

Occupied with Class:

The Middle Class in the Occupy Movement

by Phoenix Insurgent

By any measure—unemployment, foreclosures, the rise in food stamp dependency, homelessness, etc—the US middle class has taken a beating over the last several years. And although I'm always hesitant to start an essay off by quoting Žižek, I haven't heard a better metaphor for both the current economic situation and the shock many Americans feel at what they see as the death of the "American Dream" than the iconic scene recounted by Žižek of a cartoon cat walking over a cliff who proceeds confidently for several paces into thin air before pausing and looking down. Seeing the gaping chasm beneath him, it is only then that he begins to fall.

After three decades of neo-liberal attacks, much of what we consider middle class life is really debt. That is, it is a fantasy, a placeholder filling in for the stagnation of wages that happened in the '80s, '90s, and '00s. Many other anarchist and Marxist authors have pointed this out (David Graeber and David Harvey come to mind) but it's interesting how the entire language of debt and crisis has shifted over the years of the Great Recession. While today the media discusses it in terms of austerity, sovereign debt, and debt to GDP ratios, early on there was a lot of talk of underwater mortgages and massive credit card debt owed by individuals to financial institutions. Briefly this popped into the media consciousness, as the sheer scale of resistance forced the media to pay attention to the rapidly spreading underground debt refusal. People walked away from houses, mailed the keys back to the bank, and stopped paying on their credit cards. Just as now the occupy movement routinely violates capitalist notions of public and private property, then there was a similar rejection of commonly held relationships and debt culpability. Whereas before default and bankruptcy had been shameful in the popular consciousness—with bankruptcy services ads run late at night or sandwiched between afternoon talk shows—all of a sudden everyone was doing it.

In 2009 the *New York Times* reported that 6% of credit card debt had been written off by banks. Faced with a population in revolt, banks and collection agencies were offering large discounts to customers willing to pay something—anything—of their outstanding balance. Many of my friends and I participated in this silent strike, netting massive discounts

on the debts we had run up over many cash-strapped years. For most of us, it wasn't just that the debts had gotten too high to maintain, but also that credit card companies had engaged in a series of interest rate increases, often for petty reasons or no reason at all. Just like the balloon payments and interest rate hikes on millions of mortgages, our credit cards were designed to encourage us to miss payments, to accrue fees, and, when it came down to it, to keep us paying large payments for life on even modest debts.

In my own case my interest rate jumped from around 10% to 34.9% for no reason at all. It was at that moment that I joined the millions of Americans who had come to the obvious conclusion that, even if we wanted to, we couldn't repay our debts. That decision, for the first time, put us and the banks on the same page. In an odd congruence, we couldn't pay them off and, given the jacked up interest rates, the banks obviously didn't want us to either. Interviewed in that same *Times* article, Don Siler, chief marketing officer at a major collection firm said, "You can't squeeze blood out of a turnip. The big settlements just aren't there anymore."

In September of 2009, Ann Minch of Red Bluff, California posted a video to Youtube announcing her debt strike as a call to action nationally. "There comes a time when a person must be willing to sacrifice in order to take a stand for what's right," she said. "Now, this is one of those times, and if I'm successful this will be the proverbial first shot fired in an American debtors' revolution against the usury and plunder perpetrated by the banking elite, the Federal Reserve, and the federal government." Many have forgotten, but Bank of America interceded directly in her case, fearing the implications of the debt revolt breaking out into the open.

This was a time when the first bailout was fresh in everyone's minds. In 2008, following the collapse of the banks and a popular revolt that scuttled the first attempt at a bailout, the ruling class suspended politics during the height of the presidential campaign in order to flood the financial institutions with taxpayer money. John McCain and Barack Obama put both their campaigns on hold and flew in a panic to Washington, forcing a highly unpopular recapitalization bill through Congress, complete with threats of martial law, collapse, and social upheaval. It was at the peak of a historic election in which the first black president stood on the verge of victory, riding on promises—believed by many very fervently—of Hope and Change, that the American ruling class revealed itself for all to see as a monolith, united in its objectives, and willing to dispel the mirage of partisanship in defense of its wealth and power. This lesson was not lost on people, emerging later in the occupy movement's denunciation of party politics.

In many ways, as I look back on those early years of the crisis, it seems to me like those quiet, often individual and isolated acts, perhaps mentioned briefly to friends and family, and negotiated through a tactic of re-

fusal, were the true precursors to the occupy movement. Millions participated, even as they held onto the fading hope that Obama would deliver the change they thought he promised. These people—middle class people primarily—had believed with some justification that the system would respond to them. Indeed, even though power clearly resides with a very small capitalist and political elite, the middle class in America is the foundation of almost all political and economic argumentation. All mainstream political arguments must refer back to this mythical and broadly-defined group at some point. The American ruling class depends on this fecund soil of middle class identity and ideology to reproduce the mythology and propaganda that maintains the system overall, and of course the economy and the profits that go with it. It is the middle class that votes and consumes.

But for thirty years the middle class had been reduced to a photo-shopped image quite unlike its former robust self. Debt had replaced wage growth. Home prices and credit card debt rather than real assets made up its balance sheet. The suburbs, once a vast retreat to safety and “normalcy” for the mostly white middle class, began to show signs of collapse. Like mushrooms, one after another “for sale” signs and foreclosure stickers spread through the car-friendly neighborhoods. The official unemployment rate (always under-counted), doubled in the eleven months between April 2008 and March of 2009. Overnight the foundations of the middle class vanished for tens of millions of people. What once seemed like a solid foundation was revealed to have been rotting for some time, as Americans found themselves crashing towards the basement in what had seemed like an impossible reversal of fortune.

It is in these conditions of 2008 and 2009, when the dream of Obama’s Hope and Change had ended and the crushing reality that politics would not respond to the drowning-not-waving middle class, awash in a sea of red, that we see the formation of what would become the occupy movement. While anarchists are right to point to predecessors in the student occupations of 2009, and in the anti-globalization movement before that, these are merely the origins of the form of the movement, not the origins of the movement itself. In those movements the general assemblies, spokescouncils, occupations, and horizontalism have their origins, and the points of cross pollination between the young occupy movement and those movements are obvious. But the occupy movement itself had its birth in the crisis, in the moment of the cartoon cat looking down after walking off the cliff. It is a movement with a varied composition, which ranges from homeless folks to students to anarchists to workers, but more than anything else it is a movement of a middle class that is rapidly re-proletarianizing, with a collapsing standard of living and failing job prospects. In the process, it is finding itself in unfamiliar territory surrounded by unfamiliar landmarks and neighbors.

Nevertheless, vestiges remain of the many biases and privileges that came with middle class status in the US, and these contradictions play out in the occupy movement in ways that we can identify. In particular we see these assumptions—primarily reflected in the bourgeois belief that the system ought to respond to middle class people—play out in arguments around nonviolence, the police, and questions of perception and imagery. Right now, as we enter what may be the end of the beginning of the occupy movement, we see the formerly middle class working out its new identity in public for all to see, contradictions and all. It appears schizophrenic, asserting at the same time both what it sees as its fundamental right to protest, to be heard, and to have its grievances ameliorated, and at the same time finding itself open to new radical ideas and tactics. All this while also facing down a system that clearly not only no longer responds to them but actually sends against them the very same jack-booted thugs that the middle class supported as they cast their ballots for one law-and-order president after another in the last three decades.

We can lay out a few significant features of this middle class state of mind that have come into play in the occupy movement, at least as I encountered it in Phoenix (OPhx). First, as I said above, is a real sense that the system ought to respond to their demands. That, when it doesn’t, the system is broken. Obviously, this simplistic view ignores the process of exclusion and dislocation central to the functioning of the system. Nevertheless, this is the view. Likewise, there is a desire for respectability, for conformity to normal bourgeois conventions, for example politeness, and a particular kind of attire. This desire also often manifests as a rejection of certain affiliations, and an insistence on maintaining or creating a particular image. Another feature of this ideology is a desire for order and an adoration of the police. Finally, one of the most important elements of the middle class view is the tendency to treat its view of the world and its experiences as normal, and to impose hegemony on the movement based on this view.

These are points of conflict in the movement not just because of the ideas that form “middle class-ness”, but also because likewise participating in the broader movement are poor people, homeless people, and political militants—primarily anarchists—who have quite different experiences with cops and politics, and who envision different constituencies as the optimal target audience for occupy actions and propaganda. Beyond this, “middle class-ness” in the US is anchored to whiteness, and this has caused conflicts whenever white middle class occupiers have attempted to treat their experience as normative rather than specific and exclusionary, especially around questions of policing, incarceration, and justice. This makes the occupy movement not only contested terrain, but one in which the formerly middle class participants seek to impose

their dominance over the rest of it. Always lurking in the dark recesses of the middle class consciousness is the idea that politics ought to be the property of the responsible classes, and rubbing up against these other populations has been the root of many of the conflicts in the early days of this movement.

All in all, middle class occupiers are in conflict with themselves. They operate generally within the safe confines of middle class ideology, but their class position has collapsed. The question is how this conflicted identity will play out. With no recovery in jobs or incomes on the horizon, and therefore no way to reconstitute itself, is the emergence of a working class or other non-middle class identity inevitable? Will interaction with radicals, anarchists, poor and working class people, as well as people of color (who may challenge many of the basic values of whiteness that constitute middle class-ness) lead to a radicalization, or a rush to defend the formerly privileged class position? Obviously many downwardly mobile occupiers long for a return to the good old days of the American dream. Meanwhile, the system and all likely political candidates seem wedded to austerity in one form or another. A political response that would satisfy them all seems improbable.

Within the occupy movement, at least its Phoenix derivation, the middle class tendencies played out in a variety of interesting ways. Nonviolence, for instance, was always deployed ideologically and never defined. Most people who used the term "nonviolence" with regard to the movement seemed to move interchangeably between "nonviolence," "nonviolent," "peaceful," "pacifist," and various other terms, treating them as if they all referred to the same thing. Some did this consciously (politically) and some seemed to be operating out of the generally privileged and anti-historical narratives of political movements that middle class people use to mythologize struggle. Cartoon versions of Gandhi and King got trotted out regularly, stripped of historical context or even political content.

Given its lack of definition, the demand for nonviolence was therefore applied almost exclusively to militants, and never to police. Militants are considered to be dangerous because they do not adhere to the ideological and poorly-defined nonviolence of the middle class occupiers. As a result of our refusal to toe the line, we are treated as if violence is our preferred method of struggle, or even our default setting. Our presence is perceived as dangerous. Indeed, the participation of anarchists in OPhx was and continues to be a source of much fear and debate, something police have exploited on several occasions.

The debate about the importance of nonviolence has a few main elements. One is the false history of social change that is so important to the middle class (people who value stability and predictability above all else). The collapse of their class position has turned them into disturbers

of public order, and yet at the same time, they value order and civility as hallmarks (or psychoses) of their suburban lives and democracy. Tied into this is the belief that the system would and should pay attention to them if only they could make their case clearly and non-offensively. For this reason, violence is not only perceived by the middle class as disruptive and ineffective, but also as poor strategy. This is reflected in almost every discussion about nonviolence, as the most common refrain "it looks bad on TV." We are not to appear like thugs, like criminals, like we are out of control or not respectable; all loaded language that points to middle class perceptions and fears.

At one point during the first mass arrest at OPhx, occupiers (sitting on the ground as riot cops encircled them) began to chant "We love you!" and "We are peaceful!", "We are nonviolent!" at the cops, as if invoking an incantation of middle class desperation. In a real way what they were saying was, we are not a threat and we are playing by the rules. This is the old identity expressing itself. But it's coming up against a hard new reality. Many of these people had likely never been on the business end of a riot suit, much less been arrested.

Imagery and perception played out along the terrain of class as well, with many middle class occupiers exhibiting a near obsession with how their fellow occupiers portrayed themselves. In the days before the actual attempt to take over the park that was initially targeted for occupation, a Reddit post circulated online which caught the attention of the middle class elements within OPhx. The post advocated that occupiers dress well, in suits and other office- or church-appropriate attire. Supporters of this position claimed that if we looked good, we would attract more people and that we would also look sympathetic in the media. In this way, form was valued over content, which probably isn't surprising for a class that has had the foundations of its ideology yanked out from under it.

In the same way that it was alleged that if we appeared respectable we would be successful, the assumption was that if we looked bad (like poor people or unemployed people or like people who had been foreclosed on) then we would lose the support of the media and therefore of the American people. Dirty clothes and torn t-shirts, attire (including signs) that evoked anarchism, radicalism, or homelessness, or a down-trodden or downward trajectory were repeatedly singled out for being inappropriate.

At the same time, middle class occupiers treated their assumptions about who was being appealed to and who would be offended or attracted by certain attire or messaging as a given, a natural fact beyond dispute. In a real sense, they were talking about their former selves, or perhaps their former employers. The idea that perhaps a movement of the excluded and disempowered might not want primarily to target middle class people made absolutely no sense to these middle class occupiers, and their

ideal presentation bore a striking resemblance to a job interview.

In a media world, driven by the consumption of the middle class, the middle class naturally has its own image reflected back to them over and over all day. Middle class-ness is treated as normal and correct and even as large sections of the middle class found itself abruptly and increasingly poor or working class, the ideology continued, like sensations from a phantom limb. Likewise, the point that the media itself was owned by the 1% and as such had no class interest in portraying the movement positively (a fact that had been clearly borne out up to that time by the coverage), was rejected wholesale by middle class participants, despite the fact that they themselves broadly felt disappointed and disillusioned by the media. For the current and former middle class occupiers, the movement was as much an appeal to conscience as anything else and the main vehicle for that appeal, initially, was the media.

Beyond this was the attempt by occupiers to impose on the movement a rigid, heterosexual, anti-subcultural, and white suburban set of standards, mimicking not so much the promise of the consensus-based general assemblies that had excited them from far-off Zucotti Square, but instead functioning more like the neighborhood or homeowners associations that stifle all threats of diversity or difference in the far-flung outer developments, now collapsing and emptying at an astounding rate. This even though their class position had changed drastically, even if they no longer lived in those suburbs or had that good job and access to the easy credit that had made it all possible. This raised the inevitable question of just what kind of change these people wanted? Was it a break with the old order—the failure of which had been the motivating factor for so many participants in the first place—or was it to replicate or shore up and reconstitute the old middle class life so many had believed they enjoyed in the decades before the crisis? Was the occupy movement to be the grave digger or the defibrillator of the current order? How deeply had middle class occupiers interrogated the realities of middle class suburban life?

Whatever the answer to that question, OPhx inevitably came into conflict with the police, who were another point of extremely heated debate. At the beginning and to this day (though less so now than then), a large majority of people have clung to the notion that cops were part of the 99%.

In order to discuss OPhx and the cops we have to temporarily accept the idea of the 99%, which I think most anarchists believe is a clumsy and inaccurate way to approach class composition of society. Many in the occupy movement are in serious danger of reifying what is merely a sometimes useful, albeit limited, tool, and this comes out nowhere more obviously than how they talk about cops. In a way, however, it makes sense that in the US, where almost everyone thinks of themselves as middle class, when a class analysis finally broke through to popular conscious-

ness it would be ridiculously broad, almost uselessly so. Either way, since "the 99%" was the terminology being used, the discussion remained largely stuck within it and vulnerable to its many limitations.

Early on those political militants, working class people, and people of color who had altogether different experiences and perspectives on the police, came into direct conflict with those largely middle class people who asserted that "cops are part of the 99%." In an echo of the conversation about image and perception, middle class occupiers asserted that if we looked respectable, the cops would treat us that way. Or if we were polite, the cops would have no reason to attack us. Indeed, looking good, using good language, and mouthing the movement's poorly-defined mantra of "nonviolence" were used not only as some talisman of protection, but also repeatedly deployed as criteria for singling out the dreaded "violent provocateurs" who haunted the dreams of middle class participants, agitators they believed were always ready to infiltrate and disrupt, thus making the movement "look bad" and leading inevitably to failure. The further one strayed from these core values, the more likely it was that one would be attacked as an infiltrator. Thus, these three criteria were used to reinforce middle class hegemony over the movement.

People who pointed out that the cops themselves were violent, and that our relationship to the police was dictated not by our behavior, appearance, or language but by our relationships to power and capital, or that police were generally right wing reactionaries who would dislike us no matter what we did or acted like, got attacked themselves for being violent. That is, opponents or even mild critics of the police were labeled violent for maligning the police or remarking on police violence. This bizarre reaction was perhaps natural given the fact that most middle class people's contact with cops up until their participation in the occupy movement was limited to getting tickets, asking for directions at public events, getting directed in traffic, getting help after a crime, and generally being made to feel safe and protected.

Therefore, police were not perceived at all as violent, but rather as well-meaning members of the 99%, just doing their jobs, and only prone to violence when provoked by people who deserved it. With seven million people in prisons or jails or under state supervision at any particular moment in the US, only the head-in-the-sand NIMBYism of the middle class could insist to a movement of the formerly middle class that a small armed gang that puts so many 99%ers in jail every year was part of the 99%. And, naturally their weak analysis of the police led to consternation and surprise amongst middle class occupiers each time the police broke with the presumed social contract and resorted to violence and arrests against those perceived socially as undeserving of such treatment.

So the question remains. What will become of the formerly middle

class occupier? Many contradictions have yet to work themselves out. It seems natural that a shift out of the comfy middle class wouldn't come without its problems. Will the second phase of occupy, with the election looming ever closer, display a more nuanced and advanced understanding of American capitalism, politics, power, class and resistance? One of the most inspiring things about the occupy movement is its willingness to transgress conventional protest tactics in surprising ways (even as it reinforces others), its willingness to be disruptive and take over public and private space, and its (so far) rejection of the dominant politics. It shows a lot of potential to be a creative, critical, and confrontational movement moving in a general trajectory that ought to make anarchists happy. But will the former middle class occupiers, ejected so summarily from their positions of privilege, find a new identity that reflects their new conditions, or having wakened from the dream briefly, will they instead seek to roll back over and recapture the comforting fantasies of days gone by? Right now they are in a sense doing anarchism without anarchism. But is that good enough?

The most striking thing to a reader who has learned about Occupy Wall Street from the nightly news is that this book doesn't include a notable section on anarchist activity in NYC proper. While there have been anarchists on the ground in NY and Zuccotti Park since day one of the occupation, there they have mostly served in a support role: providing experience with consensus, with group process, and with propaganda. By the account I heard anarchists provided tens of thousands of pieces of literature from an anarchist perspective in Zuccotti. The locations that are highlighted in this book have two characteristics. One, anarchists actively participated in the Occupies in these towns and two, anarchists wrote publicly about this participation. There is perhaps too much information from Denver, Oakland, and Seattle but that is because anarchists in these towns dedicated themselves to "getting the word out" about their participation.

Location

Like anarchism itself much of the excitement of occupy has been how it has flowered in the smaller towns and cities around the country. The idea that there are still standing political occupations in a variety of cities across the country is one of the untold stories by the mainstream media. The idea that this new (old) tactic has such an energizing impact on the people who participate should come as no surprise. The face-to-face still matters, more now than ever.

Anarchists have participated and taken this creative space to do things they perhaps would not have dared to do in other towns. This includes occupying unused space in highly public ways, attacking placidity, and being involved, critical, and analytical of the Occupy Movement. This section highlights the best of anarchist involvement in lower profile cities around North America.

various

Chicago, Illinois

Open Letter to Occupy Chicago

by some potential friends/enemies

We approach you today from a curious position on the margins of your activity, lingering here because we don't quite know what to make of you in many respects. We have friends who have been maced and kidnapped by the New York Police Department, and in many ways we are excited about the creation of new spaces in which bonds might be formed in struggle that will take us places further than just a symbolic encampment in the financial district. We have skills, ideas, and energy to make Occupy Chicago a greater force to be reckoned with. We also recognize that those who are a part of Occupy movements around the country are a part of the middle class that is being dismantled by austerity measures being put into place around the country, and have had little experience with conflict. Many want a return to the middle class, for it to be saved. But no such salvation can be delivered to the middle class by an economy in crisis. Instead, as some who have inhabited this dispossession most of our lives, we say: welcome home, but we still have a long way to travel together.

While we see potential in this activity, your general assemblies have drawn lines in the sand that make us reticent to open lines of communication, and others that have made us cringe. In some respect, there is a good element in things we have heard: recognizing that economic crisis is the work of government as a whole and not just one administration or party, that it is not necessarily just a class of greedy capitalists that want our money but rather a whole system that maintains our shitty living conditions, that it is not ideology that matters as much as it is activity. And we agree. Yet, this should not be a rally cry for Occupy Chicago to take a neutral position in what is a global war between those who want to manage economic crisis for their own ends and those of us, more and more every day, who have no future in this economic system known as capitalism, no matter how many reforms others call for. Occupy Chicago's lines, however, do not reflect this struggle. They say, "We are saving America, and all Americans will benefit from restoring economic security and the freedom that America is based on." For the descendants of the slaves who worked the fields to grow the wealth of this nation-state, for the trans women locked up and trying to survive in men's prison, for the indigenous people who have survived our long-running genocide against the people who lived on this continent, for the undocumented people who risk deportation every day to survive, for all of the abandoned chil-

dren of a society and economy that never cared about our lives in the first place, these words are empty. They only reinforce that you will stand to preserve this system of benefit for yourself even if it means the continued dispossession of all lives that the democracy and capitalism never cared about unless they could be used for profit.

Worse than this patriotism, however, is the clear line that you've drawn in supporting the police. Despite much of the rhetoric about "blue-collar" and "white collar" police, there is no difference in the function of the police in relation to our lives. Whatever collar you may see, there is surely a brownshirt underneath. The police serve to keep those without power in line on a day-to-day basis, and especially when they rise up against systems that keep them in chains. We've smelled the tear gas in the air, watched our friends and families thrown to the ground and beaten. This is not police brutality, it is the cold fact that policing as a system defends the wealthy and will use deadly force to do so. And no apologies from police will make this any different. The Chicago Police Department, to whom your General Assembly has decided to extend olive branch, have held guns to our heads since time immemorial. In the first seven months of this year, they murdered 42 people. Between 1972 and 1991, they tortured more than 130 black men in secret jails with impunity. They break up all our fun parties. They turn over our friends to ICE. The CPD do not "make sacrifices" and "take risks" every day to "keep Chicago a safe community," they risk their lives to murder, imprison, and torture those who refuse to be content with the poverty that this system has given us, and there is no room for friendship with those who seek cordial relations with those who terrorize us to keep us in line.

We know that these statements do not represent everyone currently occupying Chicago. We've seen the glazed-over look in many participants' eyes at the General Assemblies and the general lack of enthusiasm about this experiment in democracy. To those participants we say: perhaps we share something in common. The truth of this of course lies in whether or not you choose to break the tyranny of silent consensus, the democracy that has so quickly taken the power from those who dare to dissent. Refuse to be silent about how this moment which could challenge so much oppression is being taken away from us, just like everything else has. Refuse the orders of the police. Challenge those who are limiting your ability to act within the occupation, for they also act as police. Occupy space that disrupts that normal flow of life. Find those friends who dare to act with you, and do the same. We will be there for you if you choose to take your lives and your participation into your own hands. Are you occupying to become powerful or to give away your power to the systems that have gotten us into this mess?

Portland, Oregon

An Anarchist Account of Occupy Portland: "Whose Sidewalks?"

by A Former Occupier

I write this because I see many of the same problems occurring at occupations around the country and I hope to share a perspective that may be of use to other anarchists trying to understand the dynamics of the Occupation Movement and how to engage with it.

I was excited by the potential of Occupy Wall Street, and thought that horizontal organizing would be conducive to anarchist participation. In Portland, there seemed to be a commitment to organize the march and occupation without seeking permits, which to me signaled a positive development in Portland's protest culture.

However, leading up to the 3rd General Assembly (GA) a number of troubling issues began to surface. A self-appointed and unaccountable leadership, later nicknamed the ghost committee, established plans for peacekeepers and police liaisons in the face of clear objections and without discussion or agreement in the GA. Once their existence was a *fait accompli*, the GA insisted that police liaisons only convey information in one direction, from police to occupiers. Police liaisons were not empowered to negotiate on behalf of the GA, yet they repeatedly did. Some of the same people also tried (and failed) to keep the opening march on the sidewalk and blocked a proposal to keep the march route secret from the police. A Green Party organizer even attempted to obtain a march permit on behalf of Occupy Portland in defiance of the GA. The fact that the march was unpermitted, despite heavy pressure from the city, was in my opinion one of the chief reasons for the incredible estimated turnout of 10,000 people.

Controversial and unaccountable decision-making on the part of the ghost committee continued. Initial plans to use Terry Schunk Plaza as the occupation site, due to legal precedent protecting freedom of speech on federal property, were suddenly reversed at the last minute when a ghost committee member, Gina R., announced on a bullhorn that she had negotiated an agreement with the police and that's why riot cops weren't storming us right now. The agreement was that we could stay at Lownsdale and Chapman Squares, but not Terry Schunk. This was not brought forward for discussion either at Lownsdale/Chapman or at Terry Schunk—it was decided for us. There should have been intervention at that point, but ev-

everyone was so exhausted and confused that it wasn't openly challenged.

Soon we learned that while the city had offered Lowndale/Chapman for the night, they threatened our arrest and removal the following morning due to a contract with the Portland Marathon to use the area as the staging ground for their event the following Sunday. We demanded to negotiate directly with the Marathon, a small victory. The Marathon stipulated that they would agree to some of us staying in Chapman Square behind the chain link fence and black curtain traditionally used at the end of the Marathon route. No one would be allowed in or out between 4am-5pm Sunday except for medical emergencies. This was presented by the Marathon as non-negotiable due to security concerns.

The GA agreed that a skeleton crew would remain behind while others would leave the park before 4am, regrouping to march from PSU on a route to be determined. At the Saturday evening GA, a man announced that he had met with the city, the police, and the Marathon, and negotiated to allow Occupy Portland to march at 2:30pm with the mayor and police along the marathon route. He also said, wouldn't it be great if we all sang "Imagine" by John Lennon because the march date coincided with John Lennon's birthday. This was met with immediate opposition for not going through the GA process. It was stated by the facilitator that this had been organized autonomously and that whoever wanted to go should go; the man wasn't asking for the endorsement of Occupy Portland. However, the information for the PSU march was then changed to reflect the information for the "John Lennon march" on the Occupy Portland website.

At the PSU march the next day, police liaisons negotiated with the police, in violation of their mandate from the GA to only convey information one-way, that the march would take the streets initially and return to the sidewalk at Yamhill. The police desire for us to stay on the sidewalk was announced to the crowd via megaphone. There were impassioned pleas to take the streets, as well as a couple of confused arguments against. Thousands began marching—most people staying on the sidewalk through the park blocks. I helped to lead a small determined group of people in the street. It was a miracle, the cops weren't attacking us! Despite pleas from the peacekeepers to stay on the sidewalk, eventually the whole march ended up in the streets and headed to Pioneer Courthouse Square, the central public forum in the city. It was clear to me at that point that the police had orders to stand down because we were operating with too much public support. Being heavy handed would surely backfire at this stage.

From Pioneer Courthouse Square, those of us who didn't want to march with the cops and mayor began to march to O'Bryant Square to meet and rally. Someone with a megaphone began directing people away from us, telling them we were not the "official" march. People be-

gan shouting and eventually everyone agreed to a facilitated consensus. Many people spoke passionately about not marching with the police, including a young African American woman, an elderly white woman, and a disabled man on crutches. A consensus to continue to O'Bryant Square was assumed, with only the man with the megaphone blocking, and his objection was dismissed due to the fact that the John Lennon march was not a GA-endorsed event. Subsequently, there were two more efforts made to reroute marchers to the John Lennon march and these were more successful. In the end, about twenty of us marched down Broadway with an escort of ten or so motorcycle cops. We marched all the way to city hall, across from the still temporarily enclosed occupation site. That night at the GA, we agreed to retake Lowndale Square and Main Street.

On Monday, we began to receive pressure from the city about Main St., which runs between Chapman and Lowndale Squares. This one block had been closed up until this point. In fact, the police had closed it for us, and it was their barricades that were blocking the street for us. Through liaisons, it was communicated that the city was concerned about emergency vehicles and Trimet bus access. Multiple people pointed out that they had been operating fine with detours for the previous four days, that streets are routinely closed for corporate-sponsored events, and that what we were doing was worth accommodating. There was also a concern for safety of pedestrians, especially children, crossing between the two camps. People were also concerned about giving up our primary meeting spot—a fountain stands in the middle and it is a large, well-lit, highly visible place for General Assemblies. On Tuesday night, a proposal was put forward by Gina R. to open the streets unconditionally and it did not achieve consensus.

On Wednesday morning, I awoke to find that someone had taken down the barricades. No one would take ownership—I heard only vague references to autonomous individuals. We began to receive word that the city was going to take the street back, with or without our cooperation. In the afternoon, Sam Adams, Portland's mayor, approached a remaining hay bale that was serving as a barricade, where a young woman sat. He addressed the larger crowd and group of reporters following him, stating that as mayor he had the power to open Main St. and that he was now doing so.

I chimed in and asked if that meant he was going to bring the police in to forcefully remove us, he said no—he didn't need to bring in the police because he was the mayor and could open the street himself. He asked the young woman sitting down to get up. She refused. I sat down behind her. She gave an impassioned plea for him to respect our humanity and what we were trying to do. He asked her again to get up. She began to cry and I put my hand on her knee. I told him we weren't going anywhere and that per the previous GA decision we would continue to hold the street and

negotiate with interested parties on finding ways that all of our needs could be addressed. He smugly dismissed it as "process", and walked away.

From that point onward, things took a bizarre turn. Four of us remained in the street after the peacekeepers announced that anyone who didn't want to be arrested should move on to the sidewalk. At this point the cops were nowhere to be seen, but apparently some people were being advised that the police would be moving in to make arrests and open up the street. As the four of us sat there, people began shouting for us to get out of the street. I can't remember everything that was said; I stopped paying attention after awhile. I do remember one man yelling that we were committing passive aggressive violence by sitting in the street. Another said that we weren't really members of the occupation—implying that we were plants or provocateurs. Another shouted that those on the sidewalk should turn their backs to those of us in the street—and some did. The person who donated the hay came to tell us they wanted the bale back because they didn't support us being in the streets. One of the armband people came by to tell us that we weren't allowed to use the megaphones because the people who donated them didn't support us being in the street.

It was the most appalling lack of solidarity I had ever seen—and our reason for being there was to uphold the decisions made by the GA. Eventually more people began milling in the street after hours passed and the cops never showed. Hundreds of riot and mounted police were spotted at the ready, however. The order was just never given. During the day the barricades were rebuilt, and finally it was clear that the street was ours for at least a little longer.

That night, two proposals were brought before the GA: one to open the street immediately and unconditionally and attempt to negotiate with the city for limited use, another to keep the street closed except to emergency vehicles, bicycles, and an antiwar march, and to continue to negotiate with the Trimet Union and any other concerned parties about ways that their needs could be addressed. Support for each proposal at this point was so equal that the decision on which to discuss first was decided by a coin toss: the "open the street" proposal went first. About two to three hours of discussion and evolution of the proposal ensued. After a first round of evolution, the vote was perhaps 50-50 and after another round of evolution it achieved perhaps 60% in favor, not the 90% agreement required.

The first proposal was dropped and we moved to the second proposal, to keep the street mostly closed, which went through a similar process of concerns, amendments, and evolution. It came for a vote and clearly achieved the 90% agreement required for a time-sensitive proposal, with about 13 stand-asides and about 7 against (those in favor were not counted because they were visually clearly more than 90%). The person who presented this proposal asked that those who voted in favor commit to

remaining in the street to hold it, as she intended to do.

Immediately after the GA, we received word that one of the ghost committee members, Julio G., had plans to take down the barricades unilaterally at 1:30am. He was confronted by a group and defensively denied knowledge of the plan, refusing to engage us. Later conversations have affirmed that there was in fact a plan to take the barricades down. By then, only a handful of folks remained in the street, committed to holding it. The barricades stayed up, though police had driven a motorcycle past them in the middle of the night, probably a probing to see if the camp would come out to defend the street. They didn't. At 6am perhaps a hundred or so cops descended and arrested eight of us, with no legal observers or cameras present except for one man with an iphone. The media, however, were there in full force, likely tipped off that arrests would happen that morning. Before getting arrested, one of the arrestees ran through camp yelling, "The cops are here! Into the street!", to which a peacekeeper responded, "Shhhh. People are trying to sleep!"

We were each released that afternoon, after 8 to 12 hours in custody, with misdemeanor charges of disorderly conduct and interfering with a police officer, both of which were later reduced to violations. The radical caucus greeted us outside with chants of *Solidarity Forever*. The ghost committee were nowhere to be seen. The next day at our arraignment it was a media circus and there was a large rally outside. Our supporters were prevented from entering the courtroom by a line of cops at the courthouse door. Inside, our lawyers were determined. They suggested we enter not guilty pleas and seek trial dates.

Media coverage of our arrests proclaimed that everyone was happy that Main St. was finally open, even members of the occupation. One person was quoted as calling those of us who were arrested "extremists." On OccupyPortland.org, it was initially reported that one of us was resisting arrest, which was a total fabrication as evidenced by the fact that none of us were charged with resisting. It was also stated there that the police gave us an opportunity to leave and that we chose to be arrested, again, total fabrication. That night, Occupy Portland Facebook admins restricted the ability for people to post. Then an admin went on to comment: "I don't know about you guys, but I'm glad Main St. is open...."

The following day, Saturday, was the anti-war march. A feeder march began at Occupy Portland, unfortunately led by a huge American flag, and joined the permitted anti-war march. Again, peacekeepers led people onto the sidewalks, but I helped to encourage people into the streets after seeing that the police were not acting aggressively. The entire march later occupied Main St. where a rally was held for about ten minutes, before continuing on. Eventually the march went to the waterfront, still hundreds strong marching through the streets. There I heard one

of the ghost committee members confer with police and then announce that we would march on the sidewalk back to Pioneer Courthouse Square. It was never brought forward for discussion.

Sunday night, the two main proposals put forth before the GA were to empower the peacekeepers to call the police and to endorse instant run-off elections, a proposal brought forth by the same Green Party opportunist who tried to obtain a permit for the original march. I saw no allies there that night—both proposals passed—and I decided it was time to suspend my participation in Occupy Portland.

There are very serious issues of transparency and accountability in Occupy Portland right now. I had been working to address those, with very limited support, but that effort was derailed during the fight over the street and the subsequent arrests. I know that there are some people still dedicated to achieving those goals who still see OP as having potential for a real movement of resistance. Other commitments have brought me home for the time being, and so I wish them the best of luck. I still believe that this moment in time has so much potential. I don't know if Occupy Portland is capable of acting on it. They either fear or don't recognize their own power.

Due to the appalling lack of solidarity and the co-opting of this movement by forces that want to tame and pacify it, I'm beginning to feel that it would be in anarchists' best interest to organize openly and independently. Through the strength of our analysis, people will be drawn to our position. What seems like extremism now will look more reasonable once the city and police begin to increase the pressure. We cannot allow our voices to be silenced out of a fear of being labeled divisive. Our goals aren't the same as liberals and the authoritarian Left. That much should be clear. Given that members of Occupy Portland are openly collaborating with the city and police with impunity, I also feel it isn't a safe environment for anarchists to operate in. Suggestions for a registration list have been floated. Until it's made clear that collaboration won't be tolerated, security is compromised.

It has been suggested that our efforts might be better directed by following DeColonize LA's example and calling for dispersed popular assemblies throughout neighborhoods in Portland. I would also suggest that anarchists in Portland begin meeting regularly so that we can discuss how to best achieve our goals in this charged environment. Our time is now: we don't need to ride on the coat tails of back stabbing liberals in order to gain legitimacy. They discredit themselves as they go along; let them take ownership of their failures and let us organize on our own, while still looking for ways to engage the Occupy movement and help it reach its revolutionary potential.

Southern Ontario, Canada Why are Anarchists Involved in the Occupy Movement?

by Some Southern Ontario Anarchists

At the base of the Occupy Movement, is the fact that capitalism isn't working. This is a global movement against a system that sees a wealthy few controlling the majority of money, resources and land.

These same few people control politics on parliament hill, decisions made in our communities and have vested interests in continuing wars abroad and the war here against the poor.

The Occupy movements overarching goals of challenging the class divisions in this society can never be negotiated without a revolution.

In the streets and squares, the Occupations are organized horizontally so that everyone can speak for themselves, without appointing leaders.

The Occupations around the world have liberated space for us to organize autonomously against capitalism. They have created a space for us to help each other out for our mutual interests, sometimes known as "Mutual Aid".

With 1500 occupations across the world, each one expresses solidarity with those attempting to occupy the major financial districts where all the countries wealth is exchanged. These are also places for us to start conversations about addressing issues face us in our communities too.

The Occupy Movement is already ripe with anarchist ideas in action, and we want to do our part to see this through to its inevitable conclusion...

Revolution

from gettotheroots.wordpress.com

Vancouver, Canada Occupation is a Fuckin Freak Show: ALL POWER TO THE FREAKS!!

by d.

What a fuckin freak show! Down here, We don't need a weatherman to tell Us which way the winds blow. Down here, Freaks Rule—Yippiel The Occupation is a commune: ALL POWER TO THE COMMUNES! Dig the library, where comrades are playing chess and reading *The Art of War*, Dig

from momentofinsurrection.wordpress.com

the kitchen where We feed each other and wash our own dishes, Dig the healing tent, jam space, art tent, dig the vibe which is a dagger in the ribs of empire. The freaks are rising and bringing the shit down!

~ ~ ~

This is a war for peace, a war for territory, a war for deterritorialization, class war, social war, anti-imperial resistance. We are a fuckin WARMA-CHINE! The Occupation is centrifugal,—in its dispersal of Popular Power in the Streets; We are a new society at war against the old state, We commit class suicide & exodus from history: “those who have a history—it’s one of violent class war. Those without a history—it’s one of war against the state.”

~ ~ ~

We melt into a vagueness of runaway kids smoking weed with tripped-out hippies, chewed-up-and-spat-out. Tents erected in barricades of pallets, from the back a freak calls for a: “Mic Check!” ... “**FUCK THE POLICE!**”. It is in the midst of vagueness, affinities starved for survival—who want to eat on the flesh of capital, come into contact with one another and grow more confident; Clandestine cells take secret oaths to defend the camp around candle light, smoking butts and drinking herbal tea.

~ ~ ~

Outside the Pharos forces amasses against Us—white trash rednecks working for the man—these union card-carrying city workers circling for a fight. The pigs itch to crack skulls. These are the errand boys of Command, which idles patiently on the curb. Configurations of hostility evoke occultist predictions of doom, ranging from Suzan Anton to Chemtrails; the sorcery of Spectacle wishes to render Us invisible. Fools! Our life force is that of negation. This is CIVIL WAR of Us against all those lackey pigs. Any which way you wrap your head around it, this is a State of Emergency and We will each call our own tune and dance in the sludge of paranoia and conspiracy theories, cause “not even the dogs that piss on the walls of Babylon shall be saved.”

~ ~ ~

Ask a freak why We are here: “all We can say when asked, is what We each feel,” such is the poem of We freaks becoming a new form of life welcoming the coming community. A rebel commune where the Mari can’t put his finger on Us. Those who appear closest to a leader speak with a corpse in their mouth. We swirl and dance and drum and beat box and rant and fuck and get high. We mistrust, and snitch and provoke and incite; what the fuck are the pigs gonna do!? Provocateurism would be cheered for its enthusiasm! The only way sneaky-dick can establish himself is through false leaders—but that pig-piñata would be strung up.

~ ~ ~

We are not a parallel society—we are a COUNTERPOWER. We will resist invasion while digging deeper into the guts of the Beast. We are

a metaphysical charter of the phantasmagoric planetary-offensive. This site is Occupied by the Cosmopolitan Indians—Tahrir Square Faction, bringin’ the fuckin ruckus straight outta the streets of Syria. We are the COUNTERPOWER PARTY FOR SELF DEFENCE and our program is infinite; We choose these words the Black Panthers Speak and We Mic-check their style: “We draw pictures that show Standard Oil in milk bottles launched at Rockefeller with wicks made of cloth from I Magnin and J Magnin—pictures of Chinese fire works in gunpowder form aimed at the heart of the enemy—Bank of America—pictures of pigs hanging by their tongues wrapped with barbed wire connected to your local power plant.”

~ ~ ~

So listen up, not all the hippies went to the coastal islands to die; We reappear to avenge the ages that rose in defeat. All the partisans and runaway slaves, maroons and ghost dances, free kitchens and health clinics, squats and tree houses, converge as phantoms in this specter of GLOBAL INTIFADA that haunts empire. These occupations are the grave of civilization, the stronger Our relations are autonomous from the state, the quickening emergence of whatever this is becoming.

Notes for We, antagonists

The on-going occupation of social space is heavily contested, from within and without, and throughout us all. There exists in Occupy Vancouver’s every moment and every relation a complexity of contradictions, which startlingly reflect those shared between us. What makes this occupation a real event of thinking and acting is the engagement with these complexities within an open political space. In these rendezvous of various forms of life and ideas, a plane of consistency is constructed. This plane is the site where relations are intensified between a common, and our differences are developed. The reproduction of these relations transverse the idiotic notion of 99% and engage in civil war against the state and its citizens. (The ease with which the main slogan was subverted into “Decolonize the 99%” is inspiring.)

Given that this civil war is declared amongst us all, it is powerful to have a site from which to gather and further wage war. The occupation is not a totality and any allegation that it is immediately shatters against the occupation’s corals and sinks back into cynicism. The cartography of the occupation is that of multiple ridges of antagonisms. Each ridge acts as a dispersal of forces in the site—that keep antagonisms circulating through the space. Each antagonism can be intensified so as to exceed its limits. The occupation as a free space is expanded by the agitation of antagonists—who should seize this opportunity.

Although righteously dismayed by the operational construction of

the occupation, antagonists are now face-to-face with the multitude of potentialities that exist and continue to combine. The theatre of war is an open stage. Of course there are the attempts at territorializing the space into political camps, each with their unique codification, but the space continues to swirl without any definitive separations. Perhaps the greatest potential achieved thus far is the un-potentiality taken by so many—the refusal to participate in any structure (outside a tent!).

The pressing challenge for any antagonist who desires to participate is the sovereignty of the General Assembly. As the critiques of this failed effort are obvious to any observer and have been echoed, I will do as the GA should do and save my breath. The threat though, that is seeping down from this martian colony which seems to have crashed-landed onto the steps of the occupation, is that with enough persistence this alien(ating) language will reproduce itself as a template which is then adapted across the means of communication. Already the Tyranny of Time has crested; squandering the spontaneity of discussion and manufacturing a timetable that makes interaction feel a lot like Work. That for the most part these shifts are rejected can be seen as a general refusal of Work and should be encouraged by the increased creation of free spaces for belligerent pluralism—with coffee and smokes.

Circling the peripherals of the occupation looms the threat of state repression. No one at the site disputes this reality. What does seem confused is the perception people have of the police—and I don't mean the argument that 'the cops are of the 99%', but rather the notion that a police invasion is imminent. No doubt an attack is coming, but the recent histories of tent cities dispute the hunch that the invaders will be the police. The state agents that are now amassed wear numerous emblems and share the same oath as the cops but operate much more deviously. The firefighters, paramedics, welfare workers, city workers, and other badged citizens, with the police (and the military forces and secret services) operate as the Apparatus of the State, with a unified command, which has crystallized over the various tent cities, olympics, and riots. The policing operations under Empire are deployed as such an apparatus, which in turn must be fought by an assemblage of anti-imperial resistance.

Such assemblage is the constitutive force of the occupation. It can be seen as a barricade, whose qualities are active defense and a dispersal of struggle. So long as the occupation asserts its openness to circulation and movement-in-action and does not institutionalize itself with a constitution for its being, it will serve as a barricade in flux. It is when barricades come into contact with one another that we can speak of insurrection. Already, all around us, the barricades grow.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

This Building is Ours!

Chapel Hill Anarchists Occupy Downtown Building

by Anonymous

In the midst of the first general strike to hit the US since 1946, a group of comrades occupied a vacant building in downtown Oakland, CA, before being brutally evicted and attacked by cops, they taped up in the window a large banner declaring, "Occupy Everything..."

Last night, at about 8pm, a group of about 50-75 people occupied the 10,000 square foot Chrysler Building on the main street of downtown Chapel Hill. Notorious for having an owner who hates the city and has bad relations with the City Council, the giant building has sat empty for ten years. It is empty no longer.

Following the Carrboro Anarchist Bookfair, a group "in solidarity with occupations everywhere" marched to the building, amassing outside while banners reading "Occupy Everything" and "Capitalism left this building for DEAD, we brought it back to LIFE" were raised in the windows and lowered down the steep roof. Much of the crowd soon filed in through one of the garage door entrances to find a short film playing on the wall and dance music blasting.

People explored the gigantic building, and danced in the front room to images of comrades shattering the glass of bank windows 3,000 miles away in Oakland. Others continued to stay outside, shouting chants, giving speeches, and passing out hundreds of "Welcome" packets (complete with one among many possible future blueprints for the building—see below for text) to passersby. The text declared the initial occupation to be the work of "autonomous anti-capitalist occupiers," rather than Occupy Chapel Hill, but last evening's events have already drawn the involvement of many Occupy Chapel Hill participants, who are camped just several blocks down the street.

Soon several police showed up, perhaps confused and waiting for orders. Three briefly entered the building, and were met with chants of "ACAB!" Strangely, the cops seem to have been called off, because they left as quick as they came. For the rest of the night they were conspicuously absent, leaving us free to conduct a short assembly as to what to do with the space and how to hold it for the near future. The group also decided to move a nearby noise and experimental art show into the building. As some folks began to arrange the show, others began filtering across town seeking things we needed for the night.

Within 30 minutes of the assembly ending, trucks began returning with everything from wooden pallets, doors, water jugs, and a desk, to from Triarchy

a massive display case for an already growing distro and pots and trays of food donated by a nearby Indian restaurant. Others began spreading the word to the nearby Occupy Chapel Hill campsite, and bringing their camping gear into the building.

Over the next few hours more and more community members heard about the occupation and stopped by, some to bring food or other items, others just to soak it all in. All the while dozens of conversations were happening outside with people on the street. The show began eventually, and abrasive noise shook the walls of the building, interspersed with dance music and conversations, and ending with a beautiful a capella performance, and of course more dancing.

More events are to follow tomorrow in our new space, with two assemblies from the anarchist bookfair being moved to the new location, and a yoga teacher offering to teach a free class later in the afternoon.

As of the early hours this Sunday morning, the building remains in our hands, with a small black flag hanging over the front door. The first 48 hours will be extremely touch and go, but with a little luck, and a lot of public support, we aim to hold it in perpetuity. Regardless, we hope that this occupation can inspire others around the country. Strikes like the one in Oakland present one way forward; long term building occupations may present another.

Text from the "Welcome" Handout:

We would like to welcome you to an experiment.

For the past month and a half, thousands of people all over the US have been occupying public space in protest of economic inequality and hopelessness. This itself began as an experiment in a small park in New York City, though it did not emerge out of a vacuum: Occupy Wall St. "made sense" because of the rebels of Cairo, because of the indignados of Madrid and Barcelona and Athens. All of these rebellions were experiments in self-organization which emerged out of their own specific contexts, their own histories of struggle and revolution. Each was unique, but also united by the shared reality of the failure and decline of late global capitalism, and the futility of electoral politics.

Recently, this "Occupy" phenomenon has expanded beyond merely "providing a space for dialogue" to become a diverse movement actively seeking to shift the social terrain. From strikes and building occupations to marches and port blockades, this looks different in different places, as it should, but one thing is clear: many are no longer content with "speaking truth to power," for they understand that power does not listen.

Toward that end, we offer this building occupation as an experi-

ment, as a possible way forward. For decades, occupied buildings have been a foundation for social movements around the world. In places as diverse as Brazil, South Africa, Spain, Mexico, and Germany, just to mention a few, they offer free spaces for everything from health clinics and daycare to urban gardening, theaters, and radical libraries. They are reclaimed spaces, taken back from wealthy landowners or slumlords, offered to the community as liberated space.

All across the US thousands upon thousands of commercial and residential spaces sit empty while more and more people are forced to sleep in the streets, or driven deep into poverty while trying to pay rent that increases without end. Chapel Hill is no different: this building has sat empty for years, gathering dust and equity for a lazy landlord hundreds of miles away, while rents in our town skyrocket beyond any service workers' ability to pay them, while the homeless spend their nights in the cold, while gentrification makes profits for developers right up the street.

For these reasons, we see this occupation as a logical next step, both specific to the rent crisis in this city as well as generally for occupations nationwide. This is not an action orchestrated by Occupy Chapel Hill, but we invite any and all occupiers, workers, unemployed, or homeless folks to join us in figuring out what this space could be. We offer this "tour guide" merely as one possible blueprint among many, for the purpose of brainstorming the hundreds of uses to which such a building could be put, once freed from the stranglehold of rent.

In Love and Rage,
for liberty and equality,

some autonomous anti-capitalist occupiers

Santa Cruz, California

75 Hours in #75River

by Anonymous

Hopefully this group isn't representative of a new aggressive movement.

Zach Friend, SCPD Spokesman

The march was called only a few days before, billed on fliers as a march to picket banks and then to occupy a building (in some places it was a "foreclosed home," in other it was merely a "vacant property").

from Serf City Revolt

The day of the march, November 30th, people began gathering at 2pm near the Occupy Santa Cruz camp. By 2:45, when the march left, about 75 people had assembled. A mobile sound system arrived, playing, among other things, a lot of Lady Gaga. The march left towards Chase bank on Water and Ocean for a brief picket and speeches. The picket felt a bit tense, with a strong sense of anticipation for the announced occupation.

After the picket, the group moved back down Water, past the Occupy camp, and over the Water Street bridge. In the intersection of Water and River, the group paused. Then, instead of continuing down Water along the announced route, the group turned left on River. All of the sudden the doors of 75 River were open; people began elatedly yelling "We're in!" and a flier was distributed within the group to announce the new occupation.

Immediately, office furniture was re-purposed into barricades. A group of individuals had gained roof access from the outside and began hanging banners. One read: "Reclaim space. Reclaim Our Livès." The other: "Occupy Everything" (sic and *stiltick*). Soon, roof access was gained from the inside out to let these people down into the building. The building itself is fairly labyrinthine and people immediately began exploring. A group of people took over the vault to smoke a celebratory blunt while others opened up a candy machine, netting about 50 dollars in quarters. The majority of the group began organizing the space, putting up signs and moving in furniture.

One person was arrested for allegedly moving a traffic cone.

Hours later, at about 6:30, the police showed up in force. They immediately attempted to gain entry to the building, but were repelled at the barricades. Twenty or so people were inside with about 150 on the outside. The sound system from the march was still present, providing the soundtrack for the confrontation. People linked arms against the police, three or so lines deep. The cops fiddled with the barricade, trying to gain entry. They were unsuccessful. After much verbal harassment on the part of the protestors, the police left—nominally to protect against human harm. After this, the occupation took the form it would take every night for the next three nights: one part organizing, one part festival, and constant anxiety regarding a police attack. Shifts were organized to patrol the area for police, some making forays to areas that the police might be staging in. Organization and destruction of the space happened simultaneously, racing each other at about a dead heat.

The sound of traffic starting up again Thursday morning was the first sign that the occupation might have survived the night.

Thursday

The next day, which wasn't really demarcated from the previous day, started (continued?) with a clean up from the night before. Plans were

made mid-day for a social gathering that evening. The idea was to have a potluck with small group discussions, followed by dancing. What actually happened that night was a bit different. DJs started spinning at around ten with the dubstep scene out in full force. More blunts in the vault, more moderately destructive exploration of the space. A community-atmosphere prevailed, if only in a vague sense. A repeat sexual assaulter was ejected from the space. A favorite new activity was discovered: pretending to rob the bank. Groups of sometimes up to twenty people would play through different scenarios. Other individuals practiced jumping over the teller counters.

Late in the night, between 2 and 5am, the windows along River Street were barricaded with sheets of plywood nailed to each other, backed with pallets and filing cabinets. After the first altercation at the barricades, people were fairly confident that they could hold the barricades at the doors. So the emphasis shifted to the bottom floor windows and a contingency plan for an attack from the roof. Barring extreme measures by the police, occupiers felt confident they could hold the space. Those who didn't sleep at the space trickled out at around 5am, sure the space had survived another night. At least one occupier had work as soon as 8am.

Friday

Meetings were organized to clean the space ("keeping the space clean felt like carrying water with a sieve" one occupier offered). The entire space was re-organized. Shifts were drawn up for scouting and copwatch. Mid-evening, the property owner shut off power, plumbing, and gas to the building. A call-out for flashlights went out over Twitter. Later that night, a scare happened when cherry-pickers were seen assembled on Ocean Street, but it was later determined that they were there to repair power poles from the last few days of heavy wind. Occupiers slept soundly—the occupied bank had a feeling of home and, counter-intuitively, safety.

Saturday

At the mid-day meeting people decided, less than unanimously, that it was time to leave the bank. The decision was multi-faceted and a bit controversial. A fear that a small group of peripheral (or just plain not-involved) individuals were going to be blamed for the whole of the occupation was central to the discussion. The incompatibility of the space with people's desires for the space seemed to underpin much of the dissonance in the discussion.

Mid-evening, one last blunt was passed in the vault. A circle of twenty or so people who hadn't already left sat in a circle and shared their feelings about the end of the space. A Plains Indian who was present sung a song and shared a prayer. Then, little by little, folks trickled out. Leaving

wasn't at all climactic. Some people, upon leaving, would see others still within the building and go back in. By 9or so, everyone was out.

Uncontrollability

The old Coast Commercial bank at 75 River is a fucking beast. The vision of an orderly community center was completely at odds with the unmanageably large space. The same unmanageability was also one of the most beautiful attributes of the space. Almost immediately, every person in the space felt an ownership of the occupation. Every day, one could hear others calling their friends and referring to "our occupation" or "the bank that we took over." The sense of ownership over the space was contagious and took many forms, many of which were directly contradictory. Some felt the best thing to do was to hold meetings, some wanted to party, or to expropriate, or to vandalize. The root of many of the conflicts within the space was that everyone felt like the space was theirs to use as they wanted. Some people flipped out when others asked them not to smoke (cigarettes) in the main space, some flipped out when people didn't come to their meetings. An occasional individual showed amazing sangfroid amidst these conflicts.

Self-Management

An occupier activity that was fairly unpopular but overly vocal was the management of other occupiers' activities. Obviously, it would be sophomoric to call every conversation about the boundaries or shape of the space "management." Moreso, it was the tendency of some occupiers to loudly judge the activity of others in some vague moral terms of "rightness", "wrongness", or, worst of all, "down-ness." This sort of behavior peaked early and had disappeared almost entirely by Friday.

Vandalism

One occupier activity that was widely popular and loudly condemned was vandalizing the space. Many people didn't want their future community center vandalized. Other people had a quite natural reaction to a bank (the most common interface with the violence of capitalism)--the urge to fucking destroy it. If people ever chose to occupy a vacant prison, it would be a travesty if people didn't rip out all the bars and write slogans on the walls. Of course, in a nonviolent political sense, vandalism might be bad strategy. In a human sense, it is one of many beautiful reactions to the misery of the world. Also, it's fun.

Forward!

The significance of the occupation is mostly unclear and individual analyses are widely divergent. Everyone, though, wanted 75River to in-

spire occupations in other locations. Some participants never wanted to set foot inside an occupied space again, many wanted to re-occupy immediately. Differences like this shouldn't be seen as frustrating to future occupations. Future occupations, here and elsewhere, will depend on the autonomous actions of committed individuals.

Find a space. Find your friends. Do the damn thing.

Philadelphia has a long history of political counter-culture with a sizable anarchist incursion beginning in the eighties. Many anarchist group houses were turned into owned houses over the next decade. West Philly has a reputation for having a culture of coops and coffee shops that predates by years the entry of these things in other towns. Philly is still affordable and has an activist culture but doesn't have a tremendous national presence in the anarchist space. It does have a long-running paper (*The Defenestrator*), a long-running anarchist bookshop (The Wooden Shoe), and several anarchist spaces (the A-Space and LAVA).

The articles here include the first of several articles by Ben Webster from *Viewpoint* magazine, giving a great contextualization of the Occupy Philadelphia environment, a statement from the anarchists of Philadelphia to the General Assembly, and a declaration by Cindy Milstein (who we met in the history section), "We Are Our Own Demand."

Philadelphia

We are Anarchists

The following brief statement was read by a bunch of anarchists, with big smiles on their faces and a red & black flag in hand, at the general assembly (GA) on Thursday, October 13, 2011, at the occupation in Philly, using the "call and repeat" technique of the people's mic. Several anarchists—who like hundreds of other people of diverse political persuasions, have been participating in numerous wonderful ways in the do-it-ourselves Philly occupation—took the initiative to craft this statement. The words were motivated by an electronic firestorm of derogatory attacks against anarchists—including specific anarchists by name—that same day, largely initiated by one person who had admin privileges on the Occupy Philly Web site, Facebook page, and Twitter account, and basically booted off all the other admin people. Fortunately, both online and especially in person, the divide-and-conquer tactic not only failed but instead actually backfired. The vast majority of folks at the occupation stood solidly behind anarchists and solidly behind the direct democracy that we've created together; if anything, the assault seemed to bring people together a bit more, and many folks said it made them curious to learn more about anarchism! Still, many anarchists at the Philly occupation also felt the need to proudly, loudly, fabulously, and strongly offer a public statement that evening. Here's a text, culled from handwritten notes, so while it's not exactly what was said, it's a close approximation.

We are anarchists. We don't speak for anyone else, just ourselves.

You're right. We have an agenda:

- Freedom
- Solidarity
- Mutual aid
- Direct democracy

We're people just like you. We're parents, teachers, we walk your dog, we serve your coffee (etc).

We are not violent. In fact, we're critical of the most violent people here: the police.

The kind of divisive tactics of fearmongering that took place today through rumors will shut down what all of us are doing! Groups will be targeted as bad people versus good occupiers on the basis of ideology, race, and so on.

Anarchism is inherently against all forms of domination, so no, we're not hijacking the Occupy Philly movement.

We're here talking about and trying to practice what it means to be anti-racist, anti-sexist, pro-labor, queer friendly, anti-classist, anti-ableist, anti-ageist, and so on.

We're here with everyone else, practicing power-with not power-over.

And lastly, we really respect the directly democratic process. We use consensus-based decision making in many, if not all, of our own spaces and projects.

Who Threw the Can of Green Paint?

by Ben Webster

The First Two Weeks of Occupy Philadelphia

On the morning of October 14, one week into Occupy Philadelphia's encampment beside City Hall, someone emptied the contents of a paint can on the building's southwestern entrance. The unknown painter fled the scene, leaving behind a decidedly unsymbolic smear. Not of angry black or bloody red, but a smear of bland mint green. Police cordoned off the entrance, dismissing eager Occupy volunteers offering their assistance. A pressure cleaner quickly removed all traces of the deed.

This bizarre incident suggests much about Philadelphia's iteration of the Occupy phenomenon. Like other occupations, its porous boundaries integrate the protest site with the flows of the city. Participants, passers-by, police, and provocateurs move freely throughout, with the possibility of enriching or destabilizing the action; was our painter a police provocateur or a well-intentioned but strategically challenged participant? Both were considered in the aftermath.

This incident also suggests the ambiguity and contradiction in the political imagination of Occupy Philadelphia (OP). What constitutes meaningful action—a spectacular act of vandalism, the peaceful occupation of public property, or direct action on the horizon more confrontational and radical? There has been no shortage of activity—daily marches strike out to the usual targets—but as of yet no dramatic confrontations like those of Occupy Wall Street have occurred. This is the real significance of the green paint incident. That such a blatant act of vandalism against the seat of municipal power was shrugged off so quickly by occupiers and police alike indicates both the power and impotence of OP. On the one hand, there was no police advance under the pretext of this or any other number of small provocations—surely an index of our power. On the other hand, the incident is an index of the limited threat to capital's power

that OP poses, which is, as of yet, not enough to move the heavy hand of the state, a hand whose ruthless power has been amply shown in recent Philadelphia history, from the 1985 bombing of the MOVE house to the repression of protests against the 2000 Republican National Convention.

To use two familiar political concepts, Occupy Philadelphia is at once animated by both the spirit of the commons and of the strike. I do not wish to argue for the primacy of either approach or assert their incompatibility, but rather to frame the young history of OP as a state of tension between these two poles. As a participant in the occupation, I hope to describe from both experience and analysis the distinct character of the Occupy X movement in post-industrial, working-class Philadelphia, and its significance for the contemporary class struggle.

Fighting City Hall

Occupy Philadelphia feels like a march, a strike, a commune, and a carnival. This variety of forms derives from the peculiarity of the tactic. One can participate in OP just by moving ordinary human activities—like sleeping, eating, socializing—to the occupation site. But “extraordinary” human activities—demonstrations, assemblies, teach-ins, movie screenings—have taken place there as well, creating a charged but uneven topography. The personal and the political do not yet coincide here, but they rub shoulders. A reading group on Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James's *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* next to campers drying their soggy socks on a clothes line; a college dude testing out pickup lines in earshot of the people of color caucus.

Philly's unique Occupy identity has developed in large part due to a détente with the city and its police. Over one thousand people attended a raucous planning meeting two days before the occupation's inauguration, a sizable show of force well covered by the local press. Of the two options available to the Philadelphia police—massive and very public repression or tacit cooperation—they opted for the latter. At 9am on October 6, hundreds assembled on the west side of City Hall and began constructing an encampment with relatively little interference. Although police are stationed visibly around the occupation and conduct walk-throughs both uniformed and plain-clothed, so far they've acted with restraint.

Activity in violation of city codes, including the construction of pallet structures for the homeless, has been permitted, emboldening some occupiers but creating an acrimonious internal debate. The hands-off approach thus far by the police confirms the liberal naiveté of some who, using the movement's vocabulary, identify the police and city brass as part of “the 99%,” and therefore our allies. Indeed, Mayor Michael Nutter and Chief of Police Charles Ramsey made very public, very genial appear-

ances at OP in its first days. Others, from political acumen or personal experience, view the city's overtures with skepticism or overt antagonism. This debate came to a head with the early question posed to the general assembly of acquiring a permit, and has persisted to current discussions on how to respond to the city's evolving position. The GA voted for a permit after much discussion. Although unprecedented in modern Philadelphia history for the liberties and exemptions it grants to the occupation, the permit does bind OP in a legalistic stasis—official, even granted a welcome by the powers that be, but neutered of antagonism. To the outlaw, relations of power are crystal clear.

This Philly compromise distinguishes OP from its Occupy Wall Street (OWS) template. Freed from both the glare of the international media and the menace of overt police activity, OP turns inward. Freedom from repression in a far larger physical space than OWS offers opportunities to strengthen our position but also deepens the contradictions latent within the Occupy movement. And although the police aren't yet using pepper-spray and batons as they have against our New York comrades, this doesn't indicate a lack of police tactics to crush OP. Two strategies must be anticipated from our enemies in City Hall. One, the strategy of patience, in which the police bide their time and wait for either winter weather or the "tragedy of the commons" to disperse OP. Two, the exploitation of incidents of non-passivity at OP-associated direct actions to crack down on the encampment. Both approaches can be anticipated, and, with proper foresight, made to backfire as the attempts at repression in New York have.

Strike and Commons

Philadelphia City Hall is monumental, the symbolic and geographical center of a battered but tenacious city. It is the second-tallest masonry building in the world, and in its heyday was a wonder of architectural achievement. The city's two subway lines intersect underneath it, sending continuous rumblings up to its cold stone plazas. Along its west side is Dilworth Plaza, a two block long concrete plaza cast in the austere style of 60s urban renewal. It is the habitual dwelling of a large homeless population, and is scheduled to be handed over shortly to a private development group for the building of a cafe, skating rink, and conceptual fountains. In autumn, the plaza is perpetually in the shadow of City Hall and the surrounding office buildings, and whipped by intense winds.

OP has adapted many organizational features of the Occupy movement. The general assembly, which meets daily at 7pm, is the primary forum for communication and decision-making. Working groups assure the daily reproduction of the occupation (food, medic, education, safety, facilitation, etc.) and its strategic thrust (direct action, media, messaging,

etc.). Over 300 tents have been erected across Dilworth Plaza, populated by various "tribes" of the political and non-political ("do you go to the general assembly?"), young and old, white and black, counter-cultural and normies. Things are typically quiet before noon, and afterwards through the evening swell with part-time participants who sleep at home, curiosity-seekers, representatives of various political organizations, cops, passers-by, and the media. OP benefits greatly from its location literally on top of the city's busiest transit hub. High school students and commuters contribute to its open vitality; there is strength in numbers, even if they are anonymous and temporary. Despite its proximity to Philadelphia's central business district, OP does not have the belly-of-the-beast feel of OWS; this is not a global city, and a proletarian mien contaminates even those quarters fashioned in the mold of neoliberal finance capital.

OP, like its peers, strives for horizontal organization—ideally all participants have an equal right to determine the course of the occupation. The space created at OP for experimentation in egalitarian decision-making should be applauded; the proliferation of such spaces is essential for the project of proletarian autonomy. However, since thus far participation in decision-making and execution is encouraged but not compulsory, I would suggest that in practice, power at OP is functioning along the lines of a kind of primitive syndicalism. Proposals submitted for approval at the general assembly must first pass through a daily co-committee meeting ("co-co"), composed of representatives of the various working groups. In effect, access to power at OP is streamlined by participation in a working group; in the micro-society of OP, the workers in the working groups that constitute its infrastructure constitute its sovereign power. Is this a positive model to acknowledge and propagate, or a model that will tend to produce a division among occupiers between more active participants and those who participate by simply showing up and remaining in the encampment? It should be noted that groups such as caucuses of anarchists and people of color, by dint of their organizational capacity or moral power, readily move to the center of OP's sovereign power at parity with the working groups. The ambiguity of the situation lies in the question of access to power: should this be determined by capacity for organization or objective position within existing social hierarchies? How can the reproduction of these hierarchies be actively combated within the occupations?

Confusion, overlap, and frustration are tolerated out of necessity at OP by the proliferating working groups. Good faith and movement momentum—for the time—paper over the considerable challenges of constituting a micro-society from a milieu of strangers with varying experiences and backgrounds, excepting the occasional raised voices and scuffles.

How long can the momentum last? OP has passed through three overlapping stages: spectacle, organization, and critique/action. In the early

days in which spectacle dominated, everyone seemed to be filming everyone else with cellphone cameras, and the media swarmed over it all. When people gathered on the morning of October 6, they seemed uncertain what to do, which protest rituals to follow—who do I show my sign to? Is this a rally, a sit-in, or what? Who'll be the first to set up their tent and where? The proliferation of image production coincided with a nervous amorphous mass, only vaguely aware of its commonality and power.

In the second stage, organization, the encampment's infrastructure was established. With the formation of working groups and procedures for communication and decision-making, the potential of the mass was harnessed. Dilworth Plaza was spatially delineated and mapped. Subgroups such as the people of color caucus and the wheelchair-dependent self-organized to identify and correct patterns of exclusion. Brief struggles for control of media and outreach efforts finally expelled a narcissistic individual who treated OP's Facebook page as a personal fiefdom. Internal organization is an ongoing process involving considerable experimentation, but the day to day reproduction of OP is secured for now, clearing the way for a deepening focus on critique and action.

In this current stage of critique and action, the conceptual parameters of commons and strike assume their power. Two questions, of demands and of acceptable direct action, predominate. It is widely accepted that OP can only maintain its momentum with a constant schedule of marches, teach-ins, and speakers. In this laboratory of praxis, in which the tactic of maintaining the occupation and the proliferation of collective critique are mutually reinforcing, the only thing lacking is a catalyst of true resistance. Marches have set out from OP to harass banks, visit predatory student loan sharks, tour shitty hospitals, and, arguably most successfully, chase Eric Cantor from a speaking engagement at the University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia PD dutifully block off intersections and escort the marchers to their target and back to the occupation. OP now ironically possesses the power to march unobstructed anywhere in the city it chooses, but seems to be running out of symbolically potent destinations. All dressed up with nowhere to go, obscure political differences take on a new importance. What if the police are our enemies precisely by acting like our most obliging friends? If the "1%" can so easily neutralize our efforts, why will they bother listening to our demands?

OP recasts Dilworth Plaza as a commons, shifting it from a nominally public space to an actively common one, collectively owned by those who rule to the extent that they actively participate. It is a space striving towards decommodification, where human relationships have more value than the exchange of money. Yet it also bears a resemblance to a strike, a collective suspension of normal activity leading to a confrontational moment of decision. As the weather turns, the quotidian quality of OP tends

towards the grim resolve of a picket line in the dead of winter. The two forms are not mutually exclusive; every commons must be defended, and every strike relies on a shared territory of experience, spatial or otherwise. The tendencies towards commons or strike do not neatly coincide with reformist or revolutionary perspectives. Yet the intersection of the forms makes for an unhappy tension, unable to develop with confidence in either direction. To expand and deepen the commons would be to hit too deeply and radically at the relations of private property and social reproduction for some participants. To adopt the antagonistic solidarity of the strike would be to abandon all pretenses of cooperation with the state and its agents, unacceptable for some. The project of OP, and the Occupy movement more broadly, is to synthesize the commons and the strike in a form appropriate to current relations of power and production.

Recomposition

Proletarian combativeness in Philadelphia, the site of many proud clashes in the history of American class struggle, still exists, evidenced by a variety of expressions ranging from the victorious PASNAP [Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals—ed.] strike at Temple Hospital in 2010 to the auto-reduction action organized by teens at a local Sears store this past summer. OP is potentially a site of encounter and recomposition for a metropolitan working class changed by decades of deindustrialization, a swelling population of recent immigrants, and the combative youth subcultures of the flash mob and debt-ridden college grad variety. Although the process remains vague and preliminary, the occupation movement in Philly is a promising indicator of the working class's political recomposition.

Two of the largest populations in the OP encampment are the long-term homeless and the college student milieu. That they sleep willingly side by side for weeks at a time speaks to the novelty of the Occupy movement. The close, extended contact of occupiers tends to cut through prejudice and ideological mystification, even though the egalitarian ideal of the movement remains distant. Individuals and groups who may never have otherwise encountered each other in the huge city now find themselves sharing both an economic critique and a tent. Should a major work stoppage occur in the city soon—both the Verizon negotiations and a number of public sector contract negotiations remain unsettled—an encounter on a far larger scale is possible. The city's major unions have issued statements of support for the occupation, but a material mingling has the potential to change the constitution of both movements for the better and expand momentum beyond the focal encampment. OP, however, may in the long run be a better producer of subjectivities than of concrete demands, and this would not be a fault.

An important subjectivity crystallizing in the Occupy movement is similar to the driving force behind the global originators of the occupation concept in Spain, Egypt, and Tunisia: young, educated, and downwardly mobile workers. Many recent graduates or dropouts of local universities like Temple and the University of Pennsylvania provide a motive force behind OP's working groups, experiencing a mode of collective struggle quite different from managed, predictable, campus "activism." As comrades in California noted during the university occupations there in fall 2009, the practice of occupying tends to dissolve outdated distinctions like that between "workers" and "students." A tantalizing possibility begging more research is the connection between OP's site above a transit hub, and the highly mobile nature of this sector, moving around the city at odd hours between multiple part-time jobs, casual work, and classes. Earlier cycles of struggles in Philly, from the post-New Left Movement for a New Society in the 1970s to the clashes at the 2000 RNC, bequeathed long-lasting infrastructures of radical institutions and experience. Will OP be the coming-out party for a new cycle or just a flash in the pan?

Think Locally?

OP clearly owes its inspiration to Occupy Wall Street, encamped just two hours up the New Jersey Turnpike. The proximity of the two cities allowed many Philly organizers to visit OWS before launching OP, taking note of its organizational model and learning from its miscues. As one of the largest occupations in the country as of yet spared overt police repression, OP is both a significant model for the national movement and something of an aberration. Among occupiers, the relationship of OP to the movement remains uncertain, bespeaking a larger ambiguity towards the global, national, and local contexts of the crisis. Material efforts have been made to share resources with OWS, and solidarity actions with comrades attacked by police in Oakland and Atlanta are under discussion.

The political imaginary of OP remains largely stuck at the national level. Rhetoric of the 99%, Wall Street, and corporate taxes implicitly locates the current social and economic crises within national borders. Yet these crises have international causes and implications, and resistance in the form of occupations has likewise been a global phenomenon. As the calls for unified Occupy X demands increases, a real danger exists both in ignoring the global character of capital and our struggles, and in failing to connect Occupy's critiques with local conditions and local grievances.

A faction within OP seized an early opportunity to advance long-standing local grievances and make demands of the city. After receiving a letter from the city government which made several demands of OP (dismantle fire hazards, control open urination, etc.), they refused a paternalistic relationship and in turn advanced several demands at the GA that OP should

make in response. One of these included a repeal of Philadelphia's racist youth curfew law. Conveniently up for a vote of extension steps away in City Hall, the law was initially passed to kill off the flash mobs that once rocked the city. Fighting a law that intentionally seeks to fracture, discipline, and manage specific layers of the working class would go a long way to reconnecting with those sectors that are still underrepresented at OP.

This general effort was accompanied by distribution of an excellent summary of recent local struggles, entitled "The Mayor and Police Are not Our Friends!" Spearheaded largely by anarchists (who have been the convenient targets of an ongoing red-baiting campaign), this effort has brilliantly changed the inflection of OP, focusing attention on local communities already in struggle. A predictable backlash followed, with many claiming that linking the occupation with struggles around the curfew and police brutality diluted our message and weakened public support.

This backlash escalated when fifteen occupiers were arrested in front of Philadelphia PD headquarters on the national October 22 day of protest against police brutality. Although the efficacy of their non-violent civil disobedience tactics is debatable (all blocked a street overnight, refusing repeated police orders to disperse), the reality of police brutality in Philly is not. The first arrests of OP were denounced by many who sought to distance the activities at City Hall from those which, pushed outward by the occupation's momentum, occurred elsewhere in the city. Should this failure of solidarity and centrifugal political imagination continue, OP will likely die a wintry death shivering in the shadows of Center City.

The October 22 arrests and the emergence of a new ultimatum from the city throw the future of OP into question. After granting an open-ended permit to the occupation, with no stated end date, the city announced November 15 as the first day of the renovation of Dilworth Plaza. This renovation includes the total reconstruction of the plaza by a private company bearing a 30-year lease, which will install an ice-skating rink and chic cafe, obviously inspired by Manhattan tourist geographies. Of course, the renovation will entail fencing off the plaza, expelling not only the occupation, but also the homeless who use it as a long-term home. So the date has been set for confrontation. Whether the city backs down, OP relocates, or is forcibly expelled, is uncertain. How OP decides to act against this threat will be a major indicator of the movement's resolve and potential.

A far larger challenge, however, is the winter weather. The last two Philadelphia winters have been among the harshest on record. Simply put, OP cannot withstand a northeastern winter at its current size, and should not try to. Discouraged dispersion when the temperature dips is the worst possible outcome, and providing a spectacle of personal suffering to the media through it all is a terrible tactic. Occupations have captured the imagination of the world, but fetishizing the tactic is a strategic blunder.

The only limit to continuing and growing this nascent movement is our imagination. Our conversations and GAs must move, and quickly, to the discussion of new tactics—occupying abandoned buildings (of no short supply in Philly), subversive organizing in our schools and workplaces, strengthening of the local struggles our anarchist comrades have drawn attention to—action, education, and theorizing without a central encampment if need be. GAs can continue indoors, marches and direct action can expand throughout the city, and of course hardcore occupiers can continue outside if they wish. This strategic retreat is actually an advance across the entirety of the social terrain—but one that will require defying the logic of media representation and the spectacle of contemporary politics.

In one form or the other, we can be optimistic that Occupy Philadelphia will inspire a winter of discontent in the City of Brotherly Love. Come spring, we can reoccupy not only Dilworth Plaza, but Rittenhouse Square, Love Park, Franklin Parkway, and—why not—Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, too.

We Are Our Own Demand

by Cindy Milstein

Occupation in Philly, Day 16 (October 21)

Over the past few days, numerous people from across the political spectrum, at this and other occupations, have basically told me the same thing: “I’m feeling more alive than I have in years.” They nearly all remarked that they became disillusioned with politics at some point and stopped doing much of anything. They “disappeared” into private life, zoning out, often grappling with depression and/or isolation, becoming cranky, or misdirecting their anger toward friends. Or, alternatively, they had never done much of anything political at all; they had never cared one whit about politics. In every case, each person’s story of becoming reengaged had nothing to do with the messages, slogans, protests, or marches of this occupation movement; instead, it had everything to do with moments of self-activity with others. And maybe even more striking to me is that among those long experienced in collective projects and processes, the reawakening seems especially strong, as if they’d forgotten or almost never really believed in the power of their own ideals.

Right after Mubarak stepped down in Egypt, after a mere eighteen days of people building their own city in a square—a city within a city—I wrote a piece called “Waking to Revolution” for a collaboration picture-essay book project I’m working on with Erik Ruess. A few of the lines seem to fit here:

I’ve long believed that self-organization works—better than any other form.

That people, all of us, can and want to self-determine.

That we can and want to self-govern, guided by dignity and even love.

But what I realized that morning was, deep down,

I had also come not to believe it.

Since utopian notions are negated by almost everything today,

I had unconsciously lost that trust.

The uprising began with a surprise.

As if from nowhere, overnight, people discovered their collective strength.

A euphoric self-confidence took hold.

This jolted other people—like me—to recall that possibility begets possibility.

There is something wholly different here in this “occupy everything, together” experience, which began with the surprise of Occupy Wall Street and its near-contentless, carnivalesque spectacle. The lack of a message or coherent messages, and/or sheer volume of utterly-contradictory messages, along with the relatively vacuous and even problematic “occupy” and especially “99%” slogans, and the often-absurd hodgepodge of political (and sometimes nonpolitical) participants coupled with a widespread newness to politics and way-too-friendly attitude toward police all appeared antithetical to a movement, much less one with demands, dreams, or solutions. And as usual, those with massive platforms to shape public discourse toss out the annoying and predictable “But what do they want?” This, in turn, has thrown some occupiers into a frenzy of wanting or needing to find “the message”—so far to little avail. Frequently, those who want to hammer out a message most are those who are used to either trying to control circumstances (these seem to be few in number, since at least in Philly, most efforts at containing this chaotic encampment meet with kind resistance), or those who are used to bringing their ideologies, party or organizational line, or ethical imperatives to bear on every situation or movement. This includes those of us who identify, as I do, as anarchists, and in many cities, anarchists were either latecomers because of this (tossing out the standard dis, “They’re just liberals”) or are largely uninterested in the occupations, because they aren’t leading with a distinctly radical (or distinctly anything) politics.

I admit to being just as skeptical, just as perplexed, and indeed just as thrown off guard by Occupy Wall Street and the rolling waves of occupa-

tions soon after. But from the first minute I stepped foot on that plaza a couple blocks from the actual Wall Street, what oddly compelled me was that I didn't get it. No one there seemed to get it. I asked person after person why they were there, why they had come, and most could only find the vaguest of words—an intuition, something just brought them, they simply decided to check it out. This isn't the stuff of grand revolutions, much less movements. I guess I'm so used to leading with ideas, with aspirations, as part of the politics I do with others, that I couldn't see—nor seemingly, could the occupiers understand it either—why the hell people were occupying, were sleeping on concrete, through rain, without tents. This occupy everything business, that seems to be everyone and anyone's business, has humbled me; has changed the way I understand social transformation to happen, by and with whom, and from what demands or principles. No manifesto here—and thank goodness; just messiness, misfits, and mayhem, and out of it all a meaning of such depth that, well, I continue to marvel at it, even if it still seems so schizophrenic and fragile.

Two and even three years ago, a relatively small band of anarchist insurrection, too, wanted to occupy everything and “demand nothing,” but their lack of demands emerged out of a critique of hierarchy in general and capitalism in particular; we won't ask power-from-above to give us anything, whether demands or what we choose to occupy; we'll occupy spaces, sans permission, and sans demands, we'll negate everything, and see what people fill these spaces with; find your friends; build your commune; communize!

But the anarchist insurrectionists had it wrong, much as I also hold to a critique of hierarchy and capitalism, and much as I think “anarchism” as a way to describe a new form of social organization based on nonhierarchical relations and structures is right. It wasn't about finding your like-minded friends and building a commune with them from a particular critique. It is, it seems, about being tossed together willy-nilly with all manner of folks, most of whom don't have a critique of hierarchy or capitalism, on a corporate-owned plaza (with the owner's permission!) or, in Philly's case, a municipal plaza (with the city begging us to accept its permit!). Within this panoply of people, there are tales galore of hardship, loss, suffering, oppression, and underlying them all is a sense of being utterly alone and powerless, like the walking dead, unseen and unheard and unacknowledged.

Lately, as I noted above, the story I keep hearing, again and again, isn't one of loss. It's one of what we've found: “I feel alive for the first time in years.” Or more poignantly, “I feel alive for the first time ever.” Each tale begins with the experience of participating in a general assembly or a working group for the first time. It isn't always a picture-perfect experience. Invariably, though, the narratives involve a tumble of words—

far more articulate, animated, and inspiring than those used to convey that same person's “message” or “demand”—describing that moment of awakening, that instance of qualitative engagement in shaping, building, indeed constituting this do-it-ourselves encampment roughly stitched together like some crazy quilt of humanity with things like cardboard, tarps, pallets, duct tape, and string. It's the intense aliveness that seems to be demanding the impossible, more than any revolutionary ever could.

Without anyone putting it into words, or crafting something like a sound bite, status update, or slogan, our occupations have birthed what no one saw coming, in all its rich potential: our doing is our demand; our demand is in the doing. We've constituted this space of possibility out of necessity. Suddenly, many diverse and seemingly mismatched people are stuck together, for better and worse, to wait out the pundits, politicians, and police, or even more mundane, without quite knowing why, to wait. Because things have gotten so untenable, so unlivable, for so many of us—in our varied, differentiated ways—that waiting somehow seems preferable to standing still in the deadness of this present historical moment. But we didn't wait. We couldn't. We needed food, shelter, a sense of safety, fun, media, spaces for kids, art, education, health care—everything we increasingly need and can't get in the world as it is. We had to self-organize in this commons that we found ourselves in, and we had to suddenly start negotiating a way forward, together, almost without a shared “forward” in mind. A critique, a vision, messages, principles, and maybe even forethought and aims—much as this goes against all I believe—all would have offered the same deadness and disempowerment of daily life. The fact that we are collectively discovering how to birth possibilities, with an openness forced on us all by our differences, coupled with a strange “waiting for Godot” air about the occupations, perhaps has allowed for an experimentation that no one could have predicted. That can't fit on a banner or a leftover-pizza-box sign or Facebook page.

People, inside and outside our occupations, keep repeating that we don't have anything unifying us, that we don't have a message. But we're living our message—the forms of living life that we're daily expanding, daily deciding for ourselves, are pointing beyond capitalism, beyond states, beyond hierarchy, even if most people still have no language for that. Words—and again, this too goes against what I believe—almost don't matter. It's how we're behaving, together and toward each other. Badly at times. With much difficulty. Stumbling and hurting and falling over each other. But also good at many other times. With many successes and innovations, supporting and caring for and sticking by each other.

This evening, a bunch of well-heeled, smug, condescending elites gathered in City Hall to show a fancy PowerPoint presentation of a \$50 million renovation of the very plaza that we're occupying—a symbolic

slap in the face to most Philly residents. We weren't supposed to be there, but we crashed the party. A whole bunch of us. More of us than them. They talked about how they were dramatically enhancing the city center with this hefty price-tag of a privatized public-space project, with things like a cafe, free movies, and architecture that—by law—had to contrast with the historic structure of City Hall. Right where their cafe is supposed to go now sits our food tents, providing three meals a day and snacks for free to hundreds of people, including many without homes. We air free movies, and sometimes two at a time, many nights. And our architecture of encampment is a beautiful contrast to City Hall! One after another, occupiers spoke with eloquence—frequently, I suspect, a newfound eloquence, from the practice we're getting in our general assembly—about all the absurdities of this project, especially its many-million-dollar fountain with lights and smoke—the smoke and mirrors of capital gone mad.

We then trooped outside, past security guards and police and barriers, walking back around to our side of City Hall plaza, to join our fellow assortment of occupiers for our evening's general assembly, already in progress, and this night, it felt like an exuberant celebration of our self-empowerment, our bringing this space, this place, and ourselves to life.

There's no better demand! And no better way of us demanding the impossible than doing what seemed impossible a little over two weeks ago at this occupation in Philly: "That we can and want to self-govern, guided by dignity and even love."

Denver has a recently active anarchist community with a multi-use space (27 Social Centre), a very active Anarchist Black Cross (a prisoner support group), and a street medic group. The articles selected include one from the *Ignite!* newspaper (a monthly anarchist paper from Denver) on the origins of the local Occupy, another article from the local Indymedia about the police violence that occurred during the eviction of the occupation, and finally an article from the Denver ABC explaining why they can no longer support the local Occupy. This explains why the Occupy Movement has been so complicated and exhilarating for anarchists everywhere.

Denver

#OccupyWallStreet Begets #OccupyDenver

by Ignitel Collective

The reports from New York City are exciting. A loosely organized coalition of leftists, hackers, and anti-capitalists calling themselves the "99ers" have literally occupied parts of the financial district, the heart of globalized capitalism. The protest has been going for days at the time of this writing.

More than a hundred arrests have been reported and police used mace during scuffles. Many of the demonstrators are participating in a mass action for the first time, and evidently were caught off guard by the standardized brutality of crowd control police. The hivemind hacker collective Anonymous identified a police officer that dispensed mace on a peaceful crowd as Anthony Bologna, an officer who was named in a wrongful arrest lawsuit after the 2004 RNC demonstrations. Many participants are lamenting a block in communications from Twitter, which is keeping the hashtags #occupywallstreet, #takewallstreet and others from "trending."

The protest has spawned numerous solidarity demonstrations in other cities, including Chicago, Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, Tulsa, and now it has spread to Denver. Protesters have gathered in front of the capitol building since Saturday the 24th, although so far a camp has not been set up. Largely due to concerns that a "peaceful" climate from the police would change once demonstrators violated Denver's city code for sleeping outdoors, the protest has so far not emulated other cities' examples of an occupation.

According to information sent to Ignitel's twitter feed on the 24th, nearly forty protesters showed up on Saturday. A general assembly was due to be held on Tuesday the 27th at 7pm.

Online proponents of the protest claiming to be on the ground stated that more people need to show up and that donations are appreciated. We will bring more coverage of the protest as we hear news. Be sure to follow us on twitter @ignite_denver.

Eyewitness Testimony from Police Aggression in Denver (Oct 29th)

by anonymous

What REALLY Happened:

Much of what has been said and written about the police crack down of Saturday night has been speculation, misinterpretation, patently false, and/or abject lies. For this reason I offer this first hand account of the initial escalation at the park. It should be said that I do not identify as a member of Occupy Denver, nor do I agree with many of its goals, nor its constant self policing and paranoia. I am merely an individual who resides in and loves the city of Denver, a city slipping rapidly into a police state, home of the most brutal police force in the states, who regularly murder and assault members of this community, yet who are so actively and shamelessly welcomed into Occupy Denver's "99%". I do not strictly agree with or adhere to an explicitly nonviolent philosophy, but I am well versed in its principles. To stand by passively and watch one's friends or community members be brutalized by a pile of state sanctioned maniacs without intervening is not nonviolent. Nor is it violent to attempt to stop such an assault by physically restraining the attacking cop for long enough for the victim to get out of harm's way. And all over a few tents. You've referred to us as violent, as provocateurs, and as agent plants for getting beat up trying to get one another out of the police melee. We've been apologized for and called "marginal at best," simply for dreaming of holding our ground in a public space against a fascist state apparatus. Everyone has their own perspective, their own experience, and their own version of what went down that afternoon; this one is mine.

As a witness in the thick of the initial onslaught, what happened was this (this is how things got crazy, and got crazy fast): after an invigorating march through the streets of downtown Denver, during which some took the opportunity to throw a kickass roving dance party, the crowd of over one thousand arrived at the capitol building feeling empowered. Many groups of marchers argued over slogans viewed by some as overly inflammatory, gradually the crowd lost steam, and occupying the capitol steps seemed less and less important as riot cops flooded the scene heavily armed with high powered rifles. Some danced their way down the steps, across the street, and back into the park. After standing around for some time, wondering what comes next, some took the initiative to set up tents on the lawn, the temporary structures having been a potent point of symbolic contention during the weeks-long "occupation".

Moments into the setting up of tents, a mass of over a dozen riot cops,

led by a uniformed officer named Henning, approached a young woman dressed in all black setting up a tent. Henning grabbed one end of the tent and pulled, but at the other end of the tent the woman's wrist became entangled with a tent strap, unable to let go. Henning viewed this as resistance and quickly tackled the woman. Henning and at least two riot cops began applying pain compliance holds and beating the woman with clubs, Henning eventually wrapping a tent around the woman's head and wrenching back on it. At this point, an individual who appeared to share deep affinity with this woman dove through a line of riot cops and tackled one of the attacking officers in a clear attempt to stop the relentless assault. The intervening individual was maced and beaten, but appeared to have narrowly evaded arrest.

Several people attempted to get this woman out of harm's way, at which point Henning and other officers began to brutalize her more intensely. The crowd was outraged, and at least one other person was on the ground undergoing similar abuse, and the situation continued to escalate. At this point, the DPD unloaded countless clips of rubber bullets and/or pepper spray bullets, and cans of mace into the crowd of shocked onlookers. A few people acted upon an understandable reflex to defend themselves—albeit mildly—but most concentrated on getting themselves and others out of the line of fire of the rampaging police. Several people were shot in the face with rubber bullets and/or pepper bullets, dozens were maced, one man attempting to video was shot out of a tree, one had his feet or ankles run over by a motorcycle cop while being treated by a medic, and several were restrained and arrested.

All of these individuals were rejected by Occupy Denver as violent provocateurs. At this point, perhaps an hour into the initial police drive, the observer had been maced several times and clubbed, and was unable to continue observation. Most of those rejected by the movement in Denver are pooled into the box of the poorly understood label of "anarchist" by a confused and privileged few, who at the same time actively perpetuate a movement originally catalyzed by anarchists, and who unconsciously (attempt to) employ organizational methods like consensus that could, to some degree, be accurately labeled as "anarchist".

Despite this, in Denver, anarchists have unwillingly taken on the role of scapegoat, while simultaneously providing the only legal support infrastructure for Occupy Denver arrestees to date. I remain unamused in the face of such irony. Crack downs of this variety are occurring from coast to coast, yet in Denver some manage to still view these assaults as a result of provocation, rather than clear and unprovoked aggression of the state.

Police continually crack down against an unruly population which is actively claiming and defining its own rights, rather than acquiescing to those few rights awarded to us for staying in line amid the exploitation of

our everyday lives. Many of us fail to see these instances of state aggression as the acts of war they are. This economic depression is not merely a product of greed; it is a worldwide systemic failure. The state understands this, and has been mobilizing its troops. This is not just paranoid rhetoric; political discourse for security (not what they show you on the news, but the academic papers they read and write) has revolved around the transformation of police units into an urban warfare-ready outfit for at least the last decade. One day, this broad scale collapse will affect Denver as much as it affects most other post-industrial cities, beyond just the price of a gallon of gas. Sooner or later, the fall of this economic paradigm will reach a critical point of public outrage, and when it does, we'll take the streets and we'll keep them. Perhaps it already has. The state is preparing for Civil War, each escalation on their part is further preparation, though what they fail to realize is than in their preparations, they will only trigger the very thing they anticipate. These are the seeds of insurrection. Very few people actually want to be engaged in this kind of conflict, in all honesty this level of police violence is horrifying. What we have to understand, however, is that if we succeed in threatening real systemic change to any extent, they'll come for us again, harder and harder every time. Who of us will be around until victory?

Denver ABC Statement on Occupy Denver

by Denver ABC

Over the past few months, Denver ABC has devoted a tremendous amount of resources and energy to Occupy Denver. Our collective has staffed a 24/7 legal line, coordinated the bailing out of almost one hundred demonstrators arrested over the last two months, and been onsite CopWatch and Street Medics. We've made an earnest and largely successful effort to get supporters into the courtrooms for nearly every hearing and court appearance featuring our arrested comrades. All this has been juggled with attending the weekly marches and adding our spirit to the marches and General Assemblies as one portion of the 99%.

As of December 4, our collective has decided to no longer support Occupy Denver. This means we will not be providing our legal line for Occupy actions; fundraising for the movement; encouraging our members, friends and allies to get involved; or serving roles such as CopWatch and Medics. This is in solidarity and coordination with other ally formations such as West Denver CopWatch and the Colorado Street Medics.

We want to be clear that our decision is not based on a generalized absolute rejection of everyone involved in Occupy Denver. We are grateful for many relationships of solidarity that we have made through our work with OD and are confident those relationships will continue to blossom. Our commitments to the OD arrestees that we have been supporting still remain as well.

Our decision is based on festering frustrations with a small sector of OD who continue to marginalize, silence, and threaten our communities and ally communities. Despite the hard work of many involved in OD, its political platform continues to be framed by and for economically privileged, hyper-nationalist white heterosexual males. Experiences of race, gender, class, nationality, immigration status, and a multitude of other identities continue to be buried underneath the dominant "We are the 99%" narrative.

Attempts to dislodge the monopolizing of space in OD have been consistently met with threats, slander, snitch-jacketing, and other tactics of intimidation. From the start, despite our un-flinching support, our collective and other allies have been called everything from agent provocateurs to femi-nazis to pedophiles. The culminating event for us took place during a recent march. A collective member spoke up during an open mic time to challenge the assumption of a unified "99%" by bringing attention to the marginalization of reproductive rights taking place at the same time open racism was being accepted in the crowd. The response of We Are Change was to instigate a chant that drowned out the only woman to speak at the open mic and insinuate she was a CIA agent. As a collective committed to grassroots organizing in Denver and reminded daily of the horrors of the FBI's COINTEL Program through our support of political prisoners, we cannot take such behavior lightly.

On top of the concerns listed above, our work with OD has been a tremendous resource drain. Exacerbating this has been a recent wave of arrestees failing to appear in court, essentially hemorrhaging the tremendous amount of fundraising that has taken place and putting our collective in a precarious financial state. After much difficult reflection we came to the realization that we can and must use our limited resources in more radical, effective ways.

There is a lot about the Occupy movement that we find inspiring. The Oakland General Strike had many of us smiling for days. In New York, peo-

ple are taking over foreclosed houses, resisting evictions and defending them from police aggression. In DC, a house was built in a park and fought for. Chapel Hill, Seattle, and Santa Cruz saw temporary autonomous zones established within long-abandoned structures. We hope that our decision is able to open up more room to support movements we are proud of, such as these.

In revolutionary spirit, the Denver Anarchist Black Cross

Below is breakdown of our legal support fund

Funds received: \$16,531

Funds used:

- Bonds - \$14,210
- Jail Phone Fund - \$1660
- Food/supplies for released arrestees, legal line - \$237
- Commissary for long term arrestees - \$315
- Total - \$16512
- Remainder: +\$19

Debt:

- Cancelled bonds (Failure to appears, etc) - \$8100
- Loans - \$460
- Total - \$8560
- Total DEBT - \$8541

The anarchist scene in St Louis has some similarities to the one in Philadelphia, in that it's mostly based out of houses where people live together, rather than community social spaces or music scenes (although St Louis trails Philly by a couple of decades). Many anarchists live in Saint Louis but are by and large under the radar. There aren't nearly as many long-time institutions (publications, etc) as there are on the coasts. There is a bakery and a social center—neither exclusively anarchist.

St Louis

Introduction

by anonymous

Both of the following texts were written and distributed at the St. Louis occupation in early October. "Are We an Occupation or Just a Gathering" came on the heels of several situations where anarchists and anti-authoritarians found themselves defending, in both heated debate and calm dialogue, their ideologies from other occupiers. These conversations were both informal and structured and were mainly centered around concepts of violence and non-violence.

It was a sudden burst of energy that brought about the "are we an occupation" text. At the time, there wasn't the overwhelming amount of pieces written by and about the occupation movement that we see now. Finding something written from an anarchist perspective for other occupiers was not as easy as it is today. It was purposely written from the idea that anarchists were in fact occupiers as well and did not need to see themselves as outside of this growing movement. Using the term "we" was both an inclusive literary device and was true for the moment, some of us really felt that it was "we." A lot has happened since those first weeks and the terms of our engagement have become more problematic. Differences in tactics and critique have made the idea of a body moving as one unit much less palpable. The gestures towards "a movement of movements" hit blocks (pun!) along the way as the encampment became more administrated and officious.

This idea of inclusion was also written into the "Police are the tool of the 1%" text. This was a smaller handbill also written with the intention of being handed out to other occupiers. At the time this was written, few occupations had had major clashes with law enforcement. New York was the main exception to this: they had already become media sensations because of pepper spray and a failed attempt to cross the Brooklyn Bridge. The St. Louis police department had taken, and in many ways continues to take a "we're your friends and we're on your side" stance with the occupation. Because of this, there was little to no room for critical dialogue about police and policing. This handout was written in hopes of sparking some debate between those who would call the police a part of "us" and those who see their true brutality. It directly references terms and ideology that could be heard daily at the encampment, in the hopes of breaking down some of the rhetoric clouding more intense realities regarding the SLPD and law enforcement everywhere.

The direct effect of these or any other texts is difficult to discern. There is also a danger in trying to synthesize results out of a situation

that has not yet ended. Social movements, which these occupations are a part of, rarely cease to exist in some form. Therefore reflecting on our role as anarchists is somewhat premature. However, there are certainly momentary notes that could be taken about the usefulness of these two pieces in particular.

A possible failing of both these texts was their lack of critique around the 99% ideology. Both use the term in an effort to continue a catchall tone. The ideas brought forward in these writings were somewhat controversial, and could have been easily dismissed as negative anarchist propaganda or as people trying to "highjack" a movement. While those accusations are and were outlandish, they could have easily stymied conversations. It was out of these concerns that the 99% rhetoric slipped in. At the time, it was unclear how pervasive and damaging the furtherance of that ideology would be.

Texts in general would have been nothing if it weren't for the direct participation in the occupation by anarchists. Our successes in the streets or in the long term friendships we have made can be mainly attributed to our visibility at the occupation. Through our involvement in assemblies, planning of events, and actions, as well as our help with infrastructure, we remained active participants in that location up until the evictions in November.

Are We An Occupation or Just a Gathering

by anonymous

Wall Street Protesters, Occupying Till Whenever — NYT headline

The "Occupy Wall St." model has done what many have tried and failed at, it has pushed past the apathy and created a venue for possibility. In cities and towns across the country people are finding one another in situations few ever dared to venture into before. Meetings are being held, food shared and ideas discussed. But as one participant put it: "The fuzzy, ultra-left ideal about forging new kinds of relationships through struggle and finding each other and such can't just be about meeting in space and time, otherwise we could start a bowling league and be done with it." What the gatherings themselves lack is a coherent substance, a sense of self-understanding. Towards this end, we raise the following questions:

Are We An Occupation or Just a Gathering

The term occupation is often associated with a few things, namely the idea of disruption of or interference with the flow of goods or capital. When you ask for permission, when you seek a permit, the "occupations" become camping and the term becomes a catch phrase.

The original encampment, which has spawned many franchises in its wake, has been likened to other movements from around the globe, most notably the Tahrir Square occupations this past January. The major differences between the movement currently emerging in the US and those of the square occupations throughout Northern Africa and Europe is strength. It was not merely the fact that 50,000 people took over Tahrir Square, it was the fact that they would not be forced to leave that made the difference. As a movement they were ready to physically defend the areas they had liberated and attack those trying to destroy it. By deciding on a strategy of "non-violence," we have cut our legs out from under ourselves. In New York City, they do not hold Zuccotti Park—it is given to them under police supervision, and it will be taken away just as easily when the moment is deemed appropriate, i.e. when the police and the mayor have had enough.

When the Occupy Wall St. protesters took their message outside of the NYPD-contained area they were attacked. Over eighty arrests occurred when the crowd marched near Union Square. When they tried to cross the Brooklyn Bridge hundreds were detained and received citations. While the numbers swelled after those attacks, we missed a chance to sway the balance of power for just a moment.

That could change if the parameters of conflict were widened, if new avenues were opened to the possibility of physically holding space, not negotiating for its rental. Our individual refusals are small but collectively they are one of the last and strongest weapons we can wield together.

Are We Anti-Capitalists or Just Anti-Corporations

There is a difference between being anti-capitalist and being against corporations, or "corporate greed" as some have chosen to describe it. Anti-capitalists reach for a world free of the kinds of social relationships that require domination. Landlords and tenants; bosses and workers; police and prisoners. These are relationships inherent to a capitalist system and to the democracy we live under. It is not indicative of a "broken" system for unemployment rates to soar, inflation to reign, and wages to continually drop. The money cannot balance out, congress cannot legislate its way to equality. From where we all sit now, the accumulation of wealth or personal freedom is done on the back of someone else or at our own expense.

Though it may have acquired new forms, none of the poverty or exploitation we are protesting is unique to our modern age of corporate

dominance. Regulating or taxing corporations will not come close to solving these problems, because these institutions are only one part of the vast structure of social relationships called State and Capital.

The future is wretched and marked with the poverty we all feel today. This in and of itself is a cause for indignation. When that rage turns towards petitioning congress for a brighter tomorrow or demanding accountability of corporations, we have already lost.

The Police are Not Our Friends!

Capitalism, as a system, is based on a series of relationships between those who have power and those who do not. The police, whether they are a beat cop, a detective, or the Chief act as the enforcers of this economic system. They stand between us and the food we need to survive. They evict us from the homes we can no longer afford. Their job is to enforce the laws of capital, the ones created not to keep us safe but to protect capital and ensure the system works as smoothly as it can.

The police who enter our liberated zones, our occupations, are doing so as agents of the State. As individuals they may have families and problems. They may hate their jobs just like the rest of us, but that does not mean they will not do them. If we are to stand together as the proposed 99% we can not allow the thugs and mercenaries of the 1% to pierce our spaces.

"Police Are the Tool of the 1%"

The Police might just be doing their job when they eventually evict us from the plaza, but they do in fact have a choice, just like we have a choice in, say, whether to call in sick for work or not. A question we should ask is: if the Police really were part of the 99%, if they were really with us, then why would they evict us? Why would they continue to just "do their job"?

The Police help the banks evict us from our foreclosed homes every day; if they really are with us in this struggle, then why don't they stop? This struggle against corporate greed requires people giving up roles (such as the police) that are needed to lubricate the nuts and bolts that keep the status quo. This would mean for them to not follow orders from their superiors, this would mean no longer being police.

The Police might be blue-collar or part of the "99%," but they enforce the laws that keep the divide between the rich and the poor intact. The police are the protectors of the 1%. The police are the ones firing tear gas and rubber bullets whenever a demonstration gets out of hand. They are the ones who stand between every hungry person and the grocery shelves stocked with food, between every homeless person and the buildings standing empty, between every immigrant and her family. The police are the ones who beat Occupy Wall St. protesters, who gunned down Sean Bell and Oscar Grant, and who murdered Fred Hampton in his bed.

They are the ones who once enforced segregation in the United States and who back the bosses and the 1% in every strike.

The Police as an institution, that is an extension of the 1%, are fundamentally and very concretely in the way of what we really want: the end of a society based on class divisions. The downtown police officers might be the nicest people in the world, but they will still be the ones evicting us from the plaza. They are still part of that same extension.

This means they're not to be trusted by any of us involved in the occupation.

NOV 17

by anonymous

November 17th holds as a special place in the international fight against domination and exploitation. It's not just a single day of action against austerity or even simply a reference to Mohamed Bouazizi's dramatic act of self-immolation.

In 1973, Greece was rocked by a revolt against the military dictatorship then in power. The rebellion, which centered around the occupation of the Athens Polytechnic campus, involved thousands of students, workers, and young people. On November 17, 1973 the military junta invaded the occupation with tanks and soldiers resulting in the deaths of 24 rebels including one five-year-old child. Although Greece was still ruled by dictatorship until 1974, November 17th remains as a reference point to remember the Athens Polytechnic Uprising and the resistance against the dictatorship. In Greece, the day is a recognized holiday for all students and a focal point for resistance to the dictatorship of capitalism.

It should be clear that long before the current #Occupy movement, people around the world have waged a fierce struggle against capitalism and all those who seek to exploit and rule over us. Occupy Wall Street and Occupy STL do not occupy new terrain when it comes to struggle. They take much of their steam from the past and we should recognize this fact, but also critically learn from the experience of these historical movements. There have always been those who suffer the onslaught of a society based on class struggle. There have always been those who have resisted and they have a story that we can draw from.

In St. Louis, Missouri on November 17th, 2011 there was an unpermitted march through the streets to an abandoned municipal court building, empty since 2002. This took place after a scheduled union march

from antistatestl.wordpress.com

earlier in the day, which had left many people frustrated by its tameness. Especially troubling was the presence of protest marshals in green neon vests comprised of SEIU (Service Employees International Union), #Occupy and Communist Party USA members. Without much provocation, these "peace police" pointed out individuals within the march to the real police whenever they attempted to step outside the corral formed by the neon vests. When confronted on this, some marshals attempted to use the tactic of Non-Violent Communication^(tm) as a way to quell any perfectly justifiable anger and rage. Other marshals resorted to dramatic outbursts when their self-assumed authority was ignored.

The reported goal of the union march was to blockade the MLK Bridge, a high traffic thoroughfare which crosses the Mississippi River, to protest its derelict state and the unfulfilled potential of creating jobs through its repair. The obvious problem with actually blockading this particular bridge was that the action was widely advertised on Facebook and on fliers. Inevitably, the proposed blockade became a purely symbolic action due to the fact that the police knew of the plan a week or more in advance. When the crowd arrived at the bridge, there was already a line of police and a row of paddy wagons waiting. Many people in the march were unaware that the union's call to blockade a bridge was just a media stunt and wasn't actually going to happen. This left many participants feeling like they were being led on and used by the march organizers to fulfill a planned spectacle.

The protest marshals seemingly knew that this march was meant to be symbolic and restrained, and therefore they tried to stifle the energy of those who actually wanted to blockade. By the time the demonstration arrived at the bridge, there were at least 500 people taking part. As the marshals attempted to stop the advance towards the police and the bridge, individuals within the crowd would ignore them or stop for a second and then creep forward a little more. Eventually marchers made it within a couple of feet of the police line, much further than the marshals wanted. Many in the crowd seemed to want to go further still, around the police line and onto the bridge, but the marshals succeeded in draining the energy of the crowd. And like so many moments in this world, potentially rebellious people were stopped short and transformed into spectators in some grand organizer's scheme. It's clear that things will never change as long as those who voluntarily take on the role of police succeed in stifling the spontaneity and wild energy of those who want a world without police and capitalism.

After the frustrating and humiliating union march, the peace police left and the real fun began. An impromptu march was called for to the Justice Center, a building which houses the main city jail and is quite near to the abandoned Municipal Court building. The march was not of-

ficially endorsed by Occupy STL but everyone was invited to come along. As this new, smaller, yet more energetic crowd advanced through the streets, music was blaring from a mobile sound system and people were dancing. A St. Louis Blues hockey game was just about to start, so there were lots of people out on the street, many of them giving fist pumps and dancing with the marching crowd.

Turning the corner, and coming up to the front of the abandoned municipal courts, the mobile street party found that two banners had been unfurled which read "Occupy Everything." Confetti and fliers were thrown from the roof and the front door of this huge building was wide open. In that moment, dozens of people ran up the steps with pure joy. Inside were Christmas lights and wheat pasted proclamations. A banner declaring, "Everything for everyone and nothing for ourselves," was taped over the "Municipal Court" sign on the front above the doors. The police who had been trailing the march immediately left to regroup, leaving people the time to get acquainted with the building. A dance party ensued and a statement was read outside at the top of the steps. Some jokingly called the building "our new home." Others explored the labyrinthine three-story building.

The cops finally came after an hour and evicted the occupation. People willingly left the building and regrouped on the sidewalk where some yelled and taunted the police. Dancing continued and eventually the crowd left and marched through the streets to the city jail. As the group was leaving the building a fire truck was extending its ladder towards the banners to cut them down. Ridiculously, instead of gaining access from the roof, the police could only imagine using the massive fire ladder to remove the banners from the building. The cops followed the demonstration and showed up at the jail in force: three or four paddy wagons and lots of rapid response SUVs and regular cruisers. Seeing this as a good time to leave, demonstrators continued back to the Plaza where everything began.

What was inspiring about this march was that it enabled people to take something, if only for a brief time, without asking permission. It also redefined the concepts of private property and legality in many people's minds. This contrasted with the union march, an event that had predetermined parameters and stifled so many peoples' desires, where if you refused to follow the leadership you would be pointed out to the police or even physically stopped by protest marshals. The impromptu march was in the streets the whole time. There were no demands, there were no appeals to higher powers. It was only us acting together.

What happened was illegal, and sometimes it's intimidating to publicly break the law. But for most at the occupation, the law no longer mattered when we were all together. It was irrelevant for a time. Everyone was invited inside of the building and if anyone felt uncomfortable, they had the

ability to safely leave. The building, formerly being a place where the ruling class judged and locked poor people up was mocked by the presence of those who want nothing less than the complete demise of judges and jails.

So many buildings stand empty in this city only because capitalism has no use for them as of yet. It is not profitable for these buildings to be put to use. Capitalism cares nothing for our well being. So many of us outside stare at these buildings and wonder why they sit there, why we are evicted when there is so much space unoccupied, why we are thrown in jail for being poor or marginalized when there is so much wealth in the world.

Capitalism creates a false scarcity of space when in fact there is plenty. Capitalism takes physical space—as well as our time, our ability to survive and our labor power—and makes it into a commodity that we have to work and struggle for. Space is only scarce because it is locked up by money that so many of us don't have. If, like any other commodity, we take it without paying, the State will use repression (police, judges, prisons, etc.) to try and stop us. We will never have the economic or political means to own these buildings, and that is why we must build the social power to take them directly.

So many stand outside dreaming of ways to use these buildings, to use them as places of joy or a place to call home. We want to re-appropriate them, to take them and turn them into sites of contestation. We want to make them ours without asking.

There are some (in particular some within Occupy STL) who have condemned the breakaway march and the building occupation as the work of violent anarchists, provocateurs, or adventurists, claiming that such actions are damaging to the movement. There are some who are trying to dictate what is associated with the #Occupy movement because they feel like they have ownership over a supposedly leaderless movement.

It is extremely dangerous to claim that people are provocateurs, agents of the state, just because of a disagreement with their opinions or their actions. Especially when there is absolutely no evidence to back it up. This is very divisive. It also displays a sort of tunnel vision that seeks to keep every thing controlled and rigid for the sole benefit of those who want to lead a leaderless movement. And it forgets that there are many different ways to act in concert with one another. We should embrace this principle. It is worth debating strategy and tactics, but we should not fall prey to false dichotomies and divisions (non-violence vs. violence, symbolic vs. non-symbolic, etc.) that leave no room for fluidity.

For others who participated in the occupation, some of whom are very active in the local #Occupy movement, the attempted building takeover was a wonderful moment of collective joy. The events of November 17th proved that an action which pushes the movement forward does not necessarily have to be officially endorsed by a General Assembly. It can be

as simple as a group of autonomous individuals planning it and inviting others to come. These others can choose whether or not to participate. There does not need to be an official decision or an Action Committee-approved plan for something to happen. One can, if one wants, call for an action and see if the GA will consent upon endorsing it. If it does not get endorsed, it doesn't mean others can't take it upon themselves to join in.

Striket Striket Occupy!

Like Vox Populi, the Blocs Multiply!

Text from a flier that was thrown from the roof
of the occupied Municipal Courts building:

As winter approaches, we need a space to stay dry and healthy. We need a place to have a stable kitchen to feed our collective self. We need a space where we can better share our ideas and experiences—rooms for discussions, a library, space for workshops and casual conversations—all of which have become harder and harder to have in the plaza.

The occupation of this building is an act against the structural violence entrenched in our political, economic and social systems. As we move into the space, our intention is to collectively re-invent its use. We're trying to discover ways of interacting with each other as equals. How to talk so everyone is heard; how to make decisions so everyone's considered and included; how to feed and maintain a shared space; how to make sure work, responsibility, pleasure and ownership don't fall on some more than others. It's a hard process in itself, but it's made even harder by the fact that it flies in the face of how almost everything in this city (the whole world practically) is run.

We know our ideas and actions, while currently small, have already proven to be contagious. They have the power to expose the explicit violence that we see in the police department and the jails. That violence also exists in work-related deaths and injuries, in deportation camps, and in communities that have been promised so much only to be left to rot in poverty and addiction. Our very homes and bodies are pushed to the limit by laws and workloads. Wilderness, which has the chance to exist outside of this madness, is, like the County Parks, slowly being sold off to those who want to drown it in this misery.

What would our world look like if we decided how our communities and neighborhoods functioned? What would this self-directed process be like, without a handful of people in charge of it all? What would our workplaces look like if those who actually did the work got to control them, too? What if

schools were run by those who learned and taught in them, not by the dictates of careers or the economy? What if your own household, whether shared with friends or family, ran the same way?

So much of our lives are decided without our say. It's made all the more degrading and humiliating by the fact that those who make the decisions claim to do so for our benefit or in our name. We no longer want to continue the farce. If the word of the handful of people who run this city and our lives is to be taken at face value, this is hardly an unreasonable request. They've left this building to rot. It isn't the site of spectacular sporting events or corporate Christmas tree lightings. The city officials have long-since abandoned the building—much in the way they have abandoned us.

We have no intentions of reforming capitalism or improving democracy. We know there is no golden era to harken back to and restore—this country (like so many others) was founded on genocide, slavery, and exploitation, and it continues this tradition today. We have only each other to have hope in.

We occupy in solidarity with those who struggle, but will not look towards the empty promises of politicians. We need to think beyond the Downtown Partnership and the Mayor's ideas about creating condominiums for the elite, and start thinking about using these buildings for collective purposes. As long as we continue to look to politicians to solve our problems and the ruling class to have a conscience, things will only get worse. Power concentrated in the hands of a few will only bring more oppression and exploitation. We want to make decisions horizontally, and to share the little we have. Who knows, we might even surprise ourselves by what we're capable of.

Come join us if you're interested in getting to know each other, treating each other with genuine respect, and plotting ways out of this mess. We carry a new world in our hearts, one much more fantastic, more empowering, and more just than the current one.

Seattle has had one of the more exciting anarchist spaces in recent years. They report on this with their bi-monthly paper *Tides of Flame* and local anarchist web news outlet Puget Sound Anarchists. They have been actively involved in the anti-police protests of early 2011 and central to the occupy events.

Last year Seattle lost its social center Autonomia but it maintains one of the oldest anarchist bookstores in North America, Left Bank Books. Seattle also benefits by being the largest town in the Pacific Northwest, which means that it is fed by people and energy coming from the strong local anarchist communities in places like Tacoma and Olympia.

Seattle

Capital Hell Commune

by anonymous

On the night of October 29, the Occupy Seattle group moved to the campus of Seattle Central Community College. The idea of moving to the college had been circulating for over two weeks with the administration getting wind of the rumors. They immediately issued a statement saying that the occupiers would be neither welcome nor allowed to set up an encampment. However, after the General Assembly voted to officially move, it became clear that hundreds of people would swarm the college. With the occupiers being supported by the faculty union, members of student government, and hundreds of students, the administration found itself in a bind. Just a few days before the 29th, the president of the college "officially" allowed a move that would have happened anyway.

By 9pm, a kitchen and over forty tents were set up in the tree-shrouded plaza on the corner of Broadway and Pine, one of the busiest intersections in the most densely populated neighborhood in Seattle. There was a carnivalesque, celebratory atmosphere with campers indulging in all manner of merriment and debauchery.

Sometime around bar closing, three nazis came into the camp after being told to leave. One of them had "Sieg Heil" written on his chin. The three were surrounded and still refused to leave. But very soon punches and cracks with sticks began to land on their heads and the nazis were pushed out by a crowd of arguing people, bloodied and bruised. This should have been a simple matter, but soon all of the pathologies and contradictions of liberal thought exploded into a two-hour marathon of yelling, fighting, and discussion. By 5am, everyone went to bed and the rain chilled everyone out.

Despite the rough start to the occupation, there is much promise in this new base camp. Unlike Westlake Park, people will finally be able to sleep and build a village.

A sense of community does not exist because we declare it so. The communities we desire come through shared experiences of struggle. Living in an alienated capitalist society, we have no real sense of community that isn't mediated by an institution or state apparatus. The disagreements brought to the surface by Occupy Seattle's encounter with fascists is an example of people learning how to become a community. Growing pains are often uncomfortable and tumultuous, but the confrontation that took place reveals the potential for forming an anti-fascist, anti-racist, autonomous space. This potential is worth nurturing and defending.

The president and the administration of the college will face severe political consequences should anything resembling the violent police as-

saults on the occupations in Oakland or Denver take place at the occupation here in Seattle. Not only is a large segment of the faculty supportive, but the school is facing budget cuts and many students are finding much resonance with the anarchist ideas that have been saturating Capitol Hill. It will not be very long before Seattle Central Community College is a teeming bed of rebellion.

The Port Shutdown was a Wild Success!

by anonymous

Building off of the success of the November 2 Oakland General Strike, elements within the Occupy Movement planned a shutdown of all major west coast ports on Monday, December 12. Just as the General Strike showed the world what people in the movement are capable of, the Port Shutdown served as another example of this movement's power and potential. In the span of a month, the movement has re-energized itself and focused its energy on a specific target: the central nodes of capitalist distribution.

The Port of Seattle, specifically Terminal 18 on Harbor Island, is largely run by a corporation called SSA Marine. Goldman Sachs owns 51% of this company and extracts massive profits from the constant flow of commodities entering the ports run by SSA Marine.

And if that wasn't enough, SSA has also been accused of union-busting by immigrant port truckers working in Los Angeles and is a major player behind the ecologically disastrous Gateway Pacific Coal Terminal project in Bellingham, WA. For all of these reasons, Harbor Island was chosen as the first priority of the Port of Seattle shutdown.

The march to the port left Westlake Plaza and proceeded down 2nd Avenue. The Seattle Police Museum was paint-bombed as the march passed it. Further along, after the march had turned onto 4th, a Bank of America and a Wells Fargo were paint-bombed and tagged. After arriving at the fishing pier near the entrances to Harbor Island, the mass of people split up and began blocking the strategic choke points into the port. At the entrance of Klickitat Avenue, the main road into the island, people erected a large barricade made of assorted construction and industrial debris from nearby lots. There was no argument about such an effort, and everyone threw themselves into the objective of stopping all incoming workers and cargo. It was extremely refreshing to see hundreds of people intentionally and actively blocking a central node in the capitalist network.

The media has tried to make a big deal of the objects thrown at the police, but those things were inevitable, being nothing more than the defensive instincts of people who are losing their fear of capitalism and its police. The crowd held their ground for as long as possible, given their massive tactical disadvantages: being in the middle of nowhere, facing off against people with guns, not having horses, etc. The police threw two flash-bang grenades into the crowd, effectively dispersing it. As you may remember from a previous *Tides of Flame* article, the company that originally gave the SPD the money to keep the horse units active is Expeditors International, a company that takes care of the logistics that facilitate the flow of commodities from across the world through the Port of Seattle. It is not a coincidence that these same horses trampled several blockaders when the police rode them into the crowd that evening.

While this fight was going on, another group of two hundred people had moved into West Seattle to blockade Terminal 5. By the end of the night, ILWU had instructed its workers to go home due to unsafe working conditions, and the normal night shift of the two terminals was canceled. However, SSA Marine and Eagle Marine Services have decided not to pay the workers, utilizing loopholes in their contracts with ILWU. In response to this, a small group of people picketed in front of Terminal 5 on the morning of the 13th. They were met with a warm and grateful response from the workers who had lost a day's pay, defying the narrative of those who would like to present the port shutdown as a failure and an attack on the mythical 99%. Despite being dependent on the port for their wages, these workers could not help but see an attack on their contracted bosses as something worthy of support.

December 12 was the birth of a new autonomous force against the global capitalist system. Independent of unions, political parties and central leadership, this force is now ready to move forward and continue to articulate itself. After a period of gestation, what was once confined to the tactics of public camping and symbolic actions has now begun to blossom. In the sixth issue of *Tides of Flame*, we pledged our solidarity to the workers of the ILWU. There were a great many anarchists on the streets on December 12, and they all helped achieve the modest objective of a shutdown and picket.

Again, this movement is fluid, autonomous, wild, and full of folks ready to join with others who want to see the demise of capitalism and hierarchical authority. The only way to end this global system is to bring it down, together. We'll see you at the barricades we'll all be standing behind one day, facing down the capitalists and fighting off their police.

Text from a demo flyer:

Historically, the strike has been the purview of the working class, the sector of society which is both dutifully employed and over-

worked, hanging by the thread of the boss's favor. The power of the strike lay in the industrial workers' ability to stop production dead in its tracks. But we all know that the traditional blue collar job is a rarity these days and that the US economy has lost much of its industrial production to the whims of global capitalism. Now the working class exists most predominately as the underbelly of its former self, as the excluded class—the unemployed, underemployed, illegally employed. It no longer holds the same power as it once did to shut down the economy from the workplace. Some of our potential comrades still work in the old world of production: longshoremen, port truck workers, and others. The rest of us exist outside of that world, and indeed, some of us always have. Our workplace has become the place of precarity—we occupy the streets because we have no workplace to occupy. We are the face of the crisis of capitalism. When we blockade the ports and staunch the flow of capital, we do it from the outside, as displaced people, no longer as workers but as those excluded from this system, as those who have no hope in the economy, no hope in capitalism.

When we shut down the port, we dream of the day we shut down the entire system with its jobs and its economy of suffering.

Becoming Uncontrollable: an Anarchist Reflection on Occupy Seattle

by anonymous

Now we only have two options: allow this crack to close up, losing a unique opportunity for a veritable social change, or open it as much as we can, widening it until it reaches the very foundations of our misery and exploitation.

— Excerpt from Catalan anarchist
flier distributed at Occupy Seattle

Our struggle is social not political. We will not martyr ourselves as the urban guerilla nor compromise as the reformist. We make no demands and see our struggle reflected in the struggles of many others. It is from these beliefs that anarchists engaged with Occupy Seattle.

The beginning of Occupy Seattle was drenched in the misery of what

it means to live in a place that has known so little recent struggle and in which the people have forgotten what it means to rebel. The first days were marred by sidewalk marches around the perimeter of an occupied Westlake Park, the serious consideration of constructing demands, and attempts to work with the City and the police. This trajectory continued persistently until the first break with politics was reached.

Seattle is known for its liberalism and passivity. Mayor McGinn continued this strong tradition by supporting Occupy Seattle. His strategy as a politician was clear to few but later learned by many. For the first several days he let the occupiers have their camp and sidewalk protests. The City's acceptance of a tent city in downtown's premier shopping district was never meant to last. McGinn made a backhanded deal with self-appointed managerial occupiers for the camp move to City Hall, an irrelevant and isolated location.

His order was rejected after intense debate. People chose to fight for Westlake Park and against the recuperation of their emerging movement. Those who conspired with McGinn were revealed as traitors and were among the few to camp at City Hall. From the disposal of these self-appointed leaders and the refusal to heed to the Mayor's demands, the first lines were drawn at Occupy Seattle.

The weeks to come taught the next lesson: the role of the police. The police were present every day and night at the park. They chatted with occupiers during the day and at night they would shine their headlights as the delirious campers tried to sleep. They would rip blankets off people and then crack jokes with protesters the next day. Their humanity tempted many occupiers. Forced into a battle against power and social control that we will likely never truly win, there are some among this society who prefer to let that fear infest them. They are those who whisper their deepest scorn against the police but smile and wave as Officer Friendly strolls by. At the camp they insisted upon negotiation and manners toward the police and chastised those who did otherwise.

As the days wore on the hypocrisy of people who would only obey orders from someone outside their own groups was exposed to many. Open hostilities grew as the police became the clear obstacle to a very simple thing the occupiers wanted: a camp. An anti-police and "cop free zone" proposal was brought to a General Assembly during this period. It passed with flying colors. Yet with no way to enforce this newly collectivized contempt, Occupy remained a pig-ridden area. As the small battles over tents, sleeping, blankets, and even sitting down ensued, the tensions multiplied. People who had never screamed were losing their voices from yelling at the police, several people were arrested, and many witnessed with tears in their eyes the brutality that is the Seattle Police Department.

In response to the harassment and repression of the camp hundreds

of people returned with tents to reoccupy Westlake Park on October 15. The evening was festive with the joys of our first collective act of refusal. Although it lasted only for the weekend, the memory became a reference point in the weeks to come. After the eviction, the camp continued as it had before, negatively as a place for the police's passive-aggressive invasion, and positively as the meeting point for occupiers.

After many nights of debate, on Halloween weekend, the Occupy camp decided to move to Seattle Central Community College (SCCC). As anarchists, we viewed SCCC as a place to implement the lessons learned at Westlake Park. Over and over again we had insisted that without the clear intention of occupying and defending a space in defiance of the law and the police, any attempt at occupation would fail. The failure we spoke of was not limited to the material gain or loss of space but the struggle that is lost to power when we work within (and therefore for) the forces of domination.

The first night at SCCC introduced the next lesson which is the biggest and most misunderstood of all: the failure of democracy. Three Nazis entered the camp walking with their arms to the air. They were quickly attacked by anarchists and other anti-fascists and almost as quickly defended by those who were either pacifists or Nazi sympathizers. Once the Nazis were finally pushed to the street, bloodied and all, the internal fight commenced. Many spoke in favor of a policy that is nonviolent but still exclusive to fascists and racists, while a small group spoke for the inclusion of all members of the 99%. Still others, anarchists and anti-authoritarians, spoke for resisting all dialog or inclusion of any oppressive individuals—whether fascist, racist, cop, or rapist—by any means necessary. The experience of facing real tangible enemies confronted occupiers with the reality of their own vulnerability, which in turn shifted the views that many of them had about pacifism and encouraging the tool of violence. It also revealed the less-palatable side of their beloved democracy: unconditional inclusion and tolerance. This lesson is yet to be fully learned. The issues raised that night were reflected in the anti-fascist group that patrolled the perimeter of the camp (with black flags as weapons) for weeks after.

A few days later the passivity of the Seattle occupiers proved to be losing ground. On the day of the November 2 General Strike in Oakland, people locked down at a Chase Bank. This action was an unexpected catalyst for the tensions that boiled within every occupier. After the police had come and arrested many occupiers, after each bank occupier was placed inside the police van, those of us outside the bank lost our restraint. Chaos ensued as cops launched pepper spray and occupiers pushed back: some threw themselves in front of the police vehicles and others landed several strikes on police bodies. We de-arrested our new comrades and pushed

the police off the street. A small victory was felt amongst the hundred of us, one that was built from the lessons of the past month.

Like most Occupies, the camp quickly deteriorated into a cesspool of drugs and interpersonal violence. The reality of the camp was only a reflection of society; that which produces these conditions and then rejects or hides its own creation. By the middle of November the anarchist and communist presence at the actual camp lessened, likely due to its condition. This came with little regret on my part as the intention of occupying public space as a tent city is certainly not the best tactic nor strongest attribute of Occupy. We moved to focus more on street demonstrations and targets of our discontent.

On November 19 a demonstration was organized from the camp to an abandoned house in the Central District, which is an historically poor black neighborhood undergoing mass gentrification. It was unclear what the response from the crowd would be when they reached the occupied house nor were we sure what the police response would entail. Both were surprising. The occupiers immediately rushed inside the house and began plans of what to do with it. The police stood by unable to act without the owner's consent. This was the first manifestation of the next lesson: private property is not sacrosanct.

Two weeks later the law of private property was again defiled under the Occupy banner. A huge warehouse on Capitol Hill was taken over at the end of a small march entitled, "You can't evict an ideal". A short write up from that night described the moment:

We have all dreamed of it. Some of have even seen it before, but never here, never in Seattle. They say it's too liberal, too clean, that our time has passed, that the city is theirs. Last night we shattered their mirage. We all felt the specter of our own possibilities as we ran through that empty vast building. What before was dead, we made alive. Those who entered acquaintances, left comrades.

During only ten hours hundreds of people came and went from the occupied warehouse. The SWAT team destroyed the physical space we had gained yet they could not destroy the ideas that were won - of individual and collective agency against the normality of all that capitalism deems sacred. This is a considerable feat when the innate values of private property within American society are considered. Revolutionary critics disregard these gains as miniscule and point to Europe's somewhat recuperated squatting movements as an example. They are correct to say that the occupation of property is not inherently revolutionary but they fall short when they disregard the mental barriers which are broken in these moments.

Those moments were built upon as occupiers were confronted with the December 12 shutdown. Occupy Seattle voted to unanimously support the shutdown. The ILWU heads and other representatives of unionized

workers unanimously opposed the shutdown. Here I will speak for myself as an anarchist who is against the romanticism of the worker, work, and unions. Motivated by their effort to maintain their salaries and their careers in the politics of work, union bureaucrats stifle and recuperate the budding struggles of many workers they claim to protect. The concept of an "other" amassing to effectively stop the circulation of capital at the Port (and therefore the workplace of many) is a concept that does not fit within the union framework. Union workers are allowed concessions for better conditions but their demands can never be that of the destruction of work or the elimination of their position in society. While individuals within unions can always act as their own agents of revolt, their union will never be that force. One lesson learned from the Port of Seattle shutdown is that we must act as individuals against power, and not as the roles power forces upon us if we wish to destroy those same roles.

This idea manifested in the actions of the day. Hundreds, including union workers, showed up to Westlake Park for the start of the march regardless of the media's dramatic Union vs Occupy dichotomy. The shutdown for occupiers was always about standing up for the movement and pushing it forward into a momentum that encourages diverse action and the connection of diverse struggles. In Seattle it was made clear that when we shut down capital at the port we were not acting simply in solidarity with the struggles in Longview and Los Angeles but also with the struggles that we choose to fight that are imposed on us by the same forces of capital that manifest materially at the Port.

When we built that barricade in the middle of the street, we were blocking the terminal but we were also demonstrating our ability to adapt. We did not form a simple picket line as the manuscript instructs us to. We accessed the situation for the most effective and inspiring tactic. The property of the Port was not viewed as sacred but as a tool, the police were not viewed as "us" but as a clear enemy, the politics of the unions were disregarded, and the methods of self-organization and small affinities were preferred over the democratic values of mass organization and representation.

From the lessons that we learned in October, November, and early December we created a momentum for future revolts. No longer marching in circles, we await, ready for the potential of our recent history of refusal and collective rebellion. Challenges also await us in the forms of recuperation, the largely unchallenged love of democracy, and the American psyche, which so values the return of normality and which so fears power.

It is not easy, but it is possible. The path is long and as long as our dream of liberty remains alive, we will be more alive than ever.

—Anarchist flier distributed at
Plaça Catalunya

The Bay Area has one of the largest, oldest, and most complicated anarchist spaces in North America. For anarchist living spaces, Oakland is the Brooklyn to San Francisco's Manhattan. Similar to Brooklyn there are large pockets of poverty next to "urban hipness" and Occupy Oakland has reflected this. While it is possible that Occupy Oakland was more racially diverse than the Occupy Movement as a whole it was still whiter than the town itself. Unlike many towns there was not a sizable faction of anti-Fed or Ron Paul fans here; instead, there was a serious incursion by grass roots social justice activists who attempted to shape the agenda of Occupy Oakland. The consequences and repercussions remain to be seen.

As for anarchist participation, they were there and involved from day one. When the camp was broken up after two weeks on October 25, there were large protests, police violence, and a reversal from the Mayor. Along with the reoccupation of Oscar Grant Plaza (aka Frank Ogawa Plaza) was the call for a General Strike on November 2. A General Strike is an event that, while unusual in North America, is a common expression of workers' power in Europe. By linking the Occupy Movement to the history of workers' power OO succeeded, in an instant, at building bridges that would have taken months to form in other circumstances.

The General Strike was, by most accounts, a day of affirmation for anarchists: attacks against high profile targets, a closure of the Port of Oakland, and an attempted occupation of an unused building near Oscar

Oakland

Grant Plaza. This was a day when anarchists made national headlines.

After the dust had settled on the General Strike, occupation was on everyone's lips. (This included the politicians who slowly constricted around the camping occupation, ending it again almost two weeks after the General Strike.) The last major action of Occupy Oakland in 2011 was a three shift closure of the Port of Oakland on December 12, coinciding with similar attempts along the entire west coast.

One of the primary anarchist* sources of information regarding Occupy Oakland has been Bay of Rage. Their pieces here include an initial report back on the camping occupation, the police raid of October 25, the anti-capitalist march of the General Strike, and an analysis of the economics of port closures and other constraints to capital flow. Further pieces include a cheerleading piece prior to the occupation from local blog Applied Nonexistence, a critical analysis of the camping occupation, a statement by those who attempted to occupy the Travelers Building on the night of the General Strike, and a history of General Strikes in Oakland, which contextualizes the events of 2011.

*The term anarchist here isn't entirely accurate. The composition of this site, and the group that edits it, includes anarchists along with anti-state communists who follow a rich tradition of anti-leninist, councilist, situationist, bordigist, and dauvéist tendencies far too complicated to go into here.

Open Letter to the Anarchists of Occupy Oakland

by TEOAN

Dear Anarchist Friends and Frienemies,

On the eve of tomorrow's occupation of Frank Ogawa/Oscar Grant Plaza we'd like to express a few sentiments of support and caution—all with our tired, insistent clamoring to keeping negation at the forefront of everything. You are agreeing to enter into a material discourse which has already been defined—both by its actors and by its detractors, so be careful. That said, props to the heavy anarchist presence in the organizing around this event (don't shy away from being anarchists in this event's larger context). Some thoughts, for you to entirely dismiss as disconnected from the material reality we find ourselves in...

1. The impulse to demand is a strong one which needs to be challenged, out of the fear of having energy recuperated into representational politics. At the risk of reducing complexities down to slogans, the old "occupy everything, demand nothing" of the 2009-2010 student occupations/movements, seems to be appropriate here. An antipolitics of negation, one which refuses to enter and function according to the rules/delineations of political discourse (ie demanding shit within the political sphere) is elusive and much more difficult to co-opt, recuperate, and quite frankly, render completely ineffective in praxis. When the progressive, liberal, leftist, element (of what will essentially be a non-coalition's coalition of political organizations, groups, perspectives, and yearnings) attempt to authoritatively define a collective (yet oddly unified) voice of demands (greater fiscal regulation, auditing the fed, etc) negate that shit without feeling the obligation to articulate what you, as anarchists, are for.

2. Maneuvering sympathetic political landscapes here in the Bay Area is almost as indicative of the contextual *hostis* we find ourselves engaged in, in the US as it is in dealing with explicitly hostile political machinations. Coalitions (either in their explicit forms or more generally as loose, grassroots, "mass" movements) are dangerous terrains to navigate. While it is entirely admirable to make this event more "accessible" and "representative" of Oakland's disparate "communities"—hearing calls at Occupy Oakland General Assembly meetings to "reach out" to churches and their parishioners sadly show how anarchists in the US still refuse to break with the left. Remember that while greater numbers often have a cathartic pull that is unde-

niable, fixing and assigning cohesive meaning to "resistance" is an impossibility and as such, sometimes drawing lines between political sympathies is more conducive to effectively challenging anything. If we tactically view the larger sociopolitical and hyper-spectaclized events that have happened in the Bay Area the last few years (the Oscar Grant Rebellions, the various incarnations of the "student" movement, etc) we learn, as anarchists, that it is not recuperation by more expansive hostile political forces (as our mythology seems to like to suggest), but rather it is recuperation by our seemingly sympathetic co-conspirators that is often the most damning thing that can happen on the field of engagement. When individuals or political groups attempt to define what is happening at Frank Ogawa/Oscar Grant Plaza, draw lines, and negate any such aspirations towards meaning-making (this includes the dogmatic drivel of the OWS calls to hegemonic "nonviolence").

3. Utilize Oakland's symbolic political signification to your advantage. Real talk: compared to other locales in the Bay Area, shit pops off in The Town. Thus, as is the case with most "actions" in Oakland loosely signified as possessing some sort of radical/fringe/militant elements or potential, counter-action response is usually heavy, repressive, and overtly excessive. If one acknowledges that civil war is both an ontological and material reality of our collective existence, one must also acknowledge that there is no "wrong" or "right" context for direct contestation as existence effectively becomes the permanent presence of continuous contestation. Thus, any sympathetic calls to quell any radical potentiality should be dismissed—there is no temporal future, *hostis* is the norm. Like any laceration inflicted on the skin of Empire, no matter how superficial, the platelet-like institutions of control centralize in hopes of clotting the rupture. This centralization of counter-action forces the creation of gaps within their fabric of control—use this to your advantage and explore sites of contestation on the margins. Tactically, sleight-of-hand is so simple, yet extremely under-utilized. Read between the lines.

4. Do not reproduce the same sorts of one-dimensional political representational positions that we are ostensibly trying to contest. Consensus around unified, "official" statements to media outlets made by such bodies (no matter how "plural" and "non-hierarchical" they may actually be) as the Occupy Oakland General Assembly—the adherence to/reproduction of OWS's "declaration" statement calling for "peaceably" assembling and the formation of "groups in the spirit of direct democracy" (democracy and anarchy are incompatible)—or the complete planning and "agenda-izing" of the first day of the oc-

cupation itself—all contribute to a coalescing mass of implicit representations which eschew any space for potentiality and spontaneity, which are integral to insurrectionary ruptures. Our detractors will pause here and say, you pretentious fucks, the Occupy “Movement” isn’t about insurrectionary ruptures, but rather it’s about building social relations of resistance positioned against the domination of late-capitalist institutions. Yet we’d like to preemptively counter by saying this lack of any semblance of insurrectionary impetus is precisely why the Occupy “Movement” is an incredibly effective pressure-valve release, allowing for psychological projections of efficacy, agency, and “authentic” moments of individuals collectively coming together in spaces of social organization that somehow exist outside of the totality of Empire, and as such it is merely indicative of the way in which our most radical desires (individual and collective) are still socially and hegemonically mediated.

Even with our deep reservations, here’s to hoping ya’ll do the damn thing. Keep it hella stupid doo doo dumb, yadadamean?

From Oakland with Love,
TEOAN

#OCCUPYOAKLAND:

One Week Strong at Oscar Grant Plaza

by Autonomous Individuals

Social rebels from around Oakland have descended upon Oscar Grant Plaza and have created a genuine, autonomous space free of police and unwelcoming to politicians. Whereas other occupations have invited the police and politicians, or have negotiated with them, Occupy Oakland has carved a line in the cement. That line of demarcation says: if you pass this, if you try and break up or over shadow this autonomous space, you are well aware—as observed over the last couple of years—what we are capable of.

This article is a report back on the first week at Occupy Oakland, a reflection on problems we have been facing and some thoughts on moving the occupation forward—onto some next level shit.

Report Back

After much organizing, logistical coordination, joy, sweat, and tears, we’ve managed to hold down the first week of the occupation of Oscar Grant Plaza (conservatively known as Frank Ogawa Plaza). The police

have not set foot inside the parameter of the occupation without an impassioned, hostile response. Likewise, the people who do enter the space have not left without an inspired and rebellious spirit—a fever.

On the first night, there was concern about how many people would show up or if any of them would feel empowered enough to stay the night. Despite the rain, at least 1,000 attended the rally and about two dozen tents were erected. After food was served, the first general assembly took place in the amphitheater of City Hall. In the form of a speak-out, an amplified sound system and an open floor made way for those in attendance to passionately talk about why they were there—why they hate capitalism, its pigs, and its prisons. Here, people could speak their minds without the obstacles of an agenda or decision-making.

Different from many other occupations in the occupation movement, organizing took place for a week prior to the plaza takeover. On the very first day, the camp had a fully functional kitchen, an info-tent and a supply tent. By the end of this week there was a medic tent, art supply tent, an insurrectionary library, a free store, the Raheim Brown Free School, a media tent, a POC tent, a sukkah, a DJ booth, not to mention hundreds of sleeping-space tents. In addition, the rotating kitchen crew has been feeding everyone consistently from 8am until midnight and throwing spontaneous BBQs. Despite a few hiccups, these designated areas and tents have been beautifully maintained and non-exclusive—functioning to attract new-comers, leaving little prospect for anyone to feel like a spectator.

Immediately, different logistical issues that had to be dealt with spawned various working groups, or committees. These committees are in constant rotation. This “beauty in chaos” allows for a loose, flexible structure. Simultaneously, people are freely organizing and interacting with the camp however they desire: A few crucial sub-committees that the occupation hasn’t necessitated until recently, but have since been created (and experimented with) are: security (dealing with outside forces such as police, who from the beginning were not welcome), mediation (dealing with internal conflicts and dynamics), a facilitation working group (which organizes the agenda and shapes the process of the general assembly), a POC caucus that has been meeting every day, and finally, a newly formed anti-authoritarian/anti-capitalist caucus and a queer working group. People are no longer spectating the increasingly rapid destruction of their everyday life, instead they are actively participating in breaching normalized boundaries—how people relate to one another in a way that empowers everyone involved.

The General Assemblies, or “GAs,” are places where the people of the occupation can get updates, have debates, plan for actions, and decide on proposals. The GA Facilitation Working Group came up with a modified consensus process where a 90% majority—instead of 100%—is sufficient

to pass a proposal. However illusory or "democratic" this process may be, its strategic implementation strips power away from potentially authoritative individuals who might hijack or otherwise sabotage our ability to make decisions and move forward. Because there is a specific group working on the facilitation process, the GAs operate smoothly and are usually quite exciting. Additionally, a lot of people that speak at the GA are really fucking on point. Thus far the general assemblies (of 200-300 people nightly) have passed decisions to never endorse political parties or politicians, to send a solidarity statement to comrades at Occupy Wall Street and another to those on hunger strike in the Pelican Bay state prison. This is also a space where anti-state and anti-authority sentiments flourish, be they against the police or the city government. As can be expected, some people say some really fucked up racist/sexist shit, but they are usually booted off stage. With what may be a perfect ending to the first week, a letter from the city (delivered 30 minutes before the GA) was read aloud. The city detailed specifically what must be improved or taken care of "for our own safety" (when did the city ever care about our safety anyways?). Boldly (you could feel tension when the idea was initiated), some began chanting, "Burn it". Without hesitation, someone took a lighter to the letter. Another person added lighter fluid to the burning, single sheet of paper. The flames raged wildly for a full minute. The crowd of at least 300 cheered and hollered with an enthusiasm unprecedented at any prior GA. *For some reason, we feel that Occupy Oakland is different...*

In addition to the amazing infrastructure and the excellent facilitation that has been set up, the organized events are extremely diverse and most of the time explicitly political. Each of the events throughout the first week nurtures the overall, vengeful tone of the occupation—performances, Hip Hop shows, poetry slams, and movie showings. In each case, people find time away from hard work to enjoy each other's company. In addition to planned events, numerous impromptu ciphers, dance parties, and performances break out—accentuating a generalized desire to cultivate autonomous actions. One day a SambaFunk Band marched their way into Oscar Grant Plaza, and proceeded to play for almost an hour—hundreds surrounding them, dancing. This beautifully unexpected addition to the occupation, along with others like it, demonstrates a recurring spontaneity. Multiple times throughout the day you hear people exclaim how inspired they are by this occupation and what is possible here. In addition to the more creative and fun events, workshops take place during the day and have been explicitly nonconformist. The workshops range from topics such as contemporary uprisings in Greece, Chile, and Oaxaca to Occupy. Everything, which connect the student occupations to what is happening here. This upcoming week, every day from 1-5pm there are more of the same: specific talks discussing particular political topics such as "Police/

State/Prison" and "Oakland schools are being shut down! What are we gonna do?" Notably, the very first demonstration out of Occupy Oakland was an anti-capitalist march where over 200 people marched through downtown Oakland chanting, "1, 2, 3, 4 – organize for social war!"—among other things. This march attracted a diversity of people. Over 200 rebels chanting these radical slogans chill you to the bone. The following night, a queer march left from the occupation and went to Hella Gay, a queer dance party in Oakland. Upon reaching the club, marchers demanded to be let in for free and the venue acquiesced.

Incessantly, Occupy Oakland startles and excites many with its implicit radicalism. On Saturday, October 15th, MoveOn.org (a "grassroots" organizational front for the democratic party) organized a march and demonstration in conjunction with the national occupation movement's day of action. They attempted to exploit Occupy Oakland when they announced that it would draw to a close in Oscar Grant Plaza with a series of speakers including several mayors from around the Bay. Upon this announcement, a proposal was brought to the GA: a refusal of special treatment and/or endorsement of politicians and political parties/organizations. It passed like a maple leaf in the wind. After negotiations with MoveOn, and based on our own policies, no politicians would be allowed to speak on behalf of their party at that event and thereafter. Surprisingly, MoveOn eventually complied with our demand. When someone broke the agreement (rather, they took advantage of a loophole) and began reading a statement from Congresswomen Barbara Lee, someone from the occupation promptly told those from MoveOn how they broke the agreement and how the democratic party is "counter-revolutionary." At this point those who were brought to the occupation via MoveOn's march begun to disperse and explore the camp (perhaps because it was far more interesting than hearing all of the old boring democratic rhetoric that has been said time and time before).

Analysis

Over the past few years, Oakland has demonstrated its uniqueness in social conflict and protest. This distinctiveness isn't anything new; rather, it has just reemerged. To elaborate, a comrade wrote in "The Occupation Movement: On Greed, Unity & Violence":

Oakland is currently under occupation by the police. The form of this occupation varies; the situation is much different in Temescal than in deep East Oakland. We live in a militarized space. Whether it's police executions of Black youth, police harassment of sex workers along International Boulevard, or the city council's racist legislation in the form of anti-loitering laws, gang injunctions or the suggested youth curfew, this paramilitary occupation is a project of local government to pacify and contain the city so capitalism can go about its business uninterrupted.

But Oakland doesn't just have a violent, repressive contemporary situation; we have a vibrant history of struggle and resistance. From the 1946 General Strike to the formation of the Black Panther party in 1966 to the anti-police rebellion following the execution of Oscar Grant in 2009, Oakland has long been a city full of people who refuse to sit down and shut up. Despite every attempt by the state to kill that spirit, it lives on and will be out in full force over the coming days.

Occupy Oakland reflects Oakland's radical history. Because of this, an overwhelming anti-police sentiment guides the conversation about, and the reaction to, police. The GA has refused to comply with the city's demand that we apply for permits (which we were told would automatically be accepted without charge). This lawlessness has played out when police have attempted to enter the occupation. On several occasions, many surrounded the approaching police and in unison began chanting "Pigs go home!" and "Cops get out!" When the police officers realize their lack of power, they have no other option but to leave. This tactic of resisting the presence of the police started spontaneously, but has since been the usual response. We hope that other occupations will look to this practice and realize its significance.

Despite the brilliant infrastructure, there have been problems. Some extremely important committees have been slow to respond to the growing needs of the camp. Some of this is due to the transient nature of the groups, where people come in and voice their disagreements and then take off, leaving the work to the people in the committees who are already stressing about getting things done. Although there is "beauty in the chaos," it has become evident that to some degree, disciplined organization is imperative. Ideally, a harmony of chaos and composition will surface.

One of the biggest problems emerging in the camp are specific dynamics of racism, sexism, and other oppressive habits. In the first several days, excitement and festivity ruled the commune. This slowly transitioned into over-frequent dance parties that spilled late into the nights. Excessive drinking, unwanted sexual advances, harassment, and fights persist daily. This behavior, it should be mentioned, also exists without the presence of alcohol, but takes on a different form with alcohol. [NOTE: we are beginning to see reports of delinquency, drug use, and violence in the media that may begin to be duplicated in other media outlets. This could be the beginning of a campaign against the occupation. We would like to mention that these problems exist everywhere, as this occupation is to some extent a microcosm of Oakland, and until there is incentive to unlearn these behaviors, "peace" cannot be actualized. Again, this is not to say that they are not serious or that they are tolerated.¹] All of this has led to concern about the camp developing a Burning Man or Woodstock environment, devoid of almost all political content (oth-

er than the politics of culture, sub-culture and counter-culture which have a very limited potential and ultimately alienate people from one another). What is desired is a complete transformation (or destruction) of society, not just a cultural one. These dynamics are not unique to the occupation, but rather happen every day in Oakland and everywhere—they are symptomatic of a society that has broken all of us. In reaction, a mediation team has been set up to de-escalate situations and allow for dialogue between those in conflict, resulting in much benefit. Despite all of this, Occupy Oakland is magnificently self-regulating—when a fool's gotta go, a fool's gotta go. This occupation is constantly growing and expanding—becoming more and more dissident by the day, pushing us all to our limits. Let's see what else this occupation movement has to offer...

Beneath the internal conflicts lies an aching desire to externalize such wrath. Hundreds upon hundreds of people simply talk and mingle, discussing politics and life. You can almost taste a collective hostility towards each individual's own socialization. People are learning how to be human beings without the mediation of capitalism and its apparatuses. Whereas alienation and isolation rule our every interaction, it has been replaced by the crisis of remembering the last ten names of those you've met in the past hour. The war on alienation and isolation is fought through complex and voluntary social experiments, ultimately revealing the gaps of power relations that are facilitated, in part, by capitalism.

Another pressing issue is that of expansion. The plaza now hosts somewhere around 150 tents on the grassy areas alone. Sunday night, 30 minutes before the GA, a letter from the city was delivered en masse to people in the occupation. It detailed the city's intolerance of many things—among them, camping in the concrete area of the plaza. Logistically, moving to the concrete would be the most immediate remedy to the growing population density of the occupation. Are we to push that boundary? Already, a small encampment has manifested in Snow Park, which is a few blocks from Oscar Grant Plaza. Almost all of the grass is taken up at this point and if we are to push the boundaries with the city, we must be prepared to defend the spaces we select to house us next. Expansion onto the concrete would only be a temporary solution. If we are to expand to another location, we must nurture the crisis of the occupation—population density—and encourage many more from the street find a home in the occupation movement and seduce others out of their homes to do the same. [NOTE: Those occupying Snow Park stand their ground against police who tell them they are not allowed to be there due to a school being nearby. Since then, to some extent, the school and its students have announced support of the occupations in OG Plaza and Snow Park. However, Snow Park is in need of a greater occupying force. As of tonight, we are unsure whether that extension of the occupation can be held through the following day.]

The recent letter from the City gives light to their attempt to stifle our capacity. With good reason, they are afraid. It is likely the occupation will attempt a diversity of expansion strategies through the coming week. Undercover police are naive to think we haven't noticed their technique of dividing the occupation on already present tensions—some COINTELPRO type shit. The camp is vulnerable—bearing wide-open entrances in almost every direction. Do we look to barricades? Do we take the barricades into the street? These are questions that will be answered in either a collective, intuitive and organic response to police eviction or in much planning and preparation. One thing is certain: the people of Occupy Oakland are well prepared to defend their new home.

Occupy Oakland (as you may have gathered at this point) is unlike any other. We begin to appreciate this when we realize our potential and current condition—that we are a force to be reckoned with, a danger to the capitalist functioning of Oakland. Police attack is no more imminent than the all too likely opportunities of widespread insurgency. Strategizing in accordance to our immediate geography's potential as well as its weaknesses is key. Unions, schools, libraries and more, they are already our allies, as we are theirs. An overpowering confidence saturates the air of Oscar Grant Plaza—a threat and a promise.

Occupy Everything! Demand Nothing!

—Autonomous individuals among the liberated
space known as Oscar Grant Plaza

Dear Occupy Oakland: A letter on strategy

by ingirum

It seems clear that the police do plan to move in on the occupation and to ultimately evict those who now occupy Oscar Grant Plaza. This letter suggests a possible tactic to use in place of the climactic and dramatic scenario that is sure to arise.

Let us first identify what the occupation is. The occupation is a good tactic that has been used to take over space and make it common to all those who wish to participate in the appropriation of a certain geographic area. It has had its victories.

It is no small task to set a new precedent for our era of interaction with the state. The mere fact that such an amazingly diverse group of people can come together and share space with all of the joy, playfulness and

even hostilities that Occupy Oakland has dealt with, is a victory in itself.

The occupation is also a spectacle. This is not the beginning of an insurrection, it is a laboratory where different forms of organizing, decision-making and interaction can be tried, tested, and eventually used or not used. It is a rare moment when space is actually held and used to this end.

What Occupy Oakland is not is a home.

What makes the radical contingent of those who inhabit Occupy Oakland so threatening to the social machine is that they have pushed for a refusal of demands, a refusal to negotiate and ultimately a negation of the social relationship that allows the radical contingent to be perceived as being on the same plane as the state.

It is the imperceptible nature of the demandless occupation that makes it toxic towards the current social relationship.

In the refusal to negotiate must also be the refusal to interact in conflict based upon the state's understanding of the form. This is not the time to stand ground, because what makes us so threatening is that it is not their ground that we want. We do not care about their park, about their city hall. The most incendiary move at this point would be to wait for the police to amass, and then to leave in style.

If you fight them militarily you will lose, there is no doubt about that.

It is not a military war we are involved after all, is it?

This is civil war.

What makes our amoral position so useful is that we value nothing. We do not have a front line to attack, because all that can be considered valuable, be it mystified property or luxury cars can be turned into our weapons, and then abandoned on a moment's notice. Their Mercedes can quickly become our \$80,000 barricade, and we do not blink an eye.

The occupation was not worthless, it was useful, it has been used.

Discard their real estate and find the appropriate moment to skillfully exit.

It is the only way in which this can be called a victory.

After all, all they'll have is their rat-infested park back.

Letter from an Anonymous Friend after the Attack on the Oakland Commune

by anonymous

We knew that it would happen.

If you live with others in a public space in a city, if you set up shelters in which people can live without owning or renting property, if you

set up an outdoor kitchen with which to feed anyone who wants food, if you establish a free school at which anyone can read and learn, if you set up bathroom facilities provided by organizations supporting your activities, if you show solidarity with struggles against police killings and police violence against people of color, against the poor, against women, against queers and transpeople, if you state your determination to defend the space you have created against the threat of eviction, in short—if you work toward organizing ways of living and relating to one another that might challenge those mandated by capitalism, your efforts will eventually be crushed by the police.

We know this because we know that the question is not whether the police are “part of the 99%,” on the basis of their salary. What is called the 99% is ruptured by many divisions. Among these is the dividing line that runs between those who want to change the world and those who uphold the status quo, between those who work to undermine the brutal order of property and those who work to enforce it. For those who transform the world by challenging capitalist economic and social relations, working to displace and overturn them, the police are one among many enemies. We know it is their job to destroy what we create, and it is no surprise when they do that.

At 4:30am on October 25, Occupy Oakland was raided by more than five hundred police from multiple counties. From a comrade who was there:

At the time of this writing I am filled with rage. Occupy Oakland, on its second week, was raided by an overwhelming force of approximately 800 police in riot gear. I was there, ready to defend when police from all entrances to Oscar Grant Plaza rushed in with sticks and began beating people. Their tactics were simple but effective: rush in with overwhelming numbers and push out those that intended to stay for a fight, slowly crush resilience of those who took up the tactic of civil disobedience by linking arms and protecting the camp. They beat people with sticks, shot people with rubber bullets, obliterated ear-drums with flash-bang grenades, and choked them with tear gas.

What wrenches on these mornings (so many, for so many of us), what presses out on our temples, constricts our chests, fills our throats so that it can't be properly spoken is a contradiction: we knew that this would happen; we can't accept that it has happened. We know, insofar as we struggle, that our struggle will be repressed. But no amount of knowing can fortify against the sickness that we feel every time an army of cops rolls in to brutalize and arrest our friends and comrades.

All the tents are down, pots are strewn everywhere, the library scattered, the garden stomped, the Commune is in ruins. “Though it fed thousands for free and welcomed the city's desperately poor homeless population, this public park can hopefully now return to its natural state of being

completely empty.” Dozens of smug assholes and their batons surround the emptiness they prefer to the fragile possibilities that were created, getting paid overtime to chat across their barricades with idiots who think the cops are on the same side as those they just attacked and threw in jail, while others hurl insults against dead ears.

The Oakland Commune matters not because it could have lasted any longer than it did and not because of how many cops it took to tear it down. It matters because for as long as it was there it was evidence that the impossible resides in the heart of our cities, amongst those who already live together on the streets, amongst those willing to live with them. It isn't that this is “Round One” of a longer fight. It isn't that those who lived and worked there all day and all night “will be back.” It isn't that this is “just the beginning.” It isn't just the beginning because it's been going on for a long time, because the history of struggle is the history of capitalism. Because the history of capitalism, in its unfolding, in the movement of its contradiction with itself, is the coming into being of communism. If we won't be back in Oscar Grant Plaza, if the Oakland Commune won't be there as it was for two weeks, that is because we are everywhere, and the substance of history articulates itself unceasingly across the movement of what it creates. That is not an abstraction; it's a letter of solidarity from Cairo, arriving the afternoon before the tents are torn down:

An entire generation across the globe has grown up realizing, rationally and emotionally, that we have no future in the current order of things... So we stand with you not just in your attempts to bring down the old but to experiment with the new.

Our true loves are everywhere, a friend replies. We won't be back because we're not going anywhere.

For a long time we have dreamed the end of capitalism. The twenty-first century is the time in which that dream will come true. We are waking up, and we are learning again, among one another, how to use our tired bodies. This is what it feels like to wake in a tent on the grass of Oscar Grant Plaza. Comrades in Baltimore write, “this occupation is inevitable, but we have to make it.” Nothing of that dialectic can be displaced by the police.

“The revolution” does not exist. It is not a horizon to be struggled toward, and no movement in the history of struggles has “failed.” The real movement is the movement of bodies, working on what exists. If the occupation is inevitable, it is because it is what is happening everywhere, now. If we have to make it, it is because our bodies are the material collective that it is. If it is repressed, its inevitability remains. The twenty-first century is the time of that inevitability, because the limit it surges against, repression, is also the dynamic of its movement: in its death throes, the openly repressive forces of capital are the manifestation of its own weakness, returning people to the destitution from which they revolt. “This

occupation is inevitable, but we have to make it," because in a time of mass debt, of mass foreclosures, of ruthless austerity, of sprawling slums, there will be no alternative to the material necessity of taking what we need and using it amongst ourselves.

None of this makes a difference this morning, while the enemy guards, its ruins and our comrades are in jail. But if we knew this morning would come, we also know that the clocks have already stopped, that the real movement continues, and that time is on our side.

1. January 13, 2012 - When [police chief] Jordan received an update that crime was actually down 19 percent in the last week of October, he wrote an email to one of Mayor Jean Quan's advisers.

"Not sure how you want to share this good news," he wrote. "It may be counter to our statement that the Occupy movement is negatively impacting crime in Oakland."

From <http://www.ktvu.com/news>

The Oakland General Strike

Statement on the Occupation of the former Traveler's Aid Society at 520 16th Street

by some friends of Occupy Oakland

Last night, after one of the most remarkable days of resistance in recent history, some of us within Occupy Oakland took an important next step: we extended the occupation to an unused building near Oscar Grant Plaza. We did this, first off, in order to secure the shelter and space from which to continue organizing during the coming winter months. But we also hoped to use the national spotlight on Oakland to encourage other occupations in colder, more northern climates to consider claiming spaces and moving indoors in order to resist the repressive force of the

weather, after so bravely resisting the police and the political establishment. We want this movement to be here next spring, and claiming unused space is, in our view, the most plausible way forward for us at this point. We had plans to start using this space today as a library, a place for classes and workshops, as well as a dormitory for those with health conditions. We had already begun to move in books from the library.

The building we chose was perfect: not only was it a mere block from Oscar Grant Plaza, but it formerly housed the Traveler's Aid Society, a not-for-profit organization that provided services to the homeless but, due to cuts in government funding, lost its lease. Given that Occupy Oakland feeds hundreds of people every day, provides them with places to sleep and equipment for doing so, and involves them in the maintenance of the camp (if they so choose), we believe this makes us the ideal tenants of this space, despite our unwillingness to pay for it. None of this should be that surprising, in any case, as talk of such an action has percolated through the movement for months now, and the Oakland GA recently voted to support such occupations materially and otherwise. *Business Insider* discussed this decision in an article entitled "The Inevitable Has Happened."

We are well aware that such an action is illegal, just as it is illegal to camp, cook, and live in Oscar Grant Plaza as we have done. We are aware that property law means that what we did last night counts as trespassing, if not burglary. Still, the ferocity of the police response surprised us. Once again, they mobilized hundreds of police officers, armed to the hilt with bean bag guns, tear gas and flashbang grenades, despite the fact that these so-called "less-than-lethal" weapons nearly killed someone last week. The city spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to protect one landlord's right to earn a few thousand every month. Why is this? Whereas the blockade of the port—an action which caused millions of dollars of losses—met with no resistance, the attempt to take one single building, a building that was unused, met with the most brutal and swift response.

The answer: they fear this logical next step from the movement more than anything else. They fear it because they know how much appeal it will have. All across the US thousands upon thousands of commercial and residential spaces sit empty while more and more people are forced to sleep in the streets, or driven deep into poverty while trying to pay their rent despite unemployment or poverty wages. We understand that capitalism is a system that has no care for human needs. It is a system that produces hundreds of thousands of empty houses at the same time as it produces hundreds of thousands of homeless people. The police are the line between these people and these houses. They say: *you can stay in your rat-infested park. You can camp out here as long as we want. But the moment that you threaten property rights, we will come at you with everything we have.*

It is no longer clear who calls the shots in Oakland. At the same time as

OPD and the Alameda County Sheriffs were suiting up and getting ready to smash heads and gas people on 16th St., Mayor Quan was issuing a statement that she wished to speak to us about returning the building to the Traveler's Aid Society. It is clear that the enmity between the Mayor and the Police has grown so intense that the police force is now an autonomous force, making its own decisions, irrespective of City Hall. This gives us even less reason to listen to them or respect their authority now.

We understand that much of the conversation about last night will revolve around the question of violence (though mostly they mean violence to "property," which is somehow strangely equated with harming human beings). We know that there are many perspectives on these questions, and we should make the space for talking about them. But let us say this to the cops and to the mayor: things got "violent" after the police came. The riot cops marched down Telegraph and then the barricades were lit on fire. The riot cops marched down Telegraph and then bottles got thrown and windows smashed. The riot cops marched down Telegraph and graffiti appeared everywhere.

The point here is obvious: if the police don't want violence, they should stay the hell away.

Blockading the Port Is Only the First of Many Last Resorts

by Society of Enemies

By any reasonable measure, the November 2 general strike was a grand success. The day was certainly the most significant moment of the season of Occupy, and signaled the possibility of a new direction for the occupations, away from vague, self-reflexive democratism and toward open confrontation with the state and capital. At a local level, as a response to the first raid on the encampment, the strike showed Occupy Oakland capable of expanding while defending itself, organizing its own maintenance while at the same time directly attacking its enemy. This is what it means to refer to the encampment and its participants as the Oakland Commune, even if a true commune is only possible on the other side of insurrection.

Looking over the day's events it is clear that without the shutdown of the port this would not have been a general strike at all but rather a particularly powerful day of action. The tens of thousands of people who marched into the port surpassed all estimates. Neighbors, co-workers, relatives—one saw all kinds of people there who had never expressed

any interest in such events, whose political activity had been limited to some angry mumbling at the television set and a yearly or bi-yearly trip to the voting booth. It was as if the entire population of the Bay Area had been transferred to some weird industrial purgatory, there to wander and wonder and encounter itself and its powers.

Now we have the chance to blockade the ports once again, on December 12, in conjunction with occupiers up and down the west coast. Already Los Angeles, San Diego, Portland, Tacoma, Seattle, Vancouver, and even Anchorage have agreed to blockade their respective ports. These are exciting events, for sure. Now that many of the major encampments in the US have been cleared, we need an event like this to keep the sequence going through the winter months and provide a reference point for future manifestations. For reasons that will be explained shortly, we believe that actions like this—direct actions that focus on the circulation of capital, rather than its production—will play a major role in the inevitable uprisings and insurrections of the coming years, at least in the postindustrial countries. The confluence of this tactic with the ongoing attempts to directly expropriate abandoned buildings could transform the Occupy movement into something truly threatening to the present order. But in our view, many comrades continue thinking about these actions as essentially continuous with the class struggle of the twentieth century and the industrial age, never adequately remarking on how little the postindustrial Oakland General Strike of 2011 resembles the Oakland General Strike of 1946.

The placeless place of circulation

The shipping industry (and shipping in general) has long been one of the most important sectors for capital, and one of the privileged sites of class struggle. Capitalism essentially develops and spreads within the matrix of the great mercantile, colonialist, and imperial experiments of post-medieval Europe, all of which are predicated upon sailors, ships, and trade routes. But by the time that capitalism comes into view as a new social system in the 19th century the most important engine of accumulation is no longer trade itself, but the introduction of labor-saving technology into the production process. Superprofits achieved through mechanized production are funneled back into the development and purchase of new production machinery, not to mention the vast, infernal infrastructural projects this industrial system requires: mines and railways, highways and electricity plants, vast urban pours of wood, stone, concrete and metal as the metropolitan centers spread and absorb people expelled from the countryside. But by the 1970s, just as various futurologists and social forecasters were predicting a completely automated society of superabundance, the technologically-driven accumulation cycle was com-

ing to an end. Labor-saving technology is double-edged for capital. Even though it temporarily allows for the extraction of enormous profits, the fact that capital treats laboring bodies as the foundation of its own wealth means that over the long term the expulsion of more and more people from the workplace eventually comes to undermine capital's own conditions of survival. Of course, one of the starkest horrors of capitalism is that capital's conditions of survival are also our own, no matter our hatred. Directly or indirectly, each of us is dependent on the wage and the market for our survival.

From the 1970s on, one of capital's responses to the reproduction crisis has been to shift its focus from the sites of production to the (non) sites of circulation. Once the introduction of labor-saving technology into the production of goods no longer generated substantial profits, firms focused on speeding up and more cheaply circulating both commodity capital (in the case of the shipping, wholesaling and retailing industries) and money capital (in the case of banking). Such restructuring is a big part of what is often termed "neoliberalism" or "globalization," modes of accumulation in which the shipping industry and globally-distributed supply chains assume a new primacy. The invention of the shipping container and container ship is analogous, in this way, to the reinvention of derivatives trading in the 1970s—a technical intervention which multiplies the volume of capital in circulation several times over.

This is why the general strike on November 2 appeared as it did, not as the voluntary withdrawal of labor from large factories and the like (where so few of us work), but rather as masses of people who work in unorganized workplaces, who are unemployed or underemployed or precarious in one way or another, converging on the chokepoints of capital flow. Where workers in large workplaces—the ports, for instance—did withdraw their labor, this occurred after the fact of an intervention by an extrinsic proletariat. In such a situation, the flying picket, originally developed as a secondary instrument of solidarity, becomes the primary mechanism of the strike. If postindustrial capital focuses on the seaways and highways, the streets and the mall, focuses on accelerating and volatilizing its networked flows, then its antagonists will also need to be mobile and multiple. In November 2010, during the French general strike, we saw how a couple dozen flying pickets could effectively bring a city of millions to a halt. Such mobile blockades are the technique for an age and place in which production has been offshored, an age in which most of us work, if we work at all, in small and unorganized workplaces devoted to the transport, distribution, administration and sale of goods produced elsewhere.

Like the financial system which is its warped mirror, the present system for circulating commodities is incredibly brittle. Complex, computerized supply-chains based on just-in-time production models have reduced

the need for warehouses and depots. This often means that workplaces and retailers have less than a day's reserves on hand, and rely on the constant arrival of new shipments. A few tactical interventions—at major ports, for instance—could bring an entire economy to its knees. This is obviously a problem for us as much as it is a problem for capital: the brittleness of the economy means that while it is easy for us to blockade the instruments of our own oppression, nowhere do we have access to the things that could replace it. There are few workplaces that we can take over and use to begin producing the things we need. We could take over the port and continue to import the things we need, but it's nearly impossible to imagine doing so without maintaining the violence of the economy at present.

Power to the vagabonds and therefore to no class

This brings us to a very important aspect of the present moment, already touched on above. The subject of the "strike" is no longer the working class as such, though workers are always involved. The strike no longer appears only as the voluntary withdrawal of labor from a workplace by those employed there, but as the blockade, suppression (or even sabotage or destruction) of that workplace by proletarians who are alien to it, and perhaps to wage-labor entirely. We need to jettison our ideas about the "proper" subjects of the strike or class struggle. Though it is always preferable and sometimes necessary to gain workers' support in order to shut down a particular workplace, it is not absolutely necessary, and we must admit that ideas about who has the right to strike or blockade a particular workplace are simply extensions of the law of property. If the historical general strikes involved the coordinated striking of large workplaces, around which "the masses," including students, women who did unwaged housework, the unemployed and lumpenproletarians of the informal sector eventually gathered to form a generalized offensive against capital, here the causality is precisely reversed. It has gone curiously unremarked that the encampments of the Occupy movement, while claiming themselves the essential manifestations of some vast hypermajority—the 99%—are formed in large part from the ranks of the homeless and the jobless, even if a more demographically diverse group fills them out during rallies and marches. That a group like this—with few ties to organized labor—could call for and successfully organize a General Strike should tell us something about how different the world of 2011 is from that of 1946.

We find it helpful here to distinguish between the working class and the proletariat. Though many of us are both members of the working class and proletarians, these terms do not necessarily mean the same thing. The working class is defined by work, by the fact that it works. It is defined by the wage, on the one hand, and its capacity to produce value on the other. But the proletariat is defined by propertylessness. In Rome,

proletarius was the name for someone who owned no property, save his own offspring and himself, and frequently sold both into slavery as a result. Proletarians are those who are "without reserves" and therefore dependent upon the wage and capital. They have "nothing to sell except their own skins." The important point to make here is that not all proletarians are working-class, since not all proletarians work for a wage. As the crisis of capitalism intensifies, such "wageless life" becomes more and more the norm. Of course, exploitation requires dispossession. These two terms name inextricable aspects of the conditions of life under the domination of capital, and even the proletarians who don't work depend upon those who do, in direct and indirect ways.

The point, for us, is that certain struggles tend to emphasize one or the other of these aspects. Struggles that emphasize the fact of exploitation—its unfairness, its brutality—and seek to ameliorate the terms and character of labor in capitalism, take the working-class as their subject. On the other hand, struggles that emphasize dispossession and the very fact of class, seeking to abolish the difference between those who are "without reserves" and everyone else, take as their subject the proletariat as such. Because of the restructuring of the economy and weakness of labor, present-day struggles have no choice but to become proletarian struggles, however much they dress themselves up in the language and weaponry of a defeated working class. This is why the Occupy movement, even as much as it mumbles vaguely about the weakest of redistributive measures—taxing the banks, for instance—refuses to issue any demands. There are no demands to make. Worker's struggles these days tend to have few objects besides the preservation of jobs or the preservation of union contracts. They struggle to preserve the right to be exploited, the right to a wage, rather than for any expansion of pay and benefits. The power of the Occupy movement so far—despite the weakness of its discourse—is that it points in the direction of a proletarian struggle in which, instead of vainly petitioning the assorted rulers of the world, people begin to directly take the things they need to survive. Rather than an attempt to readjust the balance between the 99% and the 1%, such a struggle might be about people directly providing for themselves at a time when capital and the state can no longer provide for them.

Twilight of the unions

This brings us finally to the question of the unions, the ILWU in particular, its locals, and the rank-and-file port workers. Port workers in the US have an enormously radical history, participating in or instigating some of the most significant episodes in US labor history, from the Seattle General strike of 1919, to the battles on the San Francisco waterfront in 1934 and the sympathy strikes that spread up and down the coast. The

ferocious actions by port workers in Longview, Washington—attempting to fight off the incursion of non-ILWU grain exporter EGT—recall this history in vivid detail. Wildcatting, blockading trains and emptying them of their cargo, fighting off the cops brought in to restore the orderly loading and unloading of cargo—the port workers in Longview remind us of the best of the labor movement, its unmediated conflict with capital. We expect to see more actions like this in this new era of austerity, unemployment and riot. Still, our excitement at the courage of Longview workers should not blind us to the place of this struggle in the current crisis of capitalism. We do not think that these actions point to some revitalization of radical unionism, but rather indicate a real crisis in the established forms of class struggle. They point to a moment in which even the most meager demands become impossible to win. These conditions of impossibility will have a radicalizing effect, but not in the way that many expect it to. They will bring us allies in the workers at Longview and elsewhere but not in the way many expect.

Though they employ the tactics of the historical workers' movement at its most radical, the content of the Longview struggle is quite different: they are not fighting for any expansions of pay or benefits, or attempting to unionize new workplaces, but merely to preserve their union's jurisdictional rights. It is a defensive struggle, in the same way that the Madison, Wisconsin capitol occupation was a defensive struggle—a fight undertaken to preserve the dubious legally-enshrined rights to collectively bargain. These are fights for the survival of unions as such, in an era in which unions have no real wind in their sails, at their best seeking to keep a floor below falling wages, at their worst collaborating with the bosses to quietly sell out workers. This is not to malign the actions of the workers themselves or their participation in such struggles—one can no more choose to participate in a fight for one's survival than one can choose to breathe, and sometimes such actions can become explosive trigger points that ignite a generalized antagonism. But we should be honest about the limits of these fights, and seek to push beyond them where possible. Too often it seems as if we rely on a sentimental workerism, acting as if our alliance with port workers will restore to us some lost authenticity.

Let's remember that, in the present instance, the initiative is coming from outside the port and from outside the workers' movement as such, even though it involves workers and unions. For the most part, the initiative here has come from a motley band of people who work in non-unionized workplaces, or (for good reason) hate their unions, or work part-time or have no jobs at all. Alliances are important. We should be out there talking to truck drivers and crane operators and explaining the blockade, but that does not mean blindly following the recommendations of ILWU Local 10. For instance, we have been told time and again

that, in order to blockade the port, we need to go to each and every berth spreading out thousands of people into several groups over a distance of a few miles. This is because, under the system that ILWU has worked out with the employers' association, only a picket line at the gates to the port itself will allow the local arbitrator to rule conditions at the port unsafe and therefore provide the workers with legal protection against unpermitted work action. In such a situation we are not really blockading the port. We are participating in a two-act play, a piece of legal theater, performed for the benefit of the arbitrator.

If this arbitration game is the only way we can avoid violent conflict with the port workers, then perhaps this is the way things have to be for the time being. But we find it more than depressing how little reflection there has been about this strategy, how little criticism of it, and how many people seem to reflexively accept the necessity of going through these motions. There are two reasons why this charade is problematic. For one, we must remember that the insertion of state-sanctioned forms of mediation and arbitration into the class struggle, the domestication of the class struggle by a vast legal apparatus, is the chief mechanism by which unions have been made into the helpmeet of capital, their monopoly over labor power an ideal partner for capital's monopoly over the means of production. Under such a system, trade unions not only make sure that the system produces a working-class with sufficient purchasing power (something that is less and less possible these days, except by way of credit) but also ensure that class antagonism finds only state-approved outlets, passing through the bureaucratic filter of the union and its legal apparatus, which says when, how, and why workers can act in their own benefit. This is what "arbitration" means.

Secondly, examined from a tactical position, putting us blockaders in small, stationary groups spread out over miles of roads leaves us in a very poor position to resist a police assault. As many have noted, it would be much easier to blockade the port by closing off the two main entrances to the port area—at Third and Adeline and Maritime and West Grand. Thousands of people at each of these intersections could completely shut down all traffic into the port, and these groups could be much more easily reinforced and provided with provisions (it's easier to get food, water, and reinforcements to these locations). There is now substantial interest in extending the blockade past one shift, changing it from a temporary nuisance to something that might seriously affect the reproduction of capital in the Bay Area given the abovementioned reliance on just-in-time production. But doing so will likely bring a police attack. Therefore, in order to blockade the port with legal-theatrical means we sacrifice our ability—quite within reach—to blockade it materially. We allow ourselves to be deflected to a tactically-weak position on the plane of the symbolic.

The coming intensification of struggles both inside and outside the workplace will find no success in attempting to revitalize the moribund unions. Workers will need to participate in the same kinds of direct actions—occupations, blockades, sabotage—that have proven the highlights of the Occupy movement in the Bay Area. When tens of thousands of people marched to the port of Oakland on November 2nd in order to shut it down, by and large they did not do it to defend the jurisdiction of the ILWU, or to take a stand against union-busting (most people were, it appears, ignorant of these contexts). They did it because they hate the present-day economy, because they hate capitalism, and because the ports are one of the most obvious linkages in the web of misery in which we are all caught. Let's recognize this antagonism for what it is, and not dress it up in the costumes and ideologies of a bygone world.

December 2011

The Anti-Capitalist March and the Black Bloc

by anonymous

In addition to the marches called for by the General Assembly of the Oakland Commune, several marches were organized outside the formal processes at Oscar Grant Plaza. The organization of this, and other "unofficial" actions throughout the day is a point to be celebrated: the GA has consistently emphasized autonomous action and the strike has to be seen as a success in opening space for such autonomous activity. Most significant of these was the march that departed from the intersection of Broadway and Telegraph at 2pm. This march had been anonymously called as an *anti-capitalist march*. Both the poster promoting the march and the banner at its front boldly proclaimed "if we cannot live, we will not work; general strike!" An accompanying banner declared "this is class war." This messaging of the march matched its stated intention and its subsequent action: to shut down those businesses and banks that remained open despite the strike (a promise it would make good on).

The small concrete triangle at the intersection of Broadway and Telegraph has great significance in the recent and long-past history of the struggle against class society in Oakland. In 1946, this intersection was the stage for the opening act of what would be the last General Strike in the United States before Wednesday. More recently, anarchists and anti-

from www.bayofrage.com

state communists in the Bay Area have used the intersection as a staging point for a series of three anti-capitalist processions in downtown Oakland. Named *antitacts*, these marches were a conscious attempt by anticapitalists to carve out (anti)political space in Oakland from which to begin a non-statist/non-reformist response to the financial crisis, in the absence of any foreseeable social movement in the States. Each one beginning at Broadway and Telegraph, these three marches took to the streets of Oakland and took as their objects certain focal points of hate in downtown: particularly the jail and certain highly visible banking institutions, but also the police whenever they came into conflict with demonstrators. To the extent that the intention of this sequence was to claim space for and build the offensive capacity of anti-capitalists in the Bay Area, the anti-capitalist march during the general strike proved this initial sequence to be a success. Noise demonstrations have returned to the jail several times through the course of the occupation, each communicating louder and more fiercely to the prisoners than the march before. However, it was specifically the downtown banks that attracted the ire of this particular march. The anti-capitalist march on November 2 must then be understood within a continuum in time; it must be seen as the emboldened and enraged continuation of a communizing thread that aims to collectively claim and determine space within the city of Oakland.

Any reading of recent anti-capitalist street endeavors in the Bay Area also offers another discreet lesson to the students of social struggle: *come materially prepared for the conflict you wish to see.* Following this analysis, one could read this march as highly conflictual based solely on the obvious material preparations that went into it. From the outside, one could see that the march was equipped with two rather large reinforced banners at the lead, scores of black flags on hefty sticks, dozens of motorcycle helmets, and the now familiar book shields. Add to this the anonymity afforded by hundreds wearing masks and matching colors, and there is no question that these demonstrators came to *set it off* that afternoon. The black-clad combatants at the front of this march would retroactively be referred to with much notoriety as the black bloc, though this is perhaps a backwards reading of the events of the day. Rather than a coherent subject group or organization that set out to offer a singular political position, this tactical formation should instead be thought of as a void, a subjective black hole where those who shared a similar disposition could be drawn to one another for protection and amplification. The so-called black bloc forcefully asserted a desirable situation for those who wanted to accomplish outlaw tasks despite repressive state apparatuses. Many will question the material physical implications or the contemporary efficacy of this particular form of making destroy. Yet regardless, it is important to emphasize that in the context of efforts to openly attack capitalist institutions in the face of a

general strike, these surveillance, concealing your identity and rolling with friends will continue to be the best tactic. Additionally, this effort further expands the intention of anti-capitalist space in the bay area, offering a way for social rebels to find one another and act in concert.

Toward this end, the anti-capitalist march was quite successful in heightening the conflict in the streets of Oakland during the general strike. To the pleasure of a great majority of the several hundred demonstrators, an active minority within the march set about attacking a series of targets: Chase Bank, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Whole Foods, the UC Office of the President. Each was beset by a stormcloud of hammers, paint-bombs, rocks, black flags, and fire-extinguishers loaded with paint. The choice of these targets seems intuitive to anyone attuned to the political climate of Oakland. The banks attacked are responsible for tens of thousands of foreclosures in Oakland alone, as well as the imprisonment of Oaklanders through the funding of private prisons and immigrant detention. Whole Foods, in addition to its daily capitalist machinations, had purportedly threatened its workers with repercussions if they'd chosen to strike. UCOP, besides being the headquarters for the disgusting cabal that rules the UC system, was rumored to be the day's base of operations for OPD and its cronies. Despite any number of reasons to destroy these places, the remarkable point of these attacks was that no justification was necessary. As each pane of glass fell to the floor and each ATM was put out of service, cheers would consistently erupt. Foregoing demands of their enemies, demonstrators made demands of one another, shouting *wreck the property of the one percent!* and *occupy/shut it down/Oakland doesn't fuck around!* In 1999, at the height of neoliberal prosperity, participants in the black bloc at the Seattle WTO summit issued a communique detailing the crimes of their targets. A dozen years and a worldwide crisis later, such an indictment would seem silly. Everyone hates these places.

This isn't to say that there wasn't conflict over these smashings. A small yet dedicated group of morons set about trying hopelessly to defend the property of their masters. In the name of non-violence, these thugish pacifists assaulted demonstrators and sought to re-establish peace on the streets. Thankfully, these people were as outnumbered and ill-coordinated as they are irrelevant. Chair fights and brawls ensued, but each skirmish concluded with the hooded ones and their comrades on top. The anti-capitalist march and the formations that comprised it, should also be looked to as a practical means of neutralizing and marginalizing such peace police as well as the plain-clothed officers who fight at their side.

Property destruction is not a new element for the Oakland Commune. In the weeks prior to the anti-capitalist march, the property of various police entities were attacked by communards several times: an anonymous communique claimed an attack on an unmarked police cruiser

parked near the plaza; the riot following the eviction of Oscar Grant Plaza took a few more cop cars as its victim; a march against police brutality, days later, smashed the windows at OPD's recruiting station next to City Hall. The destruction of the anti-capitalist march is set apart from these incidents for a handful of noteworthy reasons. Firstly, this demonstration marked the first large and coordinated act of collective destruction by the nascent Occupy movement. For a movement that fetishizes rewritten narratives of non-violence in the Arab Spring, this event served as an act of forced memory. Clandestine attacks, however lovely, have a tendency to be overlooked, whereas hundreds of masked individuals comprising a march that makes destroy cannot so easily be ignored. Secondly, this symphony of wreckage marked a turning point in the naughty behavior of the occupations. Rather than reacting to police provocations (and in doing so feeding certain narratives about what justifies destruction) the demonstrators of the anti-capitalist march determined to take the initiative and the offensive in smashing their enemies without waiting to be gassed and beaten first. In doing so, they concretely refused the pacifist ideology of victimization that characterizes the dominant discourse of policing and violence. Lastly, in specifically targeting the dreaded banks and corporations, so hated by the occupation movement, these attacks served to equip the movement with the teeth it had previously been missing. Not only do these people hate the banks, they'll actually make concrete attacks against the institutions they hate.

For enemies of capital, the shattering of bank windows and the sabotage of ATM machinery is beautiful in and of itself. It is intuitive that wrecking the property of financial institutions and forcing their closure is desirable. Some will argue that plate glass can be replaced and that any business closed by these actions would likely re-open the next day. This line of criticism isn't wrong on the face of it, but it often misses a certain set of implications at the center of chaotic episodes such as this. For those seeking to destroy class society, chaos itself must be seen as a primary strategy at our disposal. Theorists of social control often cite the broken window theory: a way to describe the phenomena where the introduction of disorder to an otherwise perfectly ordered environment begets and creates space for further disorder. At the heart of this theory of governance is the understanding that biopolitical government must treat any interruption of order as a threat to order as a totality. Put another way, this violence against the facades of these capitalist institutions is damaging to said institutions in a manner far more grave than the cost of a few windows or the lost labor time. Rather, this activity sends signals of disorder pulsing through the imperial system. In the way that a broken window indicates the instability of an environment, the concerted efforts to smash the windows of various banks signals a coming wave of violence

against the existent social order and its fiscal management. In the same way, attacks on police apparatuses signal the coming of far greater confrontations with the institution of policing. In a system as future-oriented and perception-driven as capitalism, this type of perceived disorder is catastrophic to investor confidence and to the key functions of the market. One need only look to the Eurozone to see the way in which anti-austerity revolt is intrinsically tied to the collapse of any illusion of security or confidence in the capitalist mode of production. Last year, black-clad haters in London smashed windows and attacked banks during a UK Uncut day of action. Months later, dispossessed people all over England set about burning police cars, attacking police stations, looting stores and generally expropriating a future they were totally excluded from. Though the professional activists of UK Uncut were quick to distance themselves from the rioting in London, nobody was fooled. The actions of vandals during the UK Uncut events demonstrated that the crisis had arrived; that disorder was about to unfold. The left bewailed the nihilistic elements that had "infiltrated" "their protest", either anarchists intent on destruction or hooligans out to get theirs. When in subsequent months, massive segments of London's underbelly rose up against their daily misery, they confirmed the fears of the bourgeoisie: the war was at their front door. In Greece and now in Italy, the violence of insurrectionaries in the streets corresponds to the chaos tearing through the countries' economies. In each of these events, the reality that there is no future comes tearing into the present. To quote comrades in Mexico, *chaos has returned, for those who thought she had died!*

One can already see this instability rending its way through Oakland. The business leaders of the city are all too aware of the implications of this sort of anti-capitalist activity in the East Bay. In the days following the strike, bureaucrats from Oakland's Chamber of Commerce went to City Hall to wring their hands about the previous day's destruction. According to them, three businesses had already withdrawn from contractual discussions about opening their doors in downtown Oakland. Another downtown business association, comprised primarily of banking institutions and corporate investors, bewailed the existence of the Commune. They asserted that the activities of the occupation and the strike were causing a great deal of damage to Oakland's business community and that many "local businesses" wouldn't survive another month of its existence. Clearly it is wrong to locate a month of anti-capitalist activity as the cause of financial crisis in the town, but there is a truth buried beneath their denial. These events in Oakland cannot be conceived of outside the context of the crisis as it unfolds. By the same logic, the activities of Oakland communards cannot be separated from the social conflict which propels them and of which they are but a small part. Almost two

years ago, social rebels in the Bay Area locked themselves into university buildings and ran blindly onto freeway overpasses declaring *OCCUPY EVERYTHING* and *WE ARE THE CRISIS*. The former slogan has become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Perhaps the latter is coming to fruition as well.

First Note: We Are Not Peaceful

Predictably, dogmatic pacifists responded to the vandalism and fighting by screaming *PEACEFUL PROTEST* and *NON-VIOLENCE*. The majority of demonstrators responded by taking up the chant, *WE ARE NOT PEACEFUL*. Since the strike, this particular conflict has played out in innumerable discussions. In each case, the meaning and efficacy of 'violence' is drawn out and debated *ad nauseum*. In the skirmishes between occupiers and university police that played out the following week on University of California campuses, this discourse surrounding violence escalated to pure absurdity. After UC police beat protesters on the UC Berkeley campus, police and university officials declared that such beatings were in fact not violent, while those students who linked arms in the face of police assault had themselves committed a violent act. Within the logic of power, force dealt out by police batons is not violent, while solidarity and care in the face of such force is violent. In the clearest way possible, this tragicomedy demonstrates precisely why it serves us to avoid discussions of non/violence. Violence will always be defined by Power. Those who resist will be labeled violent, regardless of their conduct. Likewise, brutality at the hands of those servants of Power will always be invisible.

There is an intelligence in this declaration against peace, but it cannot be reduced to this or that position on violence. Any attempt to define violence will always fall back upon abstraction. Any attempt to deploy such a definition is always already useless. Rather than being for or against violence, it behooves us to instead position ourselves against peace. In defining peace, let's avoid abstraction. We can name every miserable element of the daily function of capital as *peace*. Peace is our terrible jobs, our lack of a job, our workplace injuries, the time stolen from us and the labor we'll never get back. Peace is being thrown out of our homes and freezing on the streets. Peace is when police officers kill us in cold blood on train platforms and in our neighborhoods. Peace is racism, transphobia, misogyny, and anti-queer attacks. Peace is immigrant detention and prison slavery. When the apologists for class society declare their intentions to be peaceful, we understand it as their desire for the perpetuation of the day to day atrocities of life under capital. To raise one's fingers in a peace sign in the face of our armed enemies can only be seen as the greatest act of sycophancy. The tragically common chanting of *PEACEFUL PROTEST* should really be read as *NOTHING, NOTHING, MORE OF THE SAME!* It should be abundantly clear, then, that we are quite done with peace.

Reading peace as a euphemism for the horrors of the present, we must take as our task the immediate suspension of social peace.

The dominant discourse of peaceful protest bears a more troubling implication. Many who advocate for peaceful protest actually do so quite cynically. It isn't out of a desire for an absence of violence (as evidenced by their violent efforts to police others and enforce their peace). Rather, these peace-warriors operate on an assumption that so long as they are sufficiently meek, their cause will be just. Following from this, so long as they are passive, the inevitable violence enacted upon them by the police will appear illegitimate. This attempt at self-victimization, beyond being a foolish tactic, is a specific measure to invalidate resistance and to justify the operations of the police state. Any criticism of peace discourse must also be centered around an understanding that this language originates from, is advocated by, affirms the position of, and is in itself the State.

Rejecting the logic of social peace, we instead assert a different rationale: social war. Social war is our way of articulating the conflict of class war, but beyond the limitations of class. Rather than a working class seeking to affirm ourselves in our endless conflict with capital, we desire instead to abolish the class relation and all other relations that reproduce this social order. Social war is the discrete and ongoing struggle that runs through and negotiates our lived experience. As agents of chaos, we seek to expose this struggle, to make it overt. The issue is not violence or non-violence. What's at issue in these forays against capital is rather the social peace and its negation. To quote a comrade here in Oakland: *windows are shattered when we do nothing, so of course windows will be shattered when we do something; blood is shed when we do nothing, so of course blood will be shed when we do something. Social war is this process of doing something.* It is our concerted effort to rupture the ever-present deadline of the social peace. It is a series of *some things* which interrupt this nothing.

Second Note: We Are the Proletariat

In the course of the anti-capitalist march, like countless before it, many attempted to take up an all too familiar chant. *WE ARE THE 99%*! However this consensus was quickly disrupted. Anti-capitalist demonstrators quickly took up a different chant: *WE ARE THE PROLETARIAT!* From an anti-capitalist perspective, this is as important an intervention as a hammer through any financial or police apparatus. Firstly, the prevailing conception of the 99% must be recognized primarily as a means to control the activity of rebellious elements within a mass. Originally a reference to crazy distributions of wealth in the United States, the 1% has come to be an empty and abstract signifier for any dominant group. A relevant example of the application of this normalizing concept is the recent letter from the Oakland Police stating that *they too* are part of the

99%, and struggle daily against the criminal 1% comprised of thieves, rapists, and murderers. Another odious deployment of the concept is the way that lovers-of-bank-windows declare that anarchists are in fact the 1%, opposed to the peaceful 99% of protesters. Even more absurd is an assertion by police apologists that, in fact, 99% police officers are good people and that only 1% of them are sadistic sociopaths. Each of these examples points to the fact that wherever it is cited, the meme of the 99% is always synonymous with one undifferentiated mass or another. Cops and mayors are part of the 99%, anarchists and hooligans clearly are not. Acting as a normalizing theoretical concept, it always functions to otherize a deviant element and to inflict disciplinary measures on that element. Insofar as it is a reference to a mass—an abstract, peaceful, law-abiding mass—the 99% can only mean society itself.

We cannot, however, read this use of the concept of the 99% as a misappropriation of an otherwise correct term. From the beginning, the concept was totally useless to us. There is no such thing as the 99% and it can never serve to describe our experience of capitalism. The use of such a framework requires a flattening out of a whole range of power relationships that constitute the real structures of our lives. In my daily life, I have never met a member of this mythical 1%, nor do I analyze this 1% as some elusive enemy in my hand-to-hand conflict with capital. I have never been directly oppressed by a member of this 1%, but I have been oppressed and exploited at the hands of police officers, queerbashers, sexual assaulters, landlords and bosses. Each of these enemies can surely claim a place within this 99%, yet that does not in any way mitigate our structural enmity. The strength of certain anarchist critiques of capital is to be found in their location of diffuse and complex power relations as being the material sinews of this society. The world is not miserable simply because 1% of the population owns this or that amount of property. Misery is our condition specifically because the beloved 99% acts to reproduce this arrangement in and through their daily activity.

Fleeing from this miserable discourse, we assert that if the 99% percent is real, we are not of it. Rather we are the proletariat. Often misconstrued as being synonymous with the working class, there is in fact a discrete distinction in our efforts to define ourselves as such. Rather than referring to a positive conception of wage-laborers, our use of *proletarian* is meant to negatively describe those who have nothing to sell but their bodies and their labor. Having nothing, being the dispossessed, the proletariat is the diffuse and yet overwhelming body of people for whom there is no future within capitalism. Those who comprised this proletarian wrecking machine perform any number of functions in society—sex workers, baristas, medical study lab rat, petty thieves, servers, parents, the unemployed, graphic designers, students—and yet we are united spe-

cifically in our dispossession from our ability to reproduce ourselves in any dignified manner within the current social order. In a post-industrial economy, an attention to our economic position must be central to our efforts to destroy that economy. Where in the past the proletariat was primarily comprised of industrial labor, it was conceivable that workplace takeovers and seizure of the means of production made a certain amount of sense. For those of us with absolutely no relationship to the means of production, an entirely different set of strategies must be cultivated. Being a genuine outside to the vital reproduction of capital, our methodology must valorize the position of the Outside and must pioneer ways in which this outside may abolish the conditions of its exclusion.

For those trapped within the field of circulation, this will mean an interruption of that circulation and an expropriation of the products to which our labor adds value. For those engaged in informal and criminal practices, it will mean developing new methods of collective crime in order to loot back a future that isn't ours. For those excluded from economic structures, it will mean efforts to blockade and sabotage and destroy those structures, rather than any attempt to self-manage the architecture of our exclusion. For those who need homes, it will mean occupation. For those who hunger, it will mean looting. For those who cannot pay, it will mean auto-reduction. This is why we steal things, this is why we smash what can't be stolen, this is why we fight in the streets, this is why we make barricades and block the flows of society. As proletarians—as those who have nothing but one another—we must immediately set about creating the tactics to destroy the machinery that reproduces capitalism and at the same time forge means of struggle that will sustain us for conflicts to come.

Oakland's Third Attempt at a General Strike

by Hieronymus

*Oakland was still at the frontier, where the issues were sharper,
the corruption cruder, the enemy more easily identifiable...*

There was nothing abstract about the class struggle in Oakland.

—Jessica Mitford in *A Fine Old Conflict* (1977)

Oakland, California has historically suffered by being in the shadow of the golden allure of San Francisco across the Bay. From the Gold Rush to the Summer of Love to the Castro District as a Gay Mecca to the Dot Com Boom, San Francisco has been known around the world as a magnet for get-rich-quick dreamers, bohemians, and idealists. Berkeley, bordering Oakland on the north, was the birthplace of radical student agitation throughout the 1960s, beginning with the Free Speech Movement on the University of California campus in 1964. Oakland has always been a gritty industrial town, whose working class residents have ranged from reactionary whites in the Ku Klux Klan (in the 1920s) and Hells Angels (after World War II) to blacks at the cutting edge of civil rights struggles. Today it is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the US. Oakland was thrust onto the world stage in 1966 with the Black Panther Party and its militant self-defense of the African American community.

The radical history of the Bay Area is like a giant tapestry and its threads run through the whole region. Telegraph Avenue is 4.4 miles long; it merges into Broadway at Latham Square on the Oakland end, the exact location of the strike of women retail clerks at two department stores on either side that sparked the 1946 General Strike. That strike led to the Taft-Hartley Act (the 1947 federal law banning strike and solidarity tactics that make general strikes possible) six months later and was the beginning of Cold War politics that smothered class struggle for a generation. On the Berkeley side, Telegraph ends at Bancroft Way, right at Sproul Plaza on the UC Berkeley campus. Exactly eighteen years later, on the exact day that the Oakland General Strike was officially declared, December 3, the Cold War began to thaw in a mass arrest of over 800 (the largest mass arrest up to that time in California) at a Free Speech Movement sit-in at Sproul Hall. Several of those student protestors had been radicalized by participating in Civil Rights organizing in the Deep South for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); many had taught at Freedom Schools. For the rest of the sixties, UC Berkeley was shut down several

times due to mass student strikes and protests, including a month-long occupation of People's Park by the National Guard, sending waves outwards as the youth revolt spread throughout the world.

Even within Oakland, the tapestry has threads that are deeply rooted in previous periods of heightened class struggle, having cross-fertilized with other radical movements across the country, as well as the world. Being that San Francisco is at the tip of a narrow peninsula, surrounded on three sides by water, Oakland became the mainland terminus of the transcontinental railroad when it was completed in 1869. Trains ran along 7th Street through West Oakland to the Mole, a railroad wharf complex extending into the Bay where ferries completed the journey west to San Francisco. During the nationwide Pullman Railroad Strike of 1894, workers occupied the tracks around the Mole, disabled trains, and the whole community prepared to defend the strike. In subsequent years, landfill pushed further into the Bay and the site of the Mole is at the heart of the current Port of Oakland, the destination of our mass march and shutdown during the attempted General Strike on November 2.

The Black Panthers had a significant base in West Oakland, where massive railroad yards had been built at the western terminus of the transcontinental line. A thread, although tenuous, connected them with the legacy of African American railroad porters who settled there a generation before. The area became the West Coast organizing center for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a socialist union founded in 1925. The Brotherhood came out of the radical ferment of that era; in October 1919 Brotherhood founder A. Philip Randolph wrote in *The Messenger*, "The Negroes and the Industrial Workers of the World have interests not only in common, but interests that are identical." The IWW, whose members are called "Wobblies," is an interracial revolutionary union founded in 1905 in Chicago that adopted a class struggle approach to organizing through direct action and the strike weapon, striving towards class consciousness and the general strike, with the ultimate goal being the creation of a classless society.

The Wobbly spirit—best embodied in the opening lines of the IWW preamble: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common"—was pervasive in the Bay Area, especially in the class-unity solidarity actions, sympathy strikes that exploded into many mass strikes and in turn led to at least two full-blown general strikes.

You see, all of us were very actively involved and this makes all the difference in the world. Another thing, very few of these people were orthodox Commies because the basic tradition on the West Coast was IWW. The attitude was really an anarchistic attitude...

—Kenneth Rexroth, interviewed in
The San Francisco Poets (1969)

Oakland developed as an industrial center in tandem with San Francisco's rise as the financial hub of the West, especially after manufacturing was shifted to Oakland en masse after the 1906 Earthquake destroyed large parts of San Francisco.

The 1934 General Strike that shut down San Francisco crossed the Bay and completely paralyzed Oakland too. Here is a description:

An estimated 15,000 building tradesmen in the East Bay laid down their tools; now they were joined by some 27,000 workers affiliated with Central Labor Council local unions. The East Bay's street car system and the Key System ferries halted operations... Employers were especially upset when the Key System's employees' strike resolution called for the employees "and the workers of the community to take over the transportation system for working people." Businessmen, "frightened" by the prospect of "an actual class struggle," had asked Governor Merriam to send the National Guard into Oakland.

—David Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (185)

Oakland was seized by a general strike again in 1946, called a "Work Holiday" for its 54-hour official duration. It was the last citywide general strike during the mass strike wave after World War II (1946 had more strikes, 4,985, with more workers, 4,600,000, than any other year in US history—that also included six cities shut down by general strikes). It was in this period that deindustrialization really began, with the closing of wartime shipyards and crises in employment and housing whose effects are still felt today. Many blacks, as well as whites, had been recruited from Dust Bowl southern states to work at industrial jobs. When those well-paid unionized jobs began to disappear, as manufacturing was moved abroad, African Americans suffered the plight of "last hired, first fired," a tragic legacy that still haunts East Bay cities like Richmond and Oakland to this day.

Even though the attempt at a General Strike on November 2, 2011 was only partially successful, Oakland ranks with Philadelphia (1835 & 1910) and Chicago (1886 & 1894) as the only US cities to have had more than one general strike. The following is an account and analysis of the events and organizing that led to the call for Oakland General Strike III. But the spirit of the Work Holiday lived on in 2011. In 1946, the city was completely shut down by the class-conscious solidarity of 130,000 workers. Spontaneous strike support committees closed all businesses, except bars which were allowed to stay open if they only served beer and put their jukeboxes out on the sidewalk. As Stan Weir (in his essay "The Informal Work Group") put it: "People were literally dancing in the streets in anticipation of some kind of new day."

Occupy Oakland

The encampment at Oscar Grant Plaza started on October 10, 2011, following the international movement inspired by Occupy Wall Street that began in Zuccotti Park in New York on September 17, 2011. It immediately threw the city's politicians into crisis; most, opportunistically, sought to position themselves as sympathetic to the global movement. Oakland mayor Jean Quan, a former UC Berkeley 60s activist, got caught up in a Catch 22: she both supported Occupy Oakland and ordered its repression; she was conveniently in Washington DC when the attack occurred. Her weak support for former Chief of Police Batts' proposal for gang injunctions may have caused him to resign, one day after Occupy Oakland was founded, and has put her at odds with tough-on-crime members of the city council. The city government is rife with infighting; in this crisis of legitimacy, the police union has issued several absurd press statements attacking the mayor, as well as complimenting and attacking Occupy Oakland.

The predawn attack on October 25, with police from eighteen Northern California jurisdictions—from cities as far away as Vacaville, Fremont, and Palo Alto—was not only a militarized operation, it was unprovoked. The 600 cops, outfitted with riot gear and backed by armored vehicles and helicopters, moved in, preemptively shooting tear gas canisters and "beanbag" rounds and throwing flashbang grenades. The aftermath left Oscar Grant Plaza looking like a hurricane had hit it. The news of the intensity of the raid spread around the Bay Area like wildfire.

Our Resistance

In response, a spontaneous demonstration was called for 4pm that same day at the main branch of the library, six blocks down 14th Street. After speeches and news updates on arrestees, the crowd marched. It started with hundreds and by the time we got close to Broadway, at the center of town, we were nearly a thousand. As the march tried to go near the jail, we had our first skirmish with the cops when they arrested some protestors, were surrounded, then reinforcements came firing tear gas and beanbag projectiles, as well as throwing flashbang grenades. Our march was dispersed, but through street smarts we all regrouped and went to the intersection of 14th and Broadway, the epicenter of many of the events not only in the Occupy Movement, but also the location of protests and riots over the last two and a half years (over the killing of Oscar Grant by BART transit police on January 1, 2009).

Once back at the intersection, the cops repeatedly warned us to disperse because we were an "unlawful assembly," reading all the legal codes being violated. With very little provocation (reportedly a plastic water bottle was thrown), they shot the first massive barrage of tear gas

at us, sending the entire crowd running. Over the next several hours, they proceeded to shoot a total of four huge volleys of long-range tear gas canisters from their defensive perimeter of metal barricades around Oscar Grant Plaza. Each time we dispersed, we ran several blocks away to avoid the fumes, a few times marching a few blocks around the area, but always returning to 14th and Broadway. It was an incredibly inspiring victory in simply standing our ground, regardless of how much tear gas they shot at us. And we grew; what at first seemed like around a thousand had easily doubled by the end of the night.

It was during one tear gas volley that Iraq War veteran Scott Olsen had his skull fractured by a direct hit, and as others came to his rescue another cop threw a grenade directly at them. Again, videos of this went viral on the internet, helping to catalyze the growing anger into concrete actions. It would not be too much of a stretch to say that the tear gas organized the call for a general strike the next night. Oakland once again turned to class struggle as a weapon in response.

The General Assembly and Call for a General Strike

A General Assembly was called for 6pm at 14th and Broadway the next night, October 26. No cops were anywhere in sight, except a few underground in the BART station. Soon after, chainlink fences surrounding the plaza were being methodically pulled down and stacked in orderly piles. The crowd came, kept arriving, and this flow never seemed to stop. We held the General Assembly in the amphitheater. And as we began, even more people arrived. By its peak, there were about 3,000 people participating. The general strike proposal was made and we had breakout groups to discuss it. The approval procedure was modified consensus with 90% required to pass. 1607 people voted on the general strike proposal, despite many more people than that in the amphitheater; 1484 voted in favor of the resolution, 77 abstained and 46 voted against it, passing it with 96.9%.

Planning the General Strike

The next night, October 27, we had a meeting to plan for the general strike right before the General Assembly. During the strike preparation break-out, I joined the labor group (others were community outreach and education, which in turn broke into three groups: K-12, community college, and university). Some union "plecards" (bureaucratic officials) tried to give speeches, but could not adapt to the "people's mic" and were shouted down. (Developed at Occupy Wall Street to deal with the lack of amplified sound, the people's mic forces speakers to be concise and use short phrases, since each sentence is repeated by the audience for all to hear.) Other speakers made clear that this is merely a first attempt at a general strike, which when they occur are usually the culmination of a period of height-

ened class struggle. Using the rhetoric of an offensive counter-attack was a popular sentiment that came up naturally. We knew we were planting the seeds of an idea that would take further, more intense, struggles to truly bear fruit. The actions on November 2 would only be the opening salvo.

When it was my turn to speak at the labor break-out, I made clear that in the US only 11.9% of the working class is in unions. So for a general strike to succeed, it will take the involvement of the unorganized 88.1%. I mentioned that a fixation on the unions will be our undoing. I brought up the example of the unorganized immigrant, Spanish-speaking workers who fought the Sensenbrenner Act (H.R. 4437, which would make the undocumented felons and assisting them a misdemeanor). On May Day 2006 millions participated in a nationwide work stoppage and 16,500 striking *troqueros* (short-haul port truckers) effectively shut down 90% of the massive Los Angeles/Long Beach Port complex. It reached the intensity of a general strike and succeeded in forcing Congress to withdraw the proposed law. In Oakland, Spanish-speaking workers marched nearly a hundred blocks and 50,000 converged on downtown, in the biggest mass of striking workers since the '46 General Strike. The unorganized *troqueros* at the Port of Oakland had an eight-day wildcat in 2004 and have had other spontaneous strike actions since then.

Those *troqueros* are clearly the most militant working class sector in California, having a track record of combative direct action over the past decade. During the break-out, I also made the point that our literature needs to be translated to Spanish, and since the port of Oakland is about twelve blocks away we should do outreach there. I also mentioned that Oakland's Chinatown begins just four blocks from Oscar Grant Plaza and that there are still many garment sweatshops and other cottage industry factories nearby, so we should also get literature translated into Chinese and reach out to our fellow workers there. My point was that our actions need to go beyond the narrow definition of labor (usually connoting unions), and become a class movement.

To put this into practice, on Monday, October 31, three of us got to the Port of Oakland at 6am and handed out English and Spanish fliers to the *troqueros*, most of whom were supportive of our efforts and acknowledged that they are part of the 99%, but none of whom knew anything about the general strike call. This one-day fliering, with just a few of us, was insufficient for such a strategically important sector on the waterfront—especially as the march on the day of the General Strike encountered *troqueros* before anyone else when we made it to the Port.

Inside discussions during the build up to November 2, some of us talked about the six-day occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago in December 2008. We mentioned the general strikes that began on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe in 2009, spread to nearby

Martinique, and won all their demands. We talked about how the occupiers of Tahrir Square in Cairo had fought pitched battles with the police, held their ground, and had brought down the Mubarak regime in Egypt.

When the proposal to occupy the Port of Oakland was made at the General Assembly on October 27, many learned for the first time about the actions of International Longshore and Warehouse Union militants in Longview, Washington. In September these actions blocked trains and sabotaged the brand new EGT grain terminal when management brought in another union to scab on their jobs. The world is on fire and many have begun to see that class struggle in Oakland can be part of the process of fanning those flames.

Oakland General Strike, November 2

By 9:30am a crowd of several hundred were already filling the intersection of 14th and Broadway, the epicenter of much action over the last couple years. Although the crowd was sizable, it was in flux as people kept arriving in a never-ending stream; by mid-morning it had grown to several thousand.

There was an unconfirmed report that longshore workers dispatched out of the union hiring hall in the morning refused to take their job assignments. Someone who drove through the Port of Oakland after the shift started reported that only 4 of the 36 cranes at the port were operating. The Contra Costa Times claimed that 40 of the 325 longshore workers dispatched out of the ILWU hiring hall did not report to their job assignments at the port and joined the strike. Port officials scrambled to find replacements, but this act of solidarity forced the port to operate below capacity for the entire day.

Local community radio station KPFA claimed 18% of Oakland schools were closed due to teachers not reporting for work; 5% of Oakland city employees took the day off. The Men's Wearhouse, located in the Rotunda Building which in 1946 had been Kahn's Department Store whose striking workers sparked that year's General Strike, posted a sign in its window saying "We stand with the 99%. Closed Wednesday, Nov. 2."

A morning march began to creep up Broadway, went past Latham Square, turned, and in a couple blocks was in front of the State Building, at 1515 Clay Street, that during Stop the Draft Week in 1967 had been the Army Induction Center and the site of the most militant anti-war demo of the 1960s. And the actions in 1967 spawned some of the same acrimonious debates occurring today, between pacifists and direct action militants. The latter, seeing the ineffectiveness and futility of symbolic spectacles, called for the escalation of tactics from protest to resistance.

This intensification of the struggle happened in two phases. The first militant action was on Tuesday October 17, 1967 as 3,000 protesters were

general strike

routed by the cops. They regrouped, re-strategized, and the following Friday, the 20th, went back with 10,000 and routed the 2,000 cops, controlling the streets for the day. Frank Bardacke, Stop the Draft Week organizer and one of the Oakland 7 defendants, put it best:

We controlled the downtown area of Oakland for most of the day and the cops were outnumbered and confused and scared. And we shut down the [Army] Induction Center, we did just what we said we were going to do, we shut the mutha down!

—Berkeley in the Sixties, documentary

Controlling the streets was not enough, as this was not only the high point of the anti-war movement but was the limitation it never went beyond. Resistance is a dead end if it cannot challenge the capitalist imperative to war, which can only begin to happen through class struggle. This passage shows that contradiction:

In the Vietnam War, for example, the picture most people had was of middle-class radicals, the New Left, fighting against the war and the hard-hats supporting it and beating up the anti-war students. Yet more war production was stopped by workers carrying on ordinary strikes in the course of their lives in the plants than by the whole antiwar movement put together. There were strikes at Olin-Matheson, which made munitions, at McDonnell-Douglas, which made fighter planes, on the Missouri Pacific railroad, which transported war materials for shipment from the Pacific coast. In a few instances, strikes lasted a couple of weeks, and the shortage of planes and war material reached the point where the Johnson administration was getting ready to take over the plants to stop the strikes.

—Martin Glaberman and Seymour Faber,
in *Working for Wages: The Roots of Insurgency*

Flying Picket at a Non-Union Workplace

Coming along Clay Street and passing 14th Street, we saw a dozen members of the local Industrial Workers of the World branch. Along with a member of the International Socialist Organization, a Trotskyist group, they were trying to gather some people together to shut down a business where the workers had wanted to come out for the general strike, but the boss would not allow them. Just as they pulled us aside, some local insurrectionists were passing by in the march and someone mentioned asking them, so I ran ahead and told them: "The Wobblies know a business that needs to be shut down." They joined us without question and we instantly had doubled our ranks. On the way to the business it turned out to be Specialty's Café, a business that has baked goods, sandwiches, soup, and

coffee, and caters to lunchtime office workers. Just before 11am, our flying picket broke into two groups to avoid detection by police or security and then marched eight blocks. As we walked along a pedestrian plaza we had to pass what turned out to be a police van; it had loaded food and was leaving just as we were arriving. We converged at the café entrance located on the ground floor of a high-rise office building, and walked in en masse and filled the whole space.

Customers did not know what to make of us, so they quickly left the store. So we began loudly shouting slogans like "Shut it down!", "General Strike!" and "Let them strike, it's their right!" After we noisily created havoc and prevented the café from operating, someone negotiated with the boss and he agreed to close, let the workers leave, and pay them for a full day's wages—even though they had not even been there half a shift. There were about fifteen people working there, with about five Latino guys baking and cooking in the visible kitchen and the rest were young black and white women and men working the counter and serving food.

Most of the workers were excited at our action, especially the ones who knew some of the Wobblies, but they had to be discrete in front of management. There was some confusion, at least until management disappeared from the windows, but once that happened the workers were all smiles and talked to us through the glass doors. We asked if we should stay or leave, and the enthusiastic response was "Stay!" So we put a banner reading "HUELGA" (Spanish for "strike") over the plate glass window facing inside, which immediately evoked smiles from the Spanish-speaking kitchen staff. As it got closer to noon, white-collar workers flooded out of their offices heading to Specialty's for lunch. Many had ordered their sandwiches or soup with credit cards online and did not believe us when we told them the store was closed; many rattled the locked door anyway to confirm, then left in despair while we tried to explain the general strike. We then blocked the main door with another banner that said "WE'RE HERE IN WORKING CLASS SOLIDARITY!" and about ten of us stayed for the next hour, chanting messages of solidarity. The same worker who told us to stay later said through the glass "You did it! You shut it down!" and gave one of the Wobblies a fist bump through the glass door. We stayed until all the workers had left the café, hoping that some of them would make it to the area around Oscar Grant Plaza to join the strike.

While we were waiting for the workers to leave, a couple of potential customers complained that we were "attacking a small local business." Before we could refute this and explain that this business was notorious for miserable working conditions, regardless whether it was local or multinational, a young black man who just arrived to our action said he was formerly an assistant manager at this café. He then pointed out that employees made low wages, worked under terrible conditions, and the kitchen

staff with poor English-speaking skills were manipulated and often worked for years without a raise because the boss exploited their lack of language ability to cheat them out of automatic wage increases. We later found out this store is part of a chain; Specialty's Café & Bakery is a San Francisco-based chain of thirty outlets throughout California, in Seattle and Chicago, with venture capitalists funding an ambitious nationwide expansion plan.

And at the end of our picket, security guards came out of the building with an ideological agenda. They engaged us, constantly said they were "with us" because they were the "99% too," but their mission was to demoralize us and dissuade us from anything confrontational that might shut businesses down. They kept telling us "you're doing it all wrong," to which those engaging them asked what the "correct" way to do it was. Their answer was simply a barrage of confused and emotional criticism. Most of us saw that they were just doing their jobs, and ignored them.

This was one of the most inspiring actions of the day. We also promised the workers that we would return to picket and occupy if they did not get the full day's pay, or if anyone suffered recriminations. The flying picket tactic showed an extremely effective method of aiding non-unionized workers who wanted to join the general strike. Too bad the several thousand in the 2pm anti-capitalist march could not repeat this solidarity tactic with the 125 workers at Whole Foods, whose management is virulently anti-union. The masked-up black bloc opted for breaking a few windows and spraying some graffiti instead of something in solidarity with the workers inside the store. I have talked with former workers at that store about the awful conditions and they said workers there would be very sympathetic to actions in solidarity with their plight.

Soon after we joined a march of around a thousand going down 21st Street toward Broadway, in the area that is Oakland's mini-financial district. We saw the same security guard who kept trying to steer us away from Specialty's Café, telling us to go to Bank of America instead. It then became clear that her security detail did not include Bank of America, so she was really just telling us to go away. But as we passed the corner of Valdez Street, this same security guard was playfully engaging in some kind of cat and mouse attempt to protect the concrete retaining wall along the sidewalk, right on the corner. Soon enough it became clear why. The corner had been covered with cardboard painted the same color as the concrete, but when protestors began tearing away the cardboard, beneath was written "MORGAN STANLEY SMITH BARNEY." The day was full of surreal moments like this.

Back to Downtown

Rejoining the massive downtown crowds was an anti-climatic letdown after shutting down the café. It was festive, full of music, and over

ten thousand people were enjoying themselves, but the point of the chants, the slogans, the posters, and the signs was indignation, moral indignation. The exception was the incredibly inspiring "DEATH TO CAPITALISM" and "OAKLAND COMMUNE" banners strung above the street at 14th and Broadway. It was hard to consider it a general strike when the most common slogans were "tax the rich" and "banks got bailed out, we got sold out." Where was the class struggle? How could we even make the stretch to call it a general strike when a sizable portion of us only wanted to reform and re-regulate the banks? Putting forward "occupy the banks" as a demand, as well as the actions of blocking their doors, was simply a moral tactic to force the financial sector to be more "responsible." It would be erroneous to call these actions "flying pickets," since those who went to the downtown banks never attempted to reach the rank-and-file bank workers in solidarity. This was a glaring weakness in our attempted general strike, but probably to be expected since effective class struggle has been largely absent for decades.

We were back at 14th Street and Broadway and the crowd had grown to be in the tens of thousands. On the street at Latham Square, someone had made an altar with "Death to Capitalism" written across it. Before we realized it, the 2pm anti-capitalist march was to begin. It assembled near the statue at Latham Square, ground zero for the 1946 General Strike, and we stayed near the back since none of us was masked-up. This activist uniform usually connotes tactics of property damage and attempts to fight with the police; the latter almost universally results in dozens—if not hundreds—of arrests. Being at the tail-end of the march, we missed the smash-'em-up at Whole Foods. But we were verbally assaulted for "condoning" the window breaking and graffiti once we got near the store's entrance. Since we did not really know what had happened, we simply defended our fellow protestors, regardless of what they had done. This somehow enraged the finger-pointing liberals further and I have never seen such vitriol and hatred from people who claim to advocate for Gandhi-style pacifism. At least the black blockers are not hypocrites.

We also missed the smashing and graffiti back at the Bank of America at the Kaiser Center. The vanguard of the march, the black bloc of a couple hundred, made it back downtown so quickly that we were unable to catch up. But we did see some of the destruction at the Wells Fargo Bank at 12th and Broadway, where a circus of moral indignation was no longer directed at the banks, but was directed at the black blockers instead. One high priest of this moralism was even proposing that the Port action be canceled because of the broken bank windows. We just could not tolerate this absurdity, so someone from our group interrupted his tirade and said "This is just a conspiracy by the plate glass industry to sell more glass." Even the moralist laughed, as did most of the defenders of the

smashing; it defused the situation and the crowd began to break up.

The Seattle Model: 1919 vs. 1999

The tactics of the black bloc quickly hit a practical dead end and brought on the same pointless violence vs. non-violence debates that are just as divisive today as they were in 1967 at Stop the Draft Week—repeated ad nauseam again at the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999. Property destruction can be effective if used properly and in the proper context. A perfect example was the members of the ILWU Local 21 at the Port of Longview, Washington who sabotaged the opening of the EGT grain terminal with scab labor, paralyzing the facility and setting off wildcat strikes that shut down the ports of Everett, Seattle, and Tacoma in Washington and Portland in Oregon (an even better example was the 77-day occupation of the Ssangyong Motors factory in Pyeongtaek, South Korea in the summer of 2009; workers fashioned defensive weapons from the auto plant's workshops). On September 7, 400-500 longshore workers and their supporters blocked trains for three hours, stood down 40-50 riot gear equipped cops, even unarresting some of their comrades. Some time after 4am the following morning hundreds of longshoremen and their supporters stormed the EGT terminal. Armed with baseball bats, they broke down the gate, smashed up the guards' shack (no one was harmed), drove the guards' car into a ditch, entered the plant site, cut air hoses on the train that had arrived on site the day before, and dumped tons of grain from over 100 railroad cars.

Without a strategy, the black bloc becomes a form devoid of a theoretical basis in the content of what is being struggled for, which can be summed up as a form of violent activism. It is clearly not class struggle, which suggests an anti-capitalist practice based on the class conscious activity of the working class—that includes everyone disposed from the means of survival, the unemployed, the homeless, and all others suffering from the oppressions of capitalism. The goal of class struggle is realizing a classless society, using the strike weapon—up to and including mass or general strikes—and solidarity actions to create a revolutionary rupture in the production and reproduction of the social relations of capital. Activism, conversely, is focused on forms, never getting beyond means to even strategize towards ends—unless the ends are still within capitalism. The spectrum stretches from non-violent liberal reformism—those wanting to democratize capitalism and correct its injustices peacefully—to the opposite pole of black bloc activists who think it possible to smash a social relationship away by mere might, as though will power alone can make anyone with a claw hammer a revolutionary subject. This limits them to the tactic of attacking the forms of capitalism, where static objects like plate glass windows are surrogates for the dynamics of accumu-

lation, but to never theoretically comprehending its content. They are oblivious to how consciousness, experience, and human agency develop as the content of the historical process of revolution.

The non-violent activists wanted to create a circus sideshow of protest—never allowing militancy to even rise to the level of resistance—replete with puppets, banners, marching bands, and the usual activist-protest tactics to shut the banks by simply blocking the doors. Not that festivity is bad, but it would be more euphoric if all commerce—including banks—was targeted by mass strike actions like in 1946. Rank-and-file workers at the banks were not seen as class allies who would benefit from solidarity actions to shut them—hopefully with pay—like what happened at Specialty's. The activist morality goes like this: corporations and banks are evil and people working in them are complicit in this depravity. Hence wage workers become the evil other and must face an accusatory finger branding them as "part of the problem." This moralizing is devoid of a systemic analysis, totally lacks a critique of political economy, and fails to understand class consciousness and solidarity. Liberal activists live in a fantasy world, where they are "classless angels" crusading to bring "social justice" to the people, which in practice often amounts to nothing more than empty rhetoric and banal slogans backed only by moral appeals.

The insurrectionists in the black bloc want to create an orgy of destruction, believing that social relations can be simply removed through negating their forms, by smashing them, totally oblivious to the content of capitalism—both in theory and in practice—as well as the possibility of finding working class allies in the stores they are smashing. Those low-income hyper-exploited wage slaves often hate work as much as—more than—the black blockers.

Activists, whether banner-waving blockaders or window-smashing black blockers, fit neatly into the "Seattle Model" of the diverse activist tactics used in the 1999 WTO protests. Some want harmless, non-violent protest; others want violent, disruptive resistance. Neither came close to the tactics, let alone the strategy, of class struggle on a mass scale—which is the most basic definition of a general strike.

Those of us who participated in the solidarity action at Specialty's root our theories and practice of class struggle in what can best be summed up as the "Chicago Idea." This class struggle model reached its high point in the Seattle General Strike of 1919 where workers—like in the Paris Commune of 1871—ran the city themselves; in the case of the Seattle in 1919, it was for five days.

The Chicago Idea

The Chicago Idea was a direct descendent of the fallout from the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune and came to birth in the move-

ment for the eight-hour day in the 1880s. It was led by anarchists who advocated for militant class struggle to create organizational forms that would become the "embryonic" forerunners of a future "free society." Here is a description:

The first sign of change came in March 1882, when a group of German tanners struck and demanded a wage equal to that of the more skilled English-speaking carriers. When employers refused, the demand and the carriers struck in sympathy with the immigrant tanners... the carriers acted not on the basis of "any grievance of their own, but because of a sentimental and sympathetic feeling for another class of workmen." The sympathy strike even surprised the editor of the of the trades council newspaper, who said it was "something new and wonderful." The seventy-two-day exercise in solidarity was, according to the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, "one of the most remarkable on record, an action "conducted on the principle of the Knights of Labor which proclaims that "an injury to one is the concern of all."

—James Green, *Death in the Haymarket*, p. 98

The state found this revolutionary working class movement so threatening that, like with the mass executions of the Communards of Paris, it was brutally crushed. The triggering incident happened at Haymarket Square in Chicago in 1886, in response to the police murder of workers during the strike for an eight-hour day. After a sham trial, four anarchists were scapegoated and hung, becoming the Haymarket Martyrs.

The IWW was founded on of the legacy of the Chicago strikes, but its spirit rises up in every act of solidarity, from sympathy strikes to wildcats to collective acts of sabotage to full-blown general strikes. When the strike of women retail clerks in Oakland in 1946 was being scabbed on by a professional strikebreaking firm, the spontaneous sympathy strike of transit operators; truck drivers, office workers, machinists, factory workers, maritime workers—and eventually almost the entire working class of Oakland—was the Chicago Idea in practice.

Mass Solidarity Action Substituting for Unionized Workers

A mechanic originally from Oakland boasted to a 1936 union convention that "a picket line in that country [Oakland] is more effective than a barb wire fence."

—in Richard Boyden's dissertation "The San Francisco Machinists from Depression to Cold War, 1930-1950"

During previous general strikes, Oakland was a manufacturing hub for all of northern California. Factories produced goods for domestic consumption, as well as some for export. A picket line was often all that was

necessary to tap into the class consciousness of workers to shut down businesses—with the effectiveness of a “barb wire fence.” But those struggles and that consciousness have long since receded and been forgotten. At worst, the US is amnesiac and anti-intellectual; class-denial is a defining cultural feature. Since the last wave of wildcat strikes in the 1970s, the ruling class has succeeded in its counterattack by displacing class antagonisms through deindustrialization, class recomposition, and creating ideological mystification—the “society of the spectacle.” The further integration of a world market has transformed the planet as well; globalized production and supply chains mean that commodities are produced on every continent, as well as being transported to and consumed in every corner of the earth. In 2011, Oakland produces much less than is consumed, so most goods are imported. Many of them come through the Port of Oakland, after being produced and assembled elsewhere.

It should not be forgotten that the Port has had rising exports, sending abroad commodities such as fruit and nuts, meat, machinery, beverages, scrap metal, animal hides and skins, chemical products, woodpulp and paper, cereals, grains, seeds, processed food, plastic, and cotton. Some of those same commodities come back through the port as finished goods, like clothes, shoes, vehicles, electronics, furniture, toys, and product packaging.

The Port of Oakland moves \$39 billion in imports and exports per year. So a work stoppage can prevent the movement of \$106,849,315 worth of commerce for a single day. This made it the most worthy target of class struggle activity during the November 2 attempt at a general strike. Some ILWU workers on the docks make over \$100,000 a year, putting them among the highest-paid industrial worker in the US. These conditions were won in the 1934 General Strike, protected with another strike in 1936, and were consolidated by a major strike again in 1948; in that fourteen-year period the ILWU had 1,399 legal and illegal work stoppages as part of this process.

The last strike of the ILWU was in 1971, but they have done political actions on the docks to boycott ships from post-junta Chile and with munitions headed for El Salvador, in addition to refusing to work ships from South Africa during apartheid. They have invoked contractual privileges to shut West Coast ports in solidarity with the struggle of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, to celebrate May Day in 2008, and to protest the police murder of Oscar Grant. They attempted an unauthorized contractual shut down on April 4, 2011 in solidarity with the fight against Governor Walker’s anti-labor legislation in Wisconsin, for which they are currently being legally prosecuted. There are rumblings about possible solidarity actions with the workers in Longview, Washington, that might spread beyond the ILWU’s jurisdiction on the West Coast and draw in

the International Longshore Association on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts too. Despite all that, Local 10 on the docks of Oakland is restricted by a no-strike clause in their contract and their legacy of wildcat striking is in the distant past. So, the mass of other workers in Oakland had to substitute for them and do what they were legally unable—or unwilling—to do, which was to shut down the port. Hopefully, this will encourage them to engage in economic strikes in the future on their own behalf. Contract or no contract, the only illegal strike is one that loses.

March to Shut Down the Port

We gathered for the 4pm march to the Port from 14th and Broadway because in prior organizing meetings it had been emphasized that we needed to be at the port before the parking lots opened at 6pm for longshore workers coming to the 7pm shift. The furthest terminal entrances are 3.7 miles from our starting point, so we needed to leave early enough to set up our picket lines at the gates before the workers got there. We could tell the march was extremely large, but more importantly everyone was in high spirits. As we crossed the 880 Freeway, cars crawled beneath us and many supportive honks could be heard in response to the many banners that were put up on the fences on the bridge.

As we entered West Oakland, people came out of apartments and houses and stood along the street cheering us on, like in a celebration. A few even joined us, but mostly people just waved at us with smiles of joy on their faces. This area is ethnically mixed, but is still predominately African American as it had been in the heyday of the Black Panthers. Although not all of them joined us, these bystanders were clearly part of us. This was hammered home when we passed a modest house near the corner of 10th Street. A boy of about eight stood on the porch, along with others who looked to be his grandmother and teenaged brother. He was excitedly holding up a paper on which “99%” had been written. His enthusiasm gave off such a life-affirming sense of hope and confidence that my spirits shot another notch higher. Just the sense of common vision I shared with that young guy made me certain that whatever happens, some young people are living through an historical moment they will remember for the rest of their lives.

It was when we turned onto Adeline that the march’s size began to dawn on me. We were many blocks long, but the streets were completely filled, from curb to curb. It was when we got to the top of the bridge over the railroad tracks, which curved and became Middle Harbor Road, that I got a true perspective on how many we were. I could look ahead and see the whole intersection around the entrance to the APL terminal was filled with a mass of human bodies, in the midst of which were six trucks all stopped abreast of each other across almost the whole road. I turned

back-around, and looked down the bridge along the route we had just come. As far as I could see, people were still coming. It was like a tsunami of humanity, just one giant mass of people flowing across the landscape. This realization made me feel so euphoric that I felt like I was in a dream.

As we got to the intersection at the Port where there is a traffic signal at the entrance to the APL terminal, I marveled at the six trucks idled six abreast in the midst of the human swarm. I wondered what the truckers thought about the shut down, so I asked the first two I saw standing next to their trucks. I began by apologizing for preventing them from working. They immediately responded by rejecting my apology, saying "We're part of this and we're happy it's happening." Their only disappointment was that they thought the strike would happen in the morning. Regardless, they were all smiles, shook all our hands, introduced themselves (I think they were from East Africa, maybe Ethiopia), and we left knowing at least some port truckers were pleased with the inconvenience.

I saw lots of old friends and comrades, some of whom I had not seen in decades, but even strangers had a familiarity as though I had known them my whole life. Everyone was talking with everyone else; atomization and alienation had melted away and even if fleeting, there was a collective joy that is beyond words. Our group would gain a person, and then someone would drift off. We eventually made it all the way to the end of Middle Harbor, where it ends at 7th Street. The sun had set and as it got darker and darker, we made our way to the crucial intersection at 7th and Maritime. On our way, we had heard misinformation as people told us we were not needed here. But that was not true, because from that intersection there are two entrances to the Port for access roads to the outside.

Our informal group got involved in making sure people created a human blockade to both entrances. But people were still confused, so someone yelled "mic check" and we had an impromptu meeting. The first speaker asked what we should be doing. One of our group spoke up and made a concrete proposal, which was: 1. no vehicle could pass us to enter the Port; 2. no truck with containers could go either in or out; 3. we would allow all workers to pass us to leave the Port. It was near unanimous agreement. And we protected this strategic intersection and no one entered. Eventually the entire intersection was filled with about 500 protestors.

Soon there were some cars and vans wanting to pass us. Some hot heads got in front and blocked them in, saying it was a general strike and they were going to shut "everything" down. We pleaded to let them out, but their response was "we walked here, so they can walk out of here." We reconvened an assembly and once again reminded everyone of our earlier consensus on the three principles of our occupation of the intersection. Quickly, with no effort, we confirmed our earlier consensus with near-unanimity. Despite these few dissenters, who seemed obsessed

general strike

about punishing anyone working in the Port, we were able to defend our blockade and let workers get out.

Soon a truck with a trailer rolled up to us. The driver said he was tired and sick and was headed home. We asked why he still had a trailer, so he explained it was empty. We said if that was so, could we have his permission to open the doors and check. He got nervous and said it was "sealed," to which we responded that sealed containers are not empty. We checked and it actually was not sealed. We worked out a compromise with him and he backed up, turned around, and parked somewhere within the Port. Despite some non-cooperative participants, our people's mic and consensus decision-making process worked extremely well and allowed us to make very quick decisions.

Around 8pm, we got word that all of our section of the port, that was about three-fourths of the entire complex, was completely shut down by the sheer force of all our bodies—which reasonable estimates put at 40,000–50,000 (although an artist comrade analyzed helicopter photos and put it closer to 100,000). It was exhilarating. Around 9pm, we got word that the outermost terminal had been picketed by the bicyclists who had got there first, then with others who had made it there on foot, and the health and safety arbitrator had ruled that the workers did not have to cross the "unsafe" picket line and could go home with a day's pay.

Conclusion

A couple dozen of us had to use direct action at Specialty's bakery to leverage management into shutting down and paying their non-unionized workers for the whole day. We had used the tactic of mass action to shut down the 5th biggest port in the US, and all of our bodies were the means to paralyze the port, sending the ILWU longshore workers home with pay as well. That day Jessica Mitford was right, there was nothing abstract about class struggle—and the solidarity of the General Strike attempt—in Oakland. At least 50,000 of us proved it. And this model needs to be repeated everywhere, if we hope to go beyond resistance and truly start taking the class war on the offensive.

The thread from Chicago has been picked up once again in Oakland, but it needs to be cast across the Pacific, to connect with the rising class consciousness of the striking workers in the burgeoning factory towns of China; it must then spread solidarity across the entire global supply chain and link together class struggle everywhere. Only then can we truly live up to the internationalist implications of the old Wobbly adage: "An injury to one is an injury to all."

But we are clearly at the beginning of a process where class relations will become less abstract as we continue to fight back against austerity. This will necessitate linking up across borders, helping to spread these

struggles to every corner of the planet. If the definition of the 99% is able to translate into class terms through the dynamic of class struggle, our next attempt at a general strike will be propelled forward much more forcefully by class consciousness. E. P. Thompson sums up this historical process quite lucidly:

...far too much theoretical attention (much of it plainly a-historical) has been paid to "class," and far too little to "class-struggle." Indeed, class-struggle is the prior, as well as the more universal concept. To put it bluntly: classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle. On the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in production relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence a struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness. Class and class-consciousness are always the last, not the first, stage in the real historical process.

—E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?"
Social History, Vol. 3, No. 2 [May, 1978], p. 1489)

If there is one principle that distinguished the occupations with a strong anarchist presence from the ones with none, it concerned the police. Beyond just blanket opposition to the police as a simple rebellion against authority, anarchists view the police as functionaries. A partial definition of the state could be that it is an agency that holds the monopoly on violence in society. The police are the most visible expression of this violence and have been exposed in this role over and over again during the Occupy Movement.

This definition highlights why many anarchists have little patience for the way in which the discussions happen around violence in North America. Without getting into the nuances of what exactly violence means, it is fair to say that the proportion of violence inflicted by police using clubs, noxious gas, pepper spray, shields, and boots has been so much greater than any other group that even to speak to them as near equivalent demonstrates either total ambivalence towards humans or utter revulsion to the political message of the Occupy Movement.

Violence & the Police