

Occupy Pittsburgh Now

FREE PRESS FOR THE PEOPLE

ISSUE NO. 11

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2013

THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE

One Whole Year of Pittsburgh's Free Press

***Amendment I of the U.S. Constitution:
Congress shall make no law respecting an
establishment of religion, or prohibiting
the free exercise thereof; or abridging the
freedom of speech, or of the press; or the
right of the people to peaceably assemble,
and to petition the government
for a redress of grievances.
Ratified December 15, 1791***

On February 1, 2012, this publication debuted as a media project of the Communications Working Group (CWG) of Occupy Pittsburgh, and as an alternative to corporate-controlled media. The goal was to establish a Free Press in the greater Pittsburgh area, one not governed by concerns about owners, advertisers or political allegiance.

Since the beginning it has been our mission to serve, educate and inform the 99% of the greater Pittsburgh area on the issues that affect their daily lives. We continue our commitment to growing and maintaining a Free Press, with an eye toward inspiring others to start their own counter-corporate media publications in Western PA.

Over the last 12 months, OPN has covered important issues such as growing economic disparity, the illegal privatization of The Commons, The War on Women in all its forms, attempts to extinguish Labor Unions and the right of all people to organize, corporations masquerading as non-profit institutions, Banks imposing illegal home-foreclosures and exploiting land that is zoned for the use of all people, our state's ongoing Public

Transit crisis, the institution of voter suppression laws, the right to healthcare for every person, the poisoning of our land & water through Fracking, human trafficking, the rise of Citizen Journalism, and the exploits of Pennsylvania's most corrupt Governor, *One-Term Tommy Corbett*.

At the height of the Occupy Movement last autumn, dozens of Occupy-affiliate newspapers began publishing. As we've gone to print with this current issue, we have been able to verify the continuing existence of only three, of which OPN is the only one printing monthly.

But just as the Occupy movement has undergone an evolution, with members focusing on a diverse range of causes and efforts, OPN is in the process of evolving as well. Since our inaugural February 2012 printing, as the middle insert of the Thomas Merton Center's monthly *New People*, printed copies continue to circulate citywide, and OPN now includes an online news website- www.opnnews.org. We have expanded our scope to include a regular City Beat article, the first of which can be found in this issue. We have also kicked off an ongoing series about the importance of Infrastructure issues, and are instituting a push to recruit more members for our growing volunteer and writing staff.

Throughout the coming months, we'll be producing & distributing various forms of media including print & video investigative reports, video news reports from the field and special video productions, photo essays and exhibitions, and more.

One of our long-term goals is to locate and acquire a headquarters/storefront to expand our presence in the local community, and to make OPN

more easily accessible to the people of Western PA. We strive to be not just a newspaper, but an independent source of media to the people of greater Pittsburgh.

It's been a long, strange trip of a year, with many sacrifices and frustrations, but one that's been filled with many practical accomplishments & tangible results. The very fact that you are reading this paper is one of those results. OPN thanks each and every person who has taken the time and effort to support us throughout the last year. Without you, this publication could not continue to exist. For those of you who want to get involved, whatever your time allows or your skills permit, every small thing that you do helps grow and maintain a Free Press for the People.

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individual concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

If you would like to support OPN through donations or help with fundraising, helping with distribution through physical drop-offs or placing OPN in your shop, helping with research, writing news reports and/or news feature articles, investigative reporting, photo & video assignments, clerical tasks, web support, social media support, equipment needs, or support in acquiring a storefront, please contact us at opnnews@gmail.com. You can also attend our monthly meetings- The first is on February 6, from 7-8:30 p.m. We'll be announcing the location and date each month on our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/opn.

Guest Editorial: Arun Gupta Examines the Future of the Occupy Movement

By Arun Gupta

Anniversaries are a time for memorial and evaluation, to dissect what has passed and venture what could have been. The one-year anniversary of the founding of *Occupy Pittsburgh Now* offers one such opportunity, and what happened to the Occupy Wall Street movement is the burning question.

In hindsight everything about Occupy seems logical, even inevitable – the conditions that gave rise to it, the decisions made, the overall trajectory. It was a year of global uprisings; big banks were widely loathed; Democrats and Republicans had let the economic crisis fester; "We are the 99%" electrified millions; occupation brought the anger to Wall Street's doorstep while creating a festive democratic commons; and in the end the system, that vague suffocating force, crushed the dream.

The analysis gives a tip of the hat to accident and contingency: Adbusters call to Occupy that galvanized the initial general assembly and gathering, the NYPD's ban on megaphones that spawned the human microphone, the near-killing of Iraq War vet Scott Olsen in Oakland that generated a wave of sympathy.

We can explain in great detail what happened, but we don't know how to shift the historical tides back in our favor. The analysis turned into paralysis. The strategy was more of the same.

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Protestors vow to 'Make it Our UPMC'



About 150 protesters made up of a coalition of groups such as Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network, Pittsburghers for Public Transit and Fight Back Pittsburgh, marched from UPMC headquarters in the U. S. Steel building to the City-County Building and the County Courthouse chanting "UPMC – You Are Not A Charity".

The coalition has started a campaign called "Make It Our UPMC", charging that the non-profit health care organization does not do enough for the regions community; for instance- spending less than 2% of its revenues on free health-care, while generating \$9.6 billion dollars in revenue in its last fiscal year, and receiving \$204 million dollars in tax breaks in 2012.

UPMC is the area's largest tax-exempt charity with annual profits worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Its CEO is paid more than \$6 million dollars a year, 22 other executives make at least \$1 million per year while it's full time employees are the third most frequent users of public assistance in the region, after Walmart & McDonalds, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor.

UPMC is the largest private employer in Pennsylvania, with approximately 56,000 employees. (For more information: www.makeitourupmc.org)

-Photos by Tom Jefferson

What Comes After Occupy?

Continued From Page 1

Like a cargo cult, occupiers kept chanting, “We are the 99%,” hoping that its mere invocation would unleash manna from heaven once more.

Attempts to reoccupy space in New York a year ago – the original encampment at Zuccotti Park, Union Square a few miles north and the sidewalks of Wall Street itself – all crumbled from police pressure and activist fatigue. Same with other attempted reoccupations of public plazas and abandoned buildings around the country. No matter, everyone was gearing up for May Day, betting militancy and numbers alone would ignite the “American Spring.” The night of May 1 in New York thousands coalesced for another Wall Street occupation, but disarray inside and thousands of menacing cops outside doomed it. Same with the anti-NATO protests in Chicago, the Occupy National Gathering in Philadelphia and the first anniversary on September 17, 2012. All came and went without the movement being rekindled.

As the core dissipated, energy flowed outward into projects like “F the banks,” home-foreclosure defense, labor solidarity, the “Rolling Jubilee” debt buyout, climate justice and Occupy Sandy. It was the spaghetti strategy, “Throw it against the wall and see what sticks.” Except little stuck, no matter how important the work. Lacking an occupied space that bestowed a unifying glue, public visibility and media attention, these efforts have struggled to gain prominence, and a few have disappeared into the memory hole.

“As a new movement, Occupy was free of the historical baggage that constrains the imagination of most established organizations.”

We are on the precipice of the future, but can’t penetrate the darkness. So we mouth platitudes like “seedlings of hope,” and point to Occupy Sandy and efforts to organize fast-food and Walmart workers that have taken cues from Occupy with public militancy and speaking in the name of all the have-nots. Yet those seedlings never seem to grow into mighty oaks that change the landscape. The future is, of course, unknowable, but we can learn from recent history to anticipate and shape what comes next.

First is the phenomenon of novelty and continuity. In regard to Occupy, occupation is an old tactic, going back more than 3,000 years ago to Ancient Egypt when tomb builders occupied the Pharaoh’s temples to demand back wages consisting of fish, beer, clothing and other provisions. Occupy Wall Street’s horizontalism is rooted in

the late 90s global justice movement and in turn the influence of the Zapatistas and other anarchist movements. But Occupy, along with the Arab Spring and the Wisconsin Uprising, was novel by being a permanent protest, eschewing one-time marches and direct actions that were easily managed by the state and ignored by the corporate media.

The novelty and continuity extend to the 99% and 1%, phrases that popularized old-fashioned class politics in a fresh manner. As a new movement, Occupy was free of the historical baggage that constrains the imagination of most established organizations. It wasn’t just the media or politicians who dismissed Occupy at first, organized labor, NGOs and virtually every progressive grouping held back until the movement went stratospheric. The original occupiers were naïve in imagining they could shake the structures of power, but that naiveté allowed them to think and act big where veteran activists are often unable to.

Most important, Occupy brought new people into politics, which is how social movements succeed. The same statement was often uttered in encampments across the United States, “I was sitting on my couch yelling at the TV before Occupy.” Appealing to the non-political means the movement has found a voice and a method that speaks to people’s everyday lives, and is not trapped in arcane disputes or academic pedantry.

Second, occupations showed the role politicized space plays in effecting social change, such as the sit-down labor strikes of the 1930s, the civil rights boycotts and sit-ins, and 1970s feminist consciousness-raising. The more the public sphere is regulated, surveilled and commodified, the more people are isolated in cages of home, work and internet, the more common space matters. Space defines every movement. The Tea Party movement is a product of reactionary ideology and the suburbs. The anti-fracking movement is propelled by homeowners and environmentalists fighting to preserve rural lands. The “Idle No More” movement began as a response to the Canadian government’s attack on indigenous sovereignty and land and water rights.

The opposite is also true: lack of space hampers organizing or requires new tactics. To organize workers at Walmart, which has perfected union-busting, labor groups started organizing in the community and are experimenting with workers associations that have more legal space to act than unions. Home-foreclosure defense activists have notched dozens of victories in Oakland, Portland, Atlanta and Boston, but loss of community, shame over unpaid debt and the banks’ manipulation of the regulatory apparatus has stymied the movement. Student debt-relief has gained little traction because people who graduated years or decades ago need the most help, and once dispersed throughout society they are far more difficult to bring together than students.

The third factor is ideology, which played a key role in the successful student strike in Montreal last year. One city resident says the public was sympathetic to student outrage against tuition hikes because most Quebecois support the idea of a “social wage,” meaning healthcare, housing and education are available to all and paid for by progressive taxation. Occupy welcomed everyone from socialists to conservatives, but this led to a lowest-common denominator critique of the economic crisis as a moralistic tale about individual “greed” rather than a more accurate analysis of class forces. The lack of explicit ideology also elevated the 99% from slogan to political principle with troubling consequences. Disruptive and divisive individuals claimed they had a right to participate as part of the 99% but with no way to hold them accountable, many occupations fell into infighting, leading seasoned activists to move on from Occupy, depriving it of experience and knowledge when it needed it most.

Fourth, the lack of a functional organization sank Occupy. General assemblies were incapable of strategic decision making, and most occupations became insular and dysfunctional before being forced out. In New York the plan to defend the occupation from an inevitable police attack was for occupiers to lock down with chains while mobilizing social media for help. The police simply used overwhelming force, and there was no back-up plan to retake the space.

Fifth, Occupy did not figure out how to deal with the reality that most participants were white youth with middle-class backgrounds or aspirations who had become disposable to capital. This is also an aspect of novelty: people who are in the process of losing social status are likelier to rebel. But this was usually treated as a negative: those who had social power were told they had to give it up. The two outcomes, either glossing over social privileges or treating people who are looking for empowerment as oppressors, is about as effective as it sounds, and hurt opportunities to build cross-class and cross-race solidarity.

So what will the next movement look like? It will be unexpected, and perhaps reactive like the anti-Iraq War movement or Occupy Sandy. It will be due to a disruption, and the likeliest ones are either ecological from climate change or social from widespread poverty due to high unemployment, low wages and a lack of social services. (Another possibility is if a popular and unified response emerges against policing, surveillance and prisons.) Taking or recreating a public commons will be an initial sign of success. The insistence on bottom-up democracy will predominate, though democratizing social control of goods and services will loom larger as inequality intensifies. Issues of race and identity will become more vexing due to social stratification, and could trip up any new movement.

A sustained movement needs a clear idea both of the legitimate people, and the illegitimate people. After all, occupiers learned that police are not part of the 1%, but as agents of repression, they are certainly not part of the 99% either. This involves developing organization, strategy and ideology to do education, train new activists, reproduce itself, and implement nuanced and nimble decisions. But this also means balancing hierarchy with democracy, and accountability with responsibility, areas in which Occupy has been weak.

Success will be met with attempts to co-opt, such as how MoveOn tried to steal Occupy’s mojo with the “99% Spring” campaign, hostility from powerful ideologues like the corporate press and violent state repression. The future is unwritten, but that doesn’t mean it can’t be anticipated and planned for. That is what politics are about, and learning why Occupy succeeded – and failed – is a necessary first step to building a stronger movement next time.

“Appealing to the non-political means the movement has found a voice and a method that speaks to people’s everyday lives, and is not trapped in arcane disputes or academic pedantry.”

Arun Gupta is a co-founder of The Occupied Wall Street Journal and The Independent. He has reported from more than 40 occupations around the United States, and is a regular contributor to The Guardian, The Progressive, In These Times and Truthout.

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“Oh, you mean they’re going to gentrify the river?”

By Bram Reichbaum

That was the reaction of one former Occupy Pittsburgh participant, upon learning of the Buncher Company’s plans to redevelop 55 acres in the Strip District. The swath of land stretches from 11th to 21st St. and from Smallman St. to the shoreline of the Allegheny. On one hand, the sweeping deal for this chunk of land represents a chance to expand the cramped “Golden Triangle” central business district eastward; on the other hand, though, it forecasts challenges for maintaining the authentic lure of the Strip and of Pittsburgh’s riverfronts as neighborhood and tourist amenities.

Pittsburgh City Council in December of last year voted by a razor-thin 5-4 margin to grant Buncher Co., a Pittsburgh-based real estate development company, special zoning requests which enable the construction of a hotel, office buildings, a residential enclave and new commercial development in addition to a concrete “piazzza” and pier into the river. These zoning requests were negotiated by Buncher with the City’s Urban Redevelopment Authority. The area presently includes the historic Produce Terminal building and surrounding parking lots. The Produce Terminal Building is slated for a partial demolition as part of the zoning package.

These plans have been called everything from “a crappy strip mall,” to a “gated community” to a “danger” to the riverbank and to the vibrancy of existing Strip District wholesalers and retailers by critics. However, advocates say that Buncher’s plans represent up to 3,000 new permanent jobs and \$33 million in local tax revenue, as well as \$400 million in local investment.

“At the end of day, I think this development is good for the City of Pittsburgh,” says Councilman Corey O’Connor to OPN. O’Connor provided a decisive vote for the new zoning, “because it provides more opportunity for business in the Strip District, adds to the city’s tax base, and offers additional residential options.”

The council debate was acrimonious enough to scuttle -- at least, for now - Buncher’s intentions to apply for a \$50 million tax-increment financing scheme, or “TIF” -- an up-front loan by the City to pay for new streets, sewers and other infrastructure for the project, underwritten by future tax proceeds.

It also soured relations among City leaders, during the new Council’s session. Responses by Mayor Luke Ravenstahl in the local press suggested that opposition to



the Buncher plan originated in political sour grapes. But O’Connor doesn’t buy in to that explanation. “I do not believe that this was politically driven,” offered O’Connor, who added he was no fan of political infighting. “While I viewed the Buncher Project in a positive light, some of my colleagues had serious concerns about the proposed development. We are each entitled to our own points of view.”

However, O’Connor said at the Council table that he “just doesn’t have as many concerns” as others, particularly Councilman Patrick Dowd, who over months offered several amendments to the zoning proposal, for everything from wider setbacks from the river, the elimination of private drives, the inclusion of more green space, and delays until separate lawsuits involving the use of the Produce Terminal, a railroad easement and the satisfaction of new storm water regulations might be fully resolved.

O’Connor also looks more favorably upon the tax-increment financing package. “I’m supportive of the TIF because it allows funding for projects that could be undertaken by other public entities and non-profits,” he said.

Council President Darlene Harris as well as Council members Daniel Lavelle, Theresa Smith, Ricky Burgess and O’Connor voted in favor of the special zoning. Members Bill Peduto, Bruce Kraus, Natalia Rudiak and Dowd opposed it. There’s no doubt this development will return to the public eye, especially considering the planned demolition of the Produce Terminal, the relocation of the public market and a revised TIF application. The debate also presages even bigger new developments, such as the one along 2nd Ave. in Hazelwood, which includes an even larger TIF.



OPN Looks At Improving America’s Infrastructure

A few decades ago, it was conventional wisdom that America’s infrastructure was the best in the world.

But that’s not true anymore. According to the 2011-12 World Economic Forum’s ranking of national infrastructure systems, American infrastructure has fallen to #16, behind South Korea, down from #6 in 2007.

Without even replacement-level investment for decades, our infrastructure is simply worn out. Many of our roads and bridges, for example, are decades past their planned lifespans, and are daily carrying loads many times what they were designed to handle.

From our deteriorating roads and bridges aboveground to the crumbling water and sewage pipes under our feet, from the fragility of our patchwork and overstressed electrical grid to the unfinished business of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, we know we can do better.

And it’s also clear that infrastructure investments not only provide immediate economic opportunities, they continue to spur economic growth for years. As infrastructure champions point out, paying into our infrastructure is not a cost—it’s an investment that pays us back many times over in hundreds of ways, including quality of life. And as our planet faces a dramatically changing climate, smart planning and action in making sustainability a core consideration is

more important than ever before. But until recently there’s been little political will, either on the part of our privatization-obsessed Governor or our Republican-dominated legislature, to find a way forward. Ending years of inertia, Corbett has promised a plan this week, and it’s eagerly awaited, since construction costs rise daily. In this atmosphere, what can PA’s citizens do to ensure a better future and intelligent and efficient infrastructure? How can we facilitate action at all levels of government and ensure we act as responsible global citizens at the same time? Who is responsible for making decisions, how do we reach them, and where does funding for these endeavors come from? Next month, OPN will feature its first piece in the ongoing series Ground Up (and Down) which will focus on the contemporary realities of American infrastructure and ways in which citizens can do their part to ensure a more sustainable future. We will be examining local infrastructure issues and national trends which affect us on a local level, offer a clearer picture on the economic, social and environmental impacts of infrastructure on our region, and offer some ideas for moving forward. We look forward to bringing this to our readers and literally occupy the streets, water systems, electric grid, communications systems...

CeaseFirePA Candlelight Vigil

Each year in Pennsylvania, 1,200 people are killed because of gun violence, and thousands more are injured.

On January 8, members of CeaseFirePA joined the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence on the anniversary of 19 people being shot in a Tuscon Arizona Supermarket parking lot, leaving six dead and 13 wounded, including United States Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

Thousands of people across Pennsylvania joined in the national candlelight vigil to remember friends & family members whose lives ended or were impacted by gun violence.

The event took place at the at the Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church in Pittsburgh, joining Philadelphia, York, Reading, West Chester, Easton and Kennett Square PA.

Those unable to attend but wishing to participate, were able to share their message of support or make a commitment to take a stand against gun violence at CeaseFirePA’s website, www.ceasefirepa.org.

-Photo by Tom Jefferson



FIGHT BACK PITTSBURGH MEMBERSHIP MEETING

On January 7th, the inaugural meeting of Fight Back Pittsburgh (FBP) brought 68 FBP members together for the first time. FBP is a local chapter of the USW's Associate Member Program, also known as Fight Back America, and it's sponsored by local #3657.

Packed into a conference room at the United Steelworkers (USW) building, the meeting was chaired by USW Local Union #3657 President, Patrick Young.

During the meeting, the membership voted to endorse two upcoming "actions" or demonstrations.

New Voices Pittsburgh and hundreds of organizations worldwide are planning *One Billion Rising*, a global day of action against violence against women on February 14 (Valentine's Day), noon until 2 p.m. in Market Square for an energetic, colorful, dance demonstration to celebrate women's right for peace, dignity and lives free from violence.

Also, on February 11, Pittsburghers for Public Transit (PPT) and other transit advocates from across the state are planning a day of action in Harrisburg to demand sustainable funding for public transit. Buses headed to the state capitol will leave at 7:30 a.m. from Freedom Corner (corner of Center and Crawford in Downtown Pittsburgh). Participants can register for the bus trip through the FBP site. (<http://fightbackpittsburgh.org/2013/01/11/get-on-the-bus-to-protect-public-transit/>)

FBP also formed five new committees to get the work of the new organization moving forward.

The Membership Committee will be reaching out to other working class people in our community to invite them to join Fight Back Pittsburgh. Those interested in getting involved should e-mail Amber Miller at amiller@usw.org and visit www.fightbackpittsburgh.org

-Photo by Tom Jefferson



Vigil for Victim of Domestic Violence

A march, followed by a vigil at Eastminster Presbyterian Church in East Liberty, took place on Saturday, January 12th, for Ka Sandra Wade, who was found shot to death in her apartment on January 2nd.

According to news reports: At 10:38 p.m. on New Years Eve, Ms. Wade called 911 from a cell phone. During that 28-second conversation, Ms. Wade was only able to ask for "someone" to come to her home in Larimer before there was a muffled sound, then the line being disconnected.

Investigators believe that Ms. Wade was secretly trying to call for help and had the phone ripped from her hand, according to District Attorney Steven Zappala. Ms. Wade was found shot to death in her apt 20 hours later.

Wade began working for Action United in March as an intern while she was a student at the Kaplan Career Institute, according to Maryellen Deckard, Statewide Campaign & Development director. The organization hired her before she finished the internship, and she was due to start full-time on the Wednesday following her death, Deckard said.

(East Liberty-based Action United is a nonprofit that focuses on issues affecting low-income communities.)

At the march, people spoke about creating "Ka Sandra's Law", legislation that would make it mandatory for police to speak with a woman during domestic violence calls.

The goal is to present it to city council on National Women's Day, March 8, 2013.

-Photo by Tom Jefferson



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Mike Check Says:

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FIGHT BACK PITTSBURGH

General Membership Meeting
Monday-February 4 - 6:30 PM
United Steelworkers Building
5 Gateway Center-Downtown Pittsburgh
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OPN

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OPN is committed to serving, informing and educating the 99% of the greater Pittsburgh area.

By fulfilling this mission, OPN can influence public debate and contribute locally to the international goal of economic and social justice for all.

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Though some issues of OPN are distributed with the Thomas Merton Center's (TMC) New People, It is produced outside of any editorial control of the TMC.

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