, and so on, in a process reminiscent of ‘trickle-down’ economics.

Many YIMBYs position themselves as progressives, with some YIMBY groups even trying to enter DSA. It should be clear that anyone pushing Reaganite economic policy as a solution to the housing crisis is not a friend of working people.

As socialists, we understand that the cause of the present crisis is not that there is too little private investment in housing, but that there is too much.

As long as housing is an investment vehicle, it will never be affordable. A home should be a place where we rest, not a place that makes an increasingly smaller number of us rich.

To truly achieve housing abundance, we should follow a two-pronged strategy. The first step is to attack the idea of housing as a commodity from which to profit. We can do this by organizing

with our fellow tenants, engaging in rent strikes, and forcing reforms that weaken capital’s ability to profit from housing. The next is to win massive public investments in housing, which should include upgrading existing public housing, taking over private housing, and building new public units.

The [Fair Share Housing Center](#) has identified 1,100 parcels of at least 0.5 acres currently owned by the state. They recommend choosing parcels in areas that have good access to transportation, are at low risk of flooding, and where the housing crisis is most acute to target for subsidized housing development. Why not go further and make these developments fully public?

To be fair, the current state of public housing in the United States may not engender confidence in such a plan. Our existing public housing is often seen as a crime-ridden symbol of urban decay. But that is not the result of anything inherent to the housing itself, but rather the [neglect and disinvestment driven by racism and the profit system](#). The reality is that public housing in the U.S. was set up for failure and never meant to challenge real estate capital. It is reserved for those with very low incomes, ensuring that there is not enough money for maintenance, and its construction was paired with slum clearance so that the supply of available units did not actually increase.

Public housing can and does work in cities like Vienna, where 60% of the population lives in government owned housing, and rents are lower than any major city in Europe. Contrary to the post-Reagan consensus, public resources can provide an equitable and decent standard of living.

It is time for New Jerseyans to realize that we can do better. To demand that we do better. Instead of begging for crumbs from for-profit developers, we can have abundant, livable housing that is democratically controlled and permanently affordable.

# Police Don't Promote Safety, They Prevent It

by Brett R.

On March 3, 2022, the police were called when Najee Seabrooks, an anti-violence interventionist with the Paterson Healing Collective, was experiencing a mental health crisis. In his moment of greatest need, he pleaded for his mother and begged fruitlessly to see his colleagues from the Paterson Healing Collective, who were on-site and trained to intervene in just these types of situations. Instead, the police met his crisis with mockery, laughter, threats, and tragically, a hail of bullets.

This was a police execution. Paterson Black Lives Matter leader and North Jersey DSA member Zellie Thomas [described Najee's murder](#): "After cajoling Najee to exit the bathroom, police behind anti ballistic shield with protective gear, shot Najee with live ammunition and killed him." Thomas noted that "you can only justify that if you do not value human life." In the aftermath of Najee's murder, and in acknowledgment of a long history of a murderously violent and entirely out of control police department, the Attorney General of New Jersey took the unprecedented step of taking over the operation of the Paterson Police Department (PPD).

In a listening session in Paterson, AG Matthew Platkin was surprisingly straightforward, acknowledging that Paterson residents were justified in having no trust in the PPD. When he said that some officers will probably need to be removed, the crowd pushed back, asserting that the PPD is not just "a few bad apples" but a thoroughly rotten basket. Platkin then acknowledged that indeed there may be a more widespread problem. While Platkin mostly said the right things, and seemed to genuinely listen to community concerns, we should not hold our breath and expect to see a bright new future of police and community collaboration on the horizon. We have to go beyond reforms and ask what the police are for in the first place.

It is easy in the aftermath of a horrific police killing to scrutinize the particulars of a situation. To say, why wasn't the Paterson Healing Collective called in to help Najee?

To ask for so-called "less lethal" interventions to be considered before resorting to bullets and chokeholds. To say that this or that police department needs more training in dealing with mental health crises.



While any of these things MAY have saved Najee Seabrooks life, or Michael Brown's life, or George Floyd's life, or Breonna Taylor's life, we misunderstand the function of police in our society if we accept the premise that police exist to provide safety to citizens. Police exist to protect and preserve capital, and the system of racial capitalism that protects and grows the fortunes of billionaires.

As abolitionist scholars Mariame Kaba and Andrea Ritchie [make clear](#), police are "violence workers" who "don't promote safety, they prevent it".

The struggle for black lives, the fight against the violence of the police state, and the push for abolition of police and prisons is an inherently socialist struggle. So too, we must see that the road to a socialist future

is inherently intertwined with the abolitionist struggle. As Joshua Clover and Nikhil Pal Singh [wrote](#):

"It is difficult for us to imagine an emancipatory politics in the current moment that does not run through the precinct house, the national guard station, or the military base, those sites of local, national, and global police power whose voracious demands on budgets, public priorities, and political imaginations have shaped the broad organization of US society over the past half-century, if not longer."

**Abolition is  
Socialism  
Socialism is  
Abolition**

It is our obligation as the largest socialist organization in the country to wholeheartedly join the fight against the violence of the police state. In this country, it is both a historical and contemporary truth that the most meaningful movements for liberation have been rooted in struggles against the chains of slavery, segregation, police, and prisons as a part of struggles against white supremacist capitalist exploitation. We must commit ourselves to this ongoing struggle in Paterson, across North Jersey, the US, and the world.

We will not allow the murder of Najee Seabrooks to be swept under the rug. We cannot permit Paterson to make cosmetic changes before resuming violence as usual. We must commit to justice, accountability, and to the long abolitionist struggle.



# Assaults on Public Libraries and Book Banning

by Karl S.



Red states like Florida and Missouri have been all over the news for their ongoing assault on public and school libraries, banning books, and curtailing curricula. Unfortunately, deep blue New Jersey is not immune from the right-wing assault on these beloved public institutions. So called “parents rights” groups in towns and school districts across the state have been making life a living hell for librarians and depriving children of a fulfilling education by attempting to ban books with LGBT and racial justice themes.

This past winter, [hundreds of residents in Glen Ridge](#) turned out to defend their public library when the ironically named group Citizens Defending Education attempted to have six books with LGBT characters removed from the shelves. Running on a parents rights platform, a recently elected school board slate in predominantly Republican Sparta called ‘Students First’ [banned a book](#) from a middle school library where the main character is a lesbian after a small number of organized parents spoke out at a school board meeting. A [school librarian in Roxbury](#), a conservative leaning town in Morris County, was so viciously smeared as a “groomer” by a group of parents that she is suing them for defamation.

It’s hard to know if these parent groups are legitimate expressions

of grassroots discontent, but extensive reporting in the [NY Times](#) has revealed that many of these organizations, which have popped up in school districts in New Jersey from Sussex to Cape May County, are being funded by outside conservative networks with deep pockets.

The most notorious of these groups, ‘[Moms for Liberty](#)’, whose members regularly threaten school workers with violence, claims to have 260 chapters across the country, six of which are based in New Jersey. In addition to advocating for book bans and lobbying for [laws so extreme](#) that librarians could be imprisoned for ordering the wrong books, Moms for Liberty has been a major force in bringing parents who were upset about school closures and mask mandates into a neo-fascist movement.

It’s worth asking why this moral panic around libraries is happening now. I went to Rutgers for a degree in library science right before the Republican Party’s embrace of Qanon, election denial, and anti-vax conspiracy theories. As a young librarian, I never expected book bans to be something I had to be particularly worried about as they seemed like relics from a less enlightened time period, but I couldn’t have imagined the delusional direction conservative politics was heading.

These moral panics around books are not new. New Jersey writers like Judy Blume and Philip Roth, who are now embraced as cultural icons, were highly controversial figures throughout their careers for writing about taboo topics like teenage sexuality. The current wave of book bannings has many similarities with the attempts five decades ago to censor *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret* and *Portnoy’s Complaint*, but I believe that if we only focus on the lewd nature of the books being targeted, as much of the media has done when discussing frequently banned titles like *Gender Queer* and *All Boys Aren’t Blue*, we are missing out on the greater picture of what the right is trying to accomplish with these books bans.

There are two dominant ideologies among the right in America: extremist libertarians who do not believe in any form of taxation or public services and Christian nationalists, who view all of our democratic institutions as corrupted beyond repair by secular liberal values. These groups are more than happy to see public libraries disappear from our communities entirely. By attacking librarians as “groomers” and peddlers of pornography, the right is attempting to build support for the complete elimination of public libraries. If this agenda sounds extreme, it is, and it’s already happening in Missouri, where the House of

## Library cont.

Representatives has attempted to reduce [state funding of libraries to \\$0](#).

The movement to ban books should not be seen as only concerned parents who have been worked into a moral panic. These parents may be the most visible culture warriors on the front lines of local battles and the easiest to



mock, but the driving force behind groups like Moms for Liberty and other “parents rights” groups are innocuously named conservative think tanks like [The Council for National Policy](#) and [The Leadership Institute](#) which have pumped millions of dollars into the move-

ment. These groups are invested in creating a moral panic around libraries in order to destroy a secular and publicly funded institution which they see as a threat to their Christo-fascist, ultra libertarian worldview.

Public libraries are worth defending. Throughout my career, I have worked in public libraries that offer free services such as English and GED classes, free lunches, appointments with social workers, expungement clinics, and overdose prevention tools. In many communities, the library is the single most important provider of.

In many communities, the library is the single most important provider of social services and the only free indoor space people have access to, making them especially vital institutions in poor and working class communities.

The parents rights movement has some wins against public and school libraries under their belt, but their agenda is deeply unpopular, even

in many conservative communities. Because they are well organized and highly funded, they have been able to hold schools and libraries hostage with a small and vocal minority of supporters. These groups have successfully turned the phrase “parents rights” into an agenda that opposes public health measures, the basic human rights of LGBT people, and classroom instruction that honestly portrays the history of racism in America, but in communities across the US there are millions of working class parents who disagree with the fascist politics of this movement and are looking for an alternative.

The parents rights movement is fundamentally reactionary and deprives children of their agency.

At a time when red state legislatures are loosening child labor laws, the parents rights movement is surprisingly silent on the very question of whether children should be stripped of their childhoods and forced into the marketplace. Rather than asking what rights parents have to dominate and exploit their children, socialists can fight this pernicious movement by focusing on the basic rights children should have but are so regularly denied.

We believe children should have the right to attend schools with universal free lunches, clean drinking water, and air-conditioned classrooms. Children should be able to express their gender identity however they choose to and receive the proper healthcare when necessary.

Why don't our children have the right to live in a society where climate change won't destroy their future



**IN MANY COMMUNITIES, THE LIBRARY IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PROVIDER OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

and mass shootings aren't accepted as inevitable? Why are children so regularly denied access to books that accurately depict the racist history of the United States? The only way to fight back against the parents rights movement is with a robust movement for the rights of children.

## TEACH TRUTH NJ

Support LGBTQIA+ students

RADICAL PEDAGOGY INSTITUTE

Resist Book Bans

Calling all students, educators and community members to rally for teaching truth in our schools and communities.

JOIN US AT ANY OF THESE LOCATIONS  
SATURDAY JUNE 10, 2023

HARRIET TUBMAN STATUE- NEWARK  
ROSEDALE ICE SKATING RINK - MADISON  
T. THOMAS FORTUNE CULTURAL CENTER-RED BANK  
PRINCETON BATTLE MONUMENT - PRINCETON

education for liberation network



For accommodations and to find specific locations/times, please RSVP to Radical Pedagogy Institute using the QR code.

We encourage attendees to wear a mask for the safety and health of all of our community members





# NNJDSA “Red (All) Stars:” An Interview with Whit Strub

by Julia T



Whit Strub has played a major role in shaping the chapter as North New Jersey DSA's co-chair following an increase in membership in 2016. A professor at Rutgers University and department representative for AAUP-AFT, Whit was on the frontlines when faculty went on strike for better working conditions and common good reforms just a few weeks ago. This profile is part of a series spotlighting longtime organizers with a wealth of knowledge and experience on the U.S. left.

## ***How long have you been an active member of the NNJDSA chapter? What has your experience been like?***

I joined DSA in either late 2016 or early 2017, but I had basically grown up on “the left.” Previously, I had experience with the Green Party and was radicalized by Ralph Nader’s campaign. I later became involved with the Socialist Workers Party, but eventually became disillusioned by their insistence on 3rd party politics.

Prior to the “Bernie Bump” of DSA when an influx of members joined in 2016, DSA was mostly read by young people as a book club. However, the night of former President Trump’s Muslim ban in 2017, I was living in downtown Newark and jumped over to get to a protest. There was quite a large DSA contingent, and I was really impressed by how they mobilized for such a large direct action. I have been a member since and was also an active part of the #AbolishICE campaign to get migrants out of detention.

What I like about DSA is that it’s not a 3rd party structure and the least sectarian version of what I’d encountered in the past. My experiences in DSA have overall been very positive: even though there are real tensions and disagreements, we’ve been able to work through them as members and I’m a big booster of the organization.

I owe my socialist politics to Kurt Cobain from the band Nirvana, who led me to punk rock, which through liner notes (especially Propagandhi and J Church) and zines like Punk Planet and Maximum Rocknroll led me to AK Press, PM Press, Noam Chomsky, etc. These all helped shape the inchoate class resentments I felt growing up working-class in rural Alaska into something closer to class analysis.

## ***What other organizations and movements have you been part of?***

I am a member of the Rutgers faculty union and, in many ways, I am very lucky because union politics can be very challenging. The last few weeks of the strike were pretty intense after bar-

gaining was taking place. Thankfully, Rutgers-Newark has a remarkably left-leaning union with 100% participation.

We are inspired by the work of the Chicago Teachers Union in bargaining for the common good along with better contracts. Our union supports Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, recognition and liberation of Palestine, and asking unions to not endorse politicians who do not support these policy positions. When I was on the executive council of the union, we drafted a proposal to end ICE contracts, which was a pretty radical resolution for a mainstream trade union to take on. We have active members in DSA who help uphold our values, and I see DSA and our union as working in tandem with each other in a symbiotic relationship.

I am a big believer in our union’s leadership. I was part of the bargaining committee sequestered at Governor Murphy’s office in the Trenton State House for a week, and I think it was a sweeping win by the standards of labor rights. We won a 40% raise and longer contracts for adjuncts, which is a great victory against the neoliberal, gig economy reality of contingent workers. I think you’re going to see this inspiring faculty at other colleges and universities.

## ***What kind of organizing work do you primarily take part in?***

I was active in the anti-war movement in the Bush years more as a foot soldier than an organizer. Since coming to Newark, I’ve been involved in the LGBTQ+ community as a member of the Rutgers Queer Newark Oral History Project and the LGBTQ+ Community Center board, which ties deeply into my academic work in Gender Studies and History. I learned more about solidarity from this experience than anything else I’ve done— I was very aware of my positionality amongst a group led by Black, queer women, but also used this opportunity to practice solidarity over allyship. I put in a lot of sweat and work and learned a lot about the value of shared struggles within a local, grassroots organization. I believe these experiences are really helpful for those who are of more privileged identities.

## ***What are some issues you hope our chapter will take on?***

The task of the left is to perform an impossible double gesture: be realistic and pragmatic, but also challenge what is possible. We cannot succumb to hegemonic ideals and must do our part to make real changes. Calibrating pragmatism and militism has been challenging— as we have seen, Biden’s administration offers a unique set of challenges vs. the ones presented under Trump. My own personal vision for DSA would be continued electoral organizing and strident militarism in rank and file unions. The most immediate challenge for our chapter would be to reinvigorate and re-engage our members. I would like to continue our strategy of mobilizing ourselves through external external campaigns like Right to Counsel that are radical, but still doable and help bring new people in.

Check out Whit’s article on the Rutgers strike at <https://www.dsausa.org/democratic-left/rutgers-strike-ends-common-good-wins/>.





### North New Jersey Democratic Socialists of America

To learn more about our chapter and the work we do, to see our calendar of events, and to join, email: [northnj@dsanj.org](mailto:northnj@dsanj.org)  
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# Democratic Socialists of America **2023** **National Convention** August 4-6, 2023

The National Convention is held every other year, and is the highest decision-making body of the organization. Delegates from across the country will meet to set our course for the next two years and elect our new National Political Committee (NPC), which functions as DSA's highest decision-making body between conventions.

NNJDSA will be sending 12 delegates to Chicago to represent our area. Let us know what you think should be priorities for our chapter work by emailing us at [northnj@dsanj.org](mailto:northnj@dsanj.org)

More information on the National Convention can be found here:



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