

Occupy Pittsburgh Now

FREE PRESS FOR THE PEOPLE

ISSUE NO. 2

MARCH 2012

GOING FORWARD



Demonstrators march for affordable and accessible healthcare on February 11th, 2012.

Healthcare for the 99% NOW

By Kristyn Felman

On February 11, Occupy Pittsburgh was joined by the Western PA Coalition for Single-Payer Healthcare, PUSH, SW Healthcare4allPA, and Save Our Community Hospitals to speak up against corporate greed in the healthcare industry. Sixty community members rallied at the UPMC headquarters downtown holding signs that demanded “Health care for the 99%,” “People over profits,” and “Medicare for all.” Citing the profit-driven nature of health insurance practices, healthcare provider Mel Packer called the healthcare system in America “a stain on our moral fabric, a turn away from our moral responsibility to each other, [and] a destruction of our innate moral compass that says that we care for each other.”

Despite greater spending on healthcare than any other nation on earth, the United States ranks 37th in overall health outcomes and 36th in life expectancy. A recent study of Medicare data also showed that Pittsburgh spends more on hospital care per person than any other major U.S. city, including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles.

In part, this is because the health insurance industry consumes billions of our healthcare dollars paying for marketing, lobbying, and corporate executive salaries rather than on ensuring the provision of quality health care.

Health insurance companies are free to increase their own profits by placing limits on coverage, denying care, and increasing premiums and out-of-pocket costs for patients. The results are that premiums rose by 130 percent over the last decade, the cost of a family health insurance policy now averages

\$15,000 per year, 75 million Americans are underinsured, and medical bills cause 1 million bankruptcies every year. Meanwhile, in Pittsburgh, UPMC and Highmark squabble over territory, threatening to deny coverage or charge exorbitant rates to patients who carry their “competitor’s” card.

Street theater at UPMC headquarters succinctly illustrated this dynamic, with an actor portraying a healthcare provider being shoved aside by insurance company representatives busily extracting cash from a patient’s abdomen. Robin Clarke, writer and director of this performance, portrayed a UPMC executive and pledged the company’s commitment to “life-changing profit margins and predatory business strategies.”

Following an occupation of the first and second floors of the UPMC building, activists marched down Liberty Avenue and into 5th Avenue Place, home of Highmark. Informational leaflets were distributed to citizens along the way. Invited to share their own healthcare stories, participants decried class-based health care and the rising cost of coverage, quoted venerated health reform activists, and demanded care based on research rather than on profits.

In addition to drawing attention to unjust practices in the health insurance industry, speakers inspired their audience to imagine a more just society. Mr. Packer challenged Americans to “build a nation that has as its moral underpinning a set of values that trump capitalist greed, that say NO to profits over people, that say we... cannot do less than demand health care for all... The [current] system that allows profits to be made from human misery must be dumped and buried in the landfill of human history.”

“Each time a [person] stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lots of others, or strikes out against injustice, [they] send forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

— Robert F. Kennedy

Most of the public have known Occupy Pittsburgh through the camp in People’s Park, and mainstream coverage of the movement seems to assume that, since the camp no longer occupies People’s Park, Occupy Pittsburgh has disappeared. But Occupy Pittsburgh, like the Occupy movement itself, is like an iceberg: the camps were just the tip that floats above water, while 7/8ths of the mass hides below the surface, unseen.

The metaphor works for the recent eviction from the People’s Park, too: the top of an iceberg is exposed to the sun and slowly melts away. Eventually, the weight shifts and the iceberg will roll over. The energy produced is enough to create an earthquake, with a magnitude between 5-6 on the Richter Scale, and enough to cause a tsunami, sending a giant, icy wave crashing onto the shore.

The encampment at People’s Park has melted away, and Occupy Pittsburgh is undergoing a revolution. The energy generated within our movement ripples out into the sea of public opinion, and perhaps, if we can generate enough force, our wave of influence will topple the corporatists that have taken ownership of our democracy for far too long.

We continue to demonstrate and Occupy everywhere with new tactics and a heightened focus on the issues that brought us to People’s Park more than five months ago. We occupy for quality affordable healthcare for the 99%, for public transportation, and for all the causes to promote economic and social justice. We are finding new ways to let the disenfranchised, the unemployed and the underemployed know that we fight for them, and that they are part of the 99%.

The process will move slowly, but with enough weight to make powerful splashes during the course of our growth. Icebergs can last many years, and we have no plans to melt away into the watered-down status quo. Instead, the movement against corporate greed and control by the 1% is seeping into the popular imagination. We are reshaping the face of our culture, and shifting the course of our national conversation. We are bursting through the dams that hold back power, and seeking to let it flow freely.

Right to Work Robs Workers’ Rights

By Jeff Cech

In January, Right to Work (RTW) legislation passed in the state of Indiana’s Republican-controlled House, Senate and Executive Office following a well-funded and extremely deceptive ad campaign. It’s the 23rd state in the union to pass such legislation.

With Indiana just two states away, and with the Republican party holding majority and executive power in Pennsylvania’s state government, “right to work” legislation may be on its way here, as well.

The Right always had the best ad men, from Goebbels to the marketing department at Coors. One of the tricks up their brown-shirt sleeves is giving benign names to toxic substances, like calling smokestacks “cloud makers.” That’s why they’ve named legislation that strips away the power of workers to organize, “Right to Work.” More accurately, it should be called, “Right to Freeload,” “Right to be Powerless in the Workplace,” or “A Tactic Designed with the Sole Intention of Diminishing the Political Will of Working People.”

Now is the time to prepare. We have to arm ourselves with information and begin to educate the public so that we can battle the right’s corporate propaganda machine.

Let’s start with RTW’s biggest claim, that the legislation stops “compulsory union membership” or the “closed shop,” a practice of shops only hiring union members. In reality, it does no such thing. Closed shops were outlawed by the United States in the Taft-Hartley Act back in 1947.

Now, consider the name. Right to Work legislation does not provide any actual rights for workers, although proponents claim that RTW frees workers from having to pay union dues when they don’t agree with the union’s use of those funds. Again, American workers are already free to withhold a

(Continued on page 3)



Healthcare for the 99% marchers move down Seventh Avenue on the way to the Highmark Building.

People’s Park, The Law and Public Space

By Kate Luce Angell

“Occupy Wall Street exists in a First Amendment space all its own. The protestors do not, in an important sense, occupy the spaces in which they exist to the exclusion of other uses, like a rally or a parade. They depend for their rhetorical force...on the persistent presence, day in and day out, of a committed core of demonstrators...whose continuing presence forces us to confront those questions we would otherwise more easily avoid. The essential moral challenge is the same as that posed by the lunch-counter demonstrators of the civil rights era: We are here, we politely dissent, and we defy you to move us along for your own convenience.”

-Raymond Vasvaril, “Occupying the First Amendment,” Slate Magazine, November 15, 2011

For months, a community of Occupy Pittsburgh protestors waged a non-violent protest in People’s Park, in the 54-story shadow of Bank of New York Mellon.

Every day, the camp stood as symbol of the efforts of the 99% against the terrible power of the 1%: a group of everyday people standing up against a multi-billion dollar banking institution that is currently being sued for raking in even more billions via fraudulent charges on public workers’ pension funds.

The Occupy protestors are working elsewhere now, peacefully dispersing from the People’s Park after it became clear that, just as in Occupy encampments all over the world, the law was going to be used to protect the interests of the powerful rather than as a tool for obtaining justice.

Even for those unclear or resistant to Occupy’s message of economic and social justice and protest against the corporate ownership of our government and laws, the camp was a daily reminder that a struggle is going on between those who have nothing and those who seek to control everything.

So of course BNY Mellon, despite initially stating they had no intention of interfering with the protest, decided the camp had to go. Just as in Occupied cities everywhere, injunctions were filed, new rules were created overnight, and laws were bent until almost broken to ensure that public space—whether owned by the nation, state, city, or held in trust by private companies for public use—could not be used by the Occupy movement.

A few examples from Occupy encampments across the country: in Tennessee, a county commission passed a law banning activities by Occupy Chattanooga, then filed a federal suit against the group’s members demanding legal fees for determining whether the law is constitutional.

On Dec. 9, the city of Honolulu passed a law that, in effect, criminalizes homelessness. In a direct attack on Occupy Charlotte, that city’s Council passed an ordinance on Jan. 24 banning camping on city property, as well as scarves, backpacks, duffel bags and coolers.

Like other Occupy encampments, Occupy Pittsburgh took its stand on symbolic land, an area formerly known as Mellon Green, claimed by the bank but developed using taxpayer money and used as public green space.

But several things make the Occupy Pittsburgh/BNY Mellon fight a particularly resonant one in terms of economic injustice and the law, and asks us to consider who the true lawbreakers are.

Occupy Pittsburgh is the only Occupy group to have held land claimed by a bank. And not just any bank--Mellon Bank was founded by Thomas Mellon, Pittsburgh industrialist, in 1869 to cater specifically to large corporations and the wealthy. It merged with the Bank of New York in 2007, and over the last few months, BNY Mellon has been the target of a growing number of lawsuits that allege it defrauded pension funds in Florida, New York and Texas.

BNY Mellon stands accused of making \$2 billion in fraudulent charges. Allegedly, BNY Mellon charged clients the highest posted rate for buying foreign securities, but would sell them on their behalf at the lowest posted rate. The difference went to the bank as pure profit.

The bank is also being sued by the city of Detroit for causing \$1 billion in losses to firefighters, police and other workers in its pension system by keeping investments in Lehman Brothers after clear signs the company would fail. It has been accused of participating in the Bernard Madoff Ponzi scheme knowingly. There is a lawsuit pending from some of its former employees because of its management of 401(k) plans, and the state of Pennsylvania is considering whether to sue, since BNY Mellon holds its public workers’, state teachers’ and municipal employees’ pension funds.

Pittsburgh has seen robber barons before. This city is ground zero for the centuries-old fight between the 1% and the 99%. A city of steelworkers and manufacturers in the middle of a coal-mining region, Pittsburgh was home to generations of men who worked 12-hour shifts 7 days a week, collapsing into beds still warm from the man on the opposite shift who also rented it.

The city saw the failure of the Homestead Steel Strike in 1892 (the site of which is now a mall parking lot) and saw the beginnings of the success of labor unions to protect working families in the 1930s. Pittsburgh is the birthplace of both the AFL and the CIO, as well as the United Steelworkers and the Ironworkers.

The inheritors of that tradition of justice for working people are the members of Occupy Pittsburgh, and the descendants of those mega-industrialists are organizations like BNY Mellon—a bank that stands accused of bilking thousands, perhaps millions, out of retirement money they earned.

The conflict hasn’t changed, but the tactics used by the 1% have shifted. Why hire Pinkertons to break strikes, or threaten people’s children? This only highlights the moral high ground occupied by protestors for social justice. How much easier it is to simply declare that no space is truly public, that there is no area in which protest is strictly legal, and paint protestors as lawbreakers.

This strategy makes the law a criminal accomplice of the 1%. Rather than protecting the powerless from exploitation, it becomes an arbitrary weapon to protect the status quo, to ensure there is no space in which we can exercise the First Amendment or protest what is being done.

Occupy Pittsburgh is not gone, even though the law was used by BNY Mellon to move the protestors along for its own convenience. But law should not be mistaken for Justice. BNY Mellon can use the law to remove Occupy Pittsburgh from Mellon Green, but Justice decrees that Occupy Pittsburgh cannot, and never will be, moved from The People’s Park.



Welcome

Property of BNY Mellon

Open 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., daily, unless otherwise posted.

This Promenade is BNY Mellon’s private property and is presently intended to facilitate pedestrian circulation to and from property owned by BNY Mellon. Please limit your activities to this purpose and please comply with the following rules:

- Keep off grass, trees, and plant areas
- Keep animals on leashes of no more than eight feet and under control at all times
- No littering
- No smoking or alcoholic beverages
- No blocking or obstructing the walkway or benches
- No music without earphones or excessive noise
- No soliciting, picketing, or leafleting
- No rally, assembly, political event or other similar activity
- No skateboarding, rollerskating, rollerblading, or bicycling
- No camping or sleeping
- No open flames, combustible material, electric generators, sleeping bags, tents, tables, chairs, coolers, or other similar items

You may be asked to leave at any time for violation of these rules or, at the discretion of the owner, for any other conduct inconsistent with the intended purpose of the Promenade.

Sign posted by BNY Mellon after Occupiers peacefully left the encampment at People’s Park.



Europe's Problem Isn't Socialism

By Tom Prigg

Our current crop of GOP candidates have been quick to point to “socialism” as the reason for Europe’s faltering economy. Clearly, they say, social-safety nets, like universal healthcare and retirement benefits, have now been revealed as the wasteful downfall of Europe.

Corporate-owned mainstream media has done nothing to contradict these bumper-sticker lies of impending socialist apocalypse. Time Magazine recently changed its American cover to keep the European crisis out of American minds. Mainstream news hides the facts, perpetuating the American belief that they are insulated from European economic collapse, as long as they continue to avoid “socialist” policies and pursue austerity.

The truth is that Europe’s economic problems are largely the same as America’s: financial institutions, freed of regulations, have perpetrated fraud on a truly global scale by using debt to make trillions of dollars.

In February of 2010, an article in *Spiegel International* by Beat Balzli described how Goldman Sachs hid Greek debt using derivatives. Goldman Sachs offered a cross-currency swap beginning in 2002. Balzli stated, “The deal involved so-called cross-currency swaps in which government debt issued in dollars and yen was swapped for euro debt for a certain period—to be exchanged back into the original currencies at a later date.”

Later, a Goldman Sachs managing director admitted to fixing financial records to further Greece’s deception. As reported in *The Telegraph*, Gerald Corrigan, a Goldman Sachs managing director, stated that the company “enabled politicians to mask borrowings” through a complex currency transaction in 2001. “With the benefit of hindsight, it seems very clear that standards of transparency could have been and should have been higher,” Mr. Corrigan said. “It is true that currency swaps entered into by Goldman and Greece did produce a small reduction in the debt to GDP ratio at that time.” It’s important to note that using derivatives to circumvent the EU Maastricht Deficit rules is not illegal, but because of the actions of Goldman Sachs the EU is near a total economic collapse.

Even worse, the same hedge-fund strategies that caused the 2008 economic collapse continue to be implemented in the European economy. Collateral Debt Swaps, or CDSs, are being sold almost three times as much as lending as of June 2011. In other words, Goldman Sachs and other U.S. banks are gambling on European countries defaulting.

The five banks writing 97% of the CDSs in the U.S. are JPMorgan, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America and Citigroup Inc. During the 2008 collapse, it was the U.S. government who bailed out the banks to save the economy. This time, it may have to be the E.U. banks who step in to avert the crisis. Timothy Geithner, U.S. Treasury and ex-Goldman Sachs man, keeps urging European banks to fix their economic problems, but has not called for restrictions on the offering of CDSs by U.S. banks. By some estimates, these CDS gambles on the European economy increase the risk of collapse by 20%.

Why should Americans care about the European crisis? Today’s economy is a global-economy: the big banks are interconnected with one another. U.S. banks have over a trillion dollars in outstanding loans with European countries, and don’t forget the billions of dollars in credit risks. Not to mention the repercussions on imports and exports of goods.

But as long as Americans think that the European crisis has to do with social safety-nets and other “socialist” programs, they won’t understand that our country’s fate is intimately tied to the fate of Europe. The European debt crisis wasn’t because of their “socialist” policies: it was a crisis, just like the American housing bubble, created by the largest U.S. banks to generate a big payout at the expense of European taxpayers and possibly, through the domino effect, U.S. citizens again.

Americans need to wise up quickly: a default by the Greek economy is expected to occur in late March. At that point, the ocean between us and Europe will have gotten a lot smaller.



Right to Work (Continued from page 1)

portion of their union dues if they do not agree with the political work their union is involved with. For instance, if you are a Republican and your union is backing a Democrat’s campaign, you are not required to pay the portion of your dues that would be used to support that candidate.

What Right to Work legislation actually does is limit workers’ rights. Workers in RTW states are prohibited from organizing in smaller bargaining units that would not include an entire shop. All workers, in every union shop under RTW, must be represented by the unions, whether or not they are members. Non-union workers in union shops in Indiana will now have the ability to exploit the services provided by organized labor, without paying a dime of their dues. They’ll get the same contracts with the same vacation time, healthcare and living wages unions have poured enormous resources into fighting for over the span of generations.

Legislators in favor of the right wing’s idea of workers’ rights claim that these laws are better for business, and invite new opportunities that create jobs and revenue for the state. But statistics have shown no such benefit in states that have passed Right to Work laws. In fact, 6 of the top 10

states with the highest rates of unemployment are right to work states, including Nevada, at 12.6% of the population out of work. Oklahoma, which was the last state to pass RTW legislation in 2001, has since seen its manufacturing base shrink by a third.

Right to Work ultimately impacts workers themselves, who end up making about \$5,333 a year less on average than workers in free bargaining states. In RTW states, 21% more people are without healthcare, and the infant mortality rate, an indication of a state’s economic health, is 16% higher.

Jim Robinson, The United Steelworkers District Director for Illinois and Indiana recalls that, “Martin Luther King said, ‘[Right To Work] grants no rights and provides no work,’ and he’s right”

Studies have shown that with weaker unions, job safety deteriorates, and on-the-job injuries increase. The Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the rate of workplace deaths is 51% greater in RTW states. Along with that comes lower worker compensation benefits.

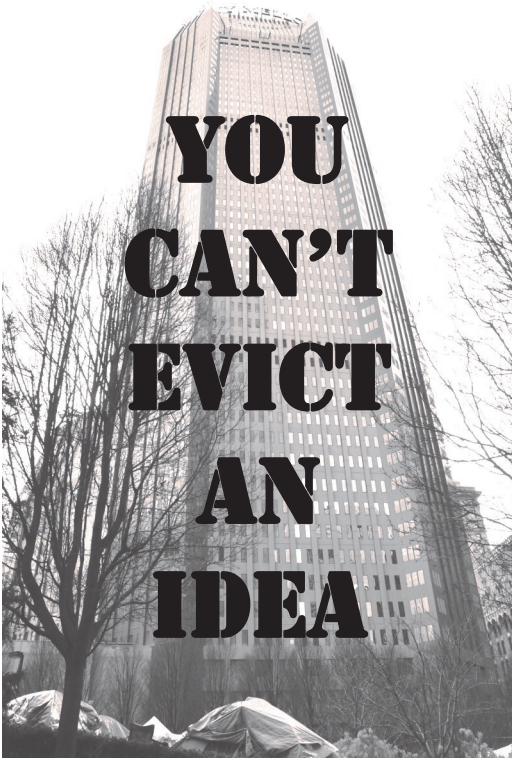
If RTW actually damages a state’s economy and lowers employment rates, wages and benefits, why is it such a high priority for Republicans? The answer is simple: it makes unions, traditionally supporters of the Democratic party, much weaker, and greatly dilutes the ability of average

workers to effect political change.

Organized labor relies on its dues-paying members to help grow the labor movement. Unions fight for workers’ interests both on the job and in our democracy. They organize communities, and increase awareness of progressive issues like healthcare, education and unemployment through public education campaigns. Their organizers are at the forefront in the battle for social and economic justice. It’s what brought their support to Occupy Pittsburgh—support that has given Occupiers food, porta-potties, meeting spaces and much more.

“Right to Work” is really about stripping away unions’ power to actively engage in and support the fight for fairness in democracy. The Right believes that by diminishing their opposition, it will make it easier to push forward a pro-corporate, socially oppressive agenda, and RTW supporters are willing to lie and throw workers under the bus to get what they want.

Sooner or later they will try to push it through Pennsylvania’s legislature, but as long as movements like Occupy continue to shine a light on the criminal activities of the 1%, they’ll have a much harder time tricking voters into thinking Right to Work means anything but “A Tactic Designed with the Sole Intention of Diminishing the Political Will of Working People.”



The Truth About Transit

Economic Myths vs. the Truth About Transit: or Why You Need to Care Even if You Never Take the Bus

By Kate Luce Angell

By now, most residents of Allegheny County are aware that the Port Authority is struggling with a financial crisis and is planning cuts which will eliminate service for 45,000 daily riders, raise fares again and lay off 600 workers. Those cuts will also:

- Eliminate the 28X, the bus service to the airport. Instead of \$3.75 to go to the airport—where many county residents work—it will cost \$25 for a shuttle and \$35-40 for a taxi.
- Eliminate bus and ACCESS service for more than 1,000 older and disabled residents.

By the time the planned cuts are put into action this summer, and added to the cuts from 2010, Pittsburgh will have lost around half of its public transit capacity. When a transit system is reduced by half, the result is often a “death spiral”: transit becomes an untenable solution for people looking to get to work on time, and as fares rise, those who can use a car to get to work will opt to do so. With reduced ridership, transit must raise fares again—until there is no transit system left. Even for those who don’t take the bus or T, these changes will have a huge impact:

- With reduced or no bus service to downtown, thousands more will need to drive and park there. Rush hour traffic and downtown parking rates will likely triple. Our already stressed roads and bridges will be hit even harder.
- Without an economical way to reach their jobs, thousands will simply lose them; the rest will shoulder much larger costs in parking, car repair, and car ownership. The ripple effect will mean higher costs, higher unemployment, failed businesses and reduced income for everyone in the region. And since the majority of tax money for the state is produced in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, tax revenue will fall for all of Pennsylvania.
- Pittsburgh’s hard-earned reputation as one of the country’s most livable and green cities will be erased overnight—there’s no “livable” and “green” without public transit. The city and the surrounding areas will no longer be able to attract new business and residents based on these assets. Our hospitals and schools will end up with lesser institutional reputations. This will cause wages and taxes to fall, and state revenue to fall again.

How did we get here? A toxic combination of rising costs for retiree health care and pensions, the worldwide financial failure and an almost complete lack of planning by our legislators and leaders. But as bad as these causes are, they are greatly exacerbated by the fact that public transit—something that benefits every taxpayer, regardless of whether or not they use it—has become a political issue.

It’s important to understand the roots of transit problems without falling into left/right divisions, since everyone in the state will be negatively impacted by the failure of Pittsburgh’s transit, regardless of their party affiliations. First, transportation infrastructure, including transit, has been radically underfunded for 30 years or more nationally. Both parties recognize this and the results are impossible to ignore. PA has more failing bridges than any other state, and thousands of miles of crumbling highway. Funding infrastructure requires raising revenue, which means taxes and fees. Since the 1980s, the trend has been toward fewer taxes, and fees have not kept up with rising costs. Tax rates nationally have gone down since the 1980s, and far less money has gone to the infrastructure projects, including transit systems, that used to be an American point of pride.

Another major problem is that, believe it or not, Pennsylvania has no dedicated source of funding for transportation infrastructure. In 2010, the federal government ruled that PA’s plan to fund transportation through tolling I-80, Act 44, was against the rules. As a result, Act 44 was mostly eviscerated, leaving the state with a \$472 million hole for transportation. At the same time, the federal government dramatically reduced the money it allotted the states for infrastructure.

With Gov. Corbett’s latest budget, he has proposed no solution to any of this, despite having received the recommendations of his very own Transportation Funding Advisory Commission (TFAC), which proposed that the cap on the gas tax be lifted and license and registration fees be increased, producing \$2.7 billion. Both Republican and Democratic leaders have offered plans based on the TFAC’s recommendations. But because implementing them would require increasing the tax on gas by several cents, and because Gov. Corbett hopped on the Grover Norquist “no new taxes” pledge bandwagon during his campaign, he has refused to consider these plans.

It’s also important to understand that opponents of funding public transit often make their arguments based on information that is partial or misleading, and that when examined, these arguments go against economic sense in favor of short-sighted austerity. Probably one of the broadest objections to public transit is that it is a government service and is therefore funded partly through taxes. The conservative position that taxes must

always be negative, that government services must be wasteful or unimportant, is in the case of transit simply untrue. Transit makes overwhelming economic sense—its return on investment is very high, higher than almost any other type of public investment, as numerous studies have shown. In the case of Pennsylvania’s transportation infrastructure, the economic analysis clearly supports transit. The amount of increased costs that Pennsylvanians would have to pay as a result of the gas increase and rise in license and registration fees recommended by TFAC is dwarfed by the huge negative impact on the state’s economy as a result of losing a functioning Pittsburgh transit system, by potentially billions of dollars. Gov. Corbett may object to raising taxes, but isn’t losing one’s job, being forced to drive to work and park every day, and having one’s downtown business fail just a different, much more burdensome, kind of tax?

Another complaint is that transit is subsidized, and that it must be able to make money under free market conditions. It’s true that transit is subsidized—but so is all transportation. Twenty percent of federal transportation funds goes to transit, but a whopping 80% goes to roads. Highways receive an annual subsidy of somewhere between \$400 billion and \$1 trillion. Transit only gets \$17 billion. There is no transportation “free market.” These numbers also help to explain why public transit doesn’t appear to make money. First, transit isn’t competing on a level playing field, when 80% of funding goes to its competitor, roads. Also, just because it’s difficult to support public transit on fares alone doesn’t make transit a net economic loss. Over and over, studies have shown that money spent on transit has a much greater return on investment than building roads. Transit allows regions to thrive economically: its true dividends don’t show up in the Port Authority’s bottom line, but in the ledgers of thousands of other businesses and in the pockets of taxpayers. Non-urban taxpayers complain that their tax dollars are “subsidizing” transit in the cities. This is true, but again, that amount doesn’t even come close to the level at which Pittsburghers and Philadelphia residents are “subsidizing” the rural parts of the state. The vast majority of Pennsylvania’s money is produced in our two large cities, and a city’s productivity is closely tied to a functioning transit system. Just imagine if counties like Forest, Fayette or Greene had to exist on their own tax revenue, without help from the rest of the state? People in Forest county need Pittsburgh transit almost as much as Pittsburghers do—perhaps even more.

Conservative opponents to funding transit also point to the fact that a portion of the Port Authority’s deficit is a result of underfunded pensions and rising benefit costs for its workers. This is true all across the country, not just here. Investment didn’t keep pace as medical costs rose, and the market tumble also affected these funds. But Port Authority has received concessions from its unions that have reduced its outstanding debt by tens of millions of dollars, and it continues to do so. And even critics of the Port Authority have been impressed by the organization’s efforts to streamline its operations. The truth is that, even with all waste eliminated, and with every worker giving up their pensions and medical coverage, *Port Authority’s funding gap would still remain*—because the bigger problem is lack of revenue, not bloated costs.

It’s easy to see why public transit has conservative political detractors. First, those who directly and immediately benefit from transit are less affluent, and are therefore less politically influential. Working families, retirees, those with disabilities—these are groups with limited voices. Transit serves urban areas, which traditionally tend to vote Democratic, and these areas also tend to be legislatively underrepresented in state and national government. But transit itself is neither red nor blue, conservative nor liberal. Transit does not benefit only one region or group of people, but rewards public investment across the board, through increased economic health and increased tax revenue. Analysis of transit reveals a truth about our country, our state and our city that is often ignored: none of us is in this alone. We do not succeed or fail only through our own efforts, and our success or failure impacts everyone else. If our national and state leaders refuse to help Pittsburgh’s transit system, they won’t pay nearly as heavy a price as Pittsburghers will, but they will pay just the same.



With budget cuts threatening public transit, the sign on this bus is worth a thousand words.

Occupy Pittsburgh Now is a media project produced by the Communication Working Group (CWG) of Occupy Pittsburgh.

Editorial Policy: Editorial decisions are made by consensus within the CWG. Submissions to **Occupy Pittsburgh Now** are open and encouraged. The views of the authors are their own.

CWG Members:
Kate Luce Angell
Jeff Cech
Ray Gerard
Tom Jefferson
Michael Lawson
Tom Prigg

Contributors:
Kristyn Felman

Photographs in this Issue:
Tom Jefferson
Ray Gerard

Contact / Send Submissions to:
occupypittsburghnow@gmail.com

Occupy Pittsburgh
1 Peoples Park
6th Avenue & Grant Street
Pittsburgh PA 15219
www.occupypittsburgh.org

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No-Derivs 3.0 Unported License.