

NYPD & THE 99%, P8 · INSIDE IRAQ, P14 · OCCUPY FICTION, P20

THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #172, December 21, 2011 – January 17, 2012
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



**Reclaiming
homes for the 99%** Pgs 2-4

ROB LAQUINTA



THE INDYPENDENT

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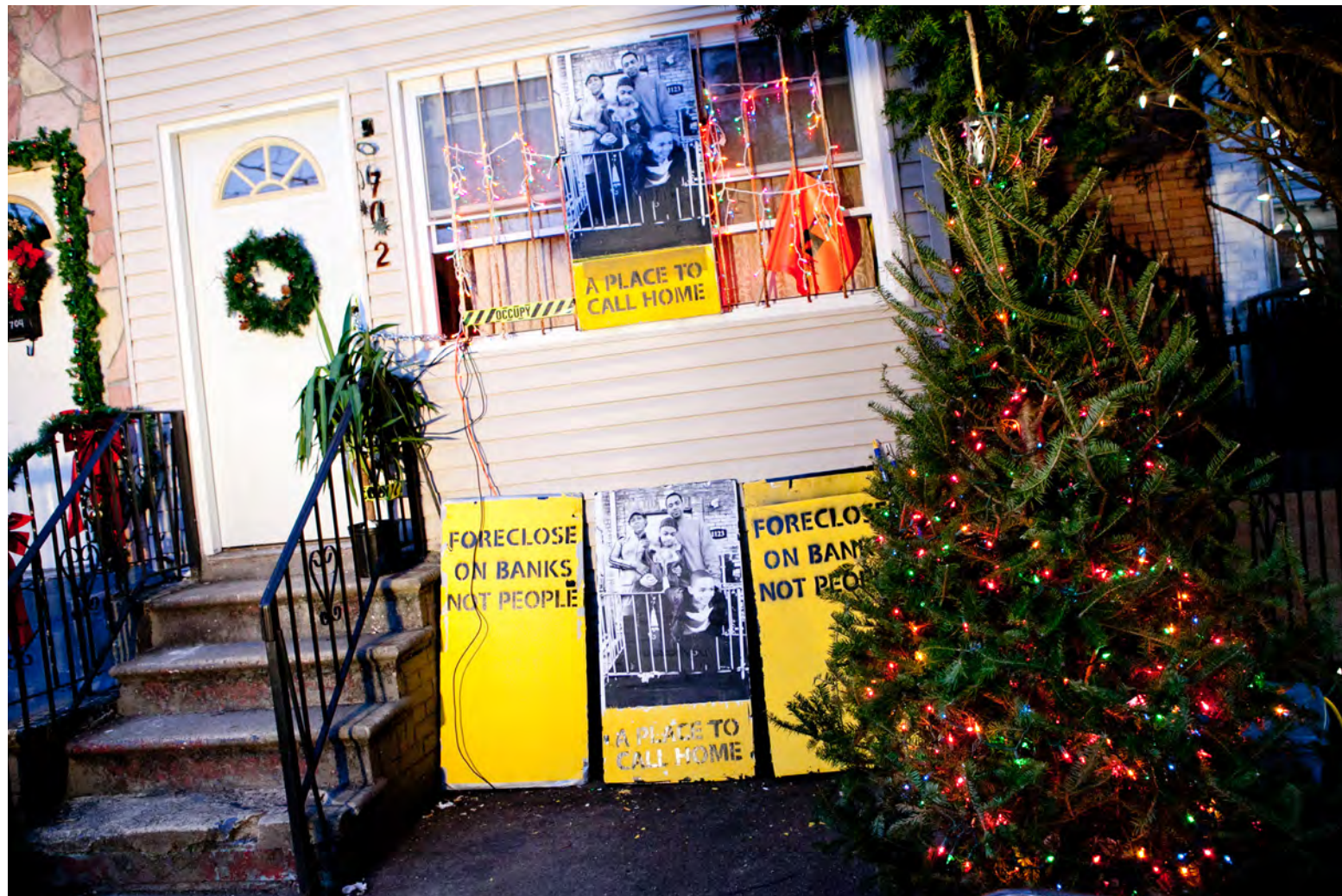
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The Independent is affiliated with the New York City Independent Media Center, which is part of the global Indymedia movement, an international network dedicated to fostering grassroots media production, and with *IndyKids*, a children's newspaper. NYC IMC is an open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org).

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BY ANDY STERN
WITH ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY
LIZ BORDA

Resist,



Wall Street banks have turned millions of Americans out of their homes since the foreclosure crisis began in 2007. On Dec. 6, Occupy activists in more than 20 states teamed up with local community organizations to start moving people back into some of those foreclosed homes. In New York City, hundreds of protesters from Occupy Wall Street and other community groups marched through the Brooklyn neighborhood of East New York to highlight the large number of foreclosed homes there. The march culminated in the community helping the family of Alfredo Carrasquillo and Tasha Glasgow reclaim a Bank of America owned home at 702 Vermont Ave. that had been vacant for three years.



HOME SWEET HOME (TOP TO BOTTOM): A Christmas tree outside of 702 Vermont Ave; A crowd enjoys a housewarming block party during the Dec. 6 action; Carrasquillo speaks with Occupy Wall Street volunteers inside an occupied foreclosed home.

Reclaim, Recreate



MARCHING FOR OUR RIGHTS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Tasha Glasgow, 30, and her son, Alfredo, Jr., in another foreclosed home they have been staying in, along with her daughter, Tanisha (not pictured); Alfredo Carrasquillo, 27, meets his new neighbors outside the foreclosed home he is occupying; Volunteers from Occupy Wall Street help clean up garbage from inside an occupied foreclosed home; Carrasquillo speaks with Occupy Wall Street volunteers inside an occupied foreclosed home; Carrasquillo rides the subway home after speaking at an NAACP rally; New York City Councilmember Charles Barron (second from right) marches with hundreds of protesters from Occupy Wall Street and other community groups through the Brooklyn neighborhood of East New York to highlight the large number of foreclosed homes there.



OWS Finds a Home

Housing Takeovers Point the Way for Occupy '2.0'

BY NATHAN SCHNEIDER

Occupy Wall Street found a new home on Dec. 6 — not a new park, plaza or square — but a house. Just weeks after the eviction from its encampment in the financial district, around 1,000 occupiers and local community members braved the rain to take a foreclosure tour of the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn, concluding with a celebratory block party as once-homeless community organizer Alfredo Carrasquillo, together with his wife and two children, reclaimed a vacant home (see photo essay, p. 2). It was one of many anti-foreclosure and anti-eviction actions taking place in communities across the United States that day.

As the march passed, I heard a local woman say, “This was a long time coming.”

For those of us who have been organizing and reporting on Occupy Wall Street for the past few months, the afternoon was a reunion of familiar faces, of people who used to see each other daily at Liberty Plaza. But more visible than usual at Occupy Wall Street actions were collared clergy and members of the State Assembly and City Council. Together with locals and organizers from the NYC General Assembly’s Direct Action Committee, they were leading the marches and calling out the chants — all through the people’s mic, of course, megaphone-free. Along the way, staffers from groups that were once anticipating from afar what Occupy Wall Street would do were now busily coordinating the action; among these were Van Jones’ Rebuild the Dream, New York Communities for Change and Organizing for Occupation.

This, it seems, is our clearest glimpse yet of what Occupy’s “Phase II” will look like.

The General Assembly and its related working groups are only able to do so much on their own. Without the focal point — or, to some, distraction — of an encampment, the movement’s actions will rely more on coordinating with institutions that are firmly entrenched in neighborhoods where it works. Despite the Occupy movement’s leaderless structure, this also means working with the leaders of these institutions.

OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

While occupiers have almost always welcomed the support of outside organizations cheerfully, during the Occupy Our Homes march I heard grumbling among some who have had negative experiences with this or that public figure, or who are suspicious of traditional institutions as a whole. A City Council member might stand with the movement one day, but what will she expect from it on election day? And how far will a given nonprofit go with civil disobedience before it starts to scare away funders? These are new questions that the Occupy movement will have to face.

The answer, though, seemed clear to me when I passed an activist running from the



Furthermore, without the need to oversee encampment sites, the attention of Phase II is much more carefully oriented around the very means by which the movement’s corporate opponents perpetuate themselves: foreclosed homes, ports and rampant consumerism. Foreclosures, as the ground zero of the 2008 financial crisis, are a fitting place to start. They’re also where the often abstract machinations of Wall Street hit home for many Americans. By preventing them, or reversing them, the movement will find new allies who were less moved by the earlier talk of ending corporate personhood or imposing a Tobin tax. Many see this kind of work as an important next step in preparation for the spring and the challenges that will come with an election year.

SPANISH LESSONS

This was a foregone conclusion for the May 15 movement in Spain, which has served as a source of inspiration to many Occupy Wall Street organizers. On Dec. 6, I talked about this with Monica Lopez, who is part of the Spanish movement and has been at Occupy Wall Street since the beginning. The Spaniards started doing anti-eviction work almost immediately, because families participating in the movement were facing eviction.

“As soon as a family got a notice that they were going to be evicted, we would all get ready to make an appointment for where we [were] supposed to go.” She flashed a mischievous smile. “We showed up, hundreds of people, every single day that it was happening.” They eventually created a text message alert system, and anti-eviction actions continue to happen all over Spain.

Knowing that some fear Occupy Wall Street might be in decline, I asked her whether this kind of work helped the Spanish movement grow after it was no longer occupying public squares. “Yeah — how can it not keep growing? I mean, this is for everybody,” Lopez said.

That much was clear from the scene in East New York, where the movement’s demographics suddenly shifted as it moved out of the financial district and into one of Brooklyn’s poorest neighborhoods. Looking out over the crowd, Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez observed, “After the eviction, the movement has got more color!” Since Occupy Wall Street has often been accused of not being welcoming enough to those hit hardest by the recession and the resulting austerity measures, this difference means a lot.

New communities and new organizations, of course, mean new complications for an already messy movement. But if it can keep building momentum this way, by speaking and acting on behalf of people’s most vital needs, it will always have a home somewhere.

Nathan Schneider is an editor at Waging-Nonviolence.org, where an earlier version of this article was published.

soon-to-be-reclaimed house on Vermont Avenue with a drill in his hand — which presumably had been used to bypass the lock. With the march came a team from Occupy Wall Street’s sanitation committee to clean up inside the house. Outside, the occupation’s library and kitchen set up shop, along with teach-ins and a piñata. The answer I had in mind, that is, is direct action. As long as this movement keeps nonviolent acts of resistance at its center, refusing to wait for the powers that be to approve of the undertakings it deems necessary, it will be far less corruptible. Politicians and nonprofits will join the cause not so much because they see

a comfortable opportunity for themselves but because they can’t afford not to.

That’s exactly what appears to be happening in Phase II, even more so than in Phase I. As occupations around the country are hardened by the experience of forced eviction, they’ll likely be less receptive to the kind of coddling by politicians that took place in some cities early on. The spirit of direct action is spreading. David DeGraw of OWSNews.org told me that he was getting text messages from all over the country Dec. 6 like this: “I just removed a newly changed lock off of a house to let original owner back in. My Leatherman rules!”

Campaign Accelerates To Recall Wisconsin Governor

BY JANE SLAUGHTER

Wisconsin unionists are saying that a copycat attack on 191 Machinists at a crane-building company is one more reason to recall Gov. Scott Walker, as if more were needed.

Taking a cue from Walker's legislation that decimated public unions in the state, Manitowoc Crane is demanding an open shop and an end to dues check off, in a plant that's been union for at least 60 years.

"They want to Walkerize us," says bargaining committeeman Gary Miller of Machinists Local 516, on strike since Nov. 15.

Miller said the company first wanted workers to vote every year whether their union would continue to exist, then proposed that at the beginning of each month

pull over and sign without getting out of their cars.

Petitioners number at least 20,000 and include far more than just members of organized labor. Walker has "gored everybody's ox," says South Central Federation of Labor President Jim Cavanaugh.

Some are angry about the new voter ID law intended to suppress votes for Democrats. Farmers resent rules that will put Badgercare, the state's medical insurance program, out of reach for many. Anyone with children in school sees the effects of \$1.6 billion in cuts to education. Brey says 4,000 fewer adults are working in Wisconsin schools now than last year.

Because state aid to localities was cut, local governments have slashed staff and services. In October, Wisconsin was the only state to lose jobs — 9,700 of them.

John Matthews, executive director of the Madison teachers union, says people are steamed about Walker's violation of the state's ethos of "Wisconsin nice" and outraged by the betrayal of Wisconsin's legacy of progressive legislation. For example, Wisconsin was the first state to let public employees bargain collectively.

Wisconsin firefighters gathered Dec. 3 to kick off their own petition-gathering, though firefighters and police are exempt from Walker's anti-union law.

President Mark Sanders of the Ohio firefighters union told the group that though most fire stations there are tuned to Fox News, last winter's uprising in Wisconsin "lit a torch in Ohio and now we are here to pass it back to you."

Ohio firefighters played point in voters' massive turn-down of their own governor's anti-collective bargaining bill, in November.

Matthews said police are enforcing the law against defacing petitions, a felony. One Walker backer who scribbled over a petition and drove off was arrested, as was another who tore up a recall sign.

DIY EFFORT

The organization driving the petition-gathering, United Wisconsin, began as a website put up by one Appleton resident, Michael Brown, during the February-March revolt.

Today the site lists 50 local offices. Retired educator Mary Rehwald is United Wisconsin's coordinator in the town of Ashland near Lake Superior, population 8,000. She's proud that by Dec. 2 her 250 volunteers had already exceeded their 3,500-signature target for the area by 900 names.

The "100 percent volunteer effort" "has more energy in it than the Obama campaign did," she said, raising its money through a donation can. "I identify this movement as part of the Occupy movement," Rehwald said.

'RUNNING SCARED'

Unionists believe that Walker is running scared. He does not appear in public in Madison, and when he travels in other parts of the state, he is met by picketers. His attempt to avoid demonstrators by moving the annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony in the Capitol to 8:15 a.m. was unsuccessful. Later, protesters unfurled a giant red Recall banner from the top balcony.

In Manitowoc, Gary Miller says his bosses should be worried that Walker will be recalled. "He might not be here to help them," he said.

This article was originally published on LaborNotes.org.



FLICKR/MADISON GUY

CAN'T WAIT: Petitioners have gathered 507,000 signatures ahead of a mid-January deadline, almost enough to force a recall vote.

each worker could choose.

Christina Brey of the statewide teachers union called the language "almost identical" to Walker's bill that touched off last winter's rebellion that saw 100,000 march in Madison against the attack on bargaining rights.

Wisconsin unionists and thousands of others recently announced that they have gathered 507,000 signatures in four weeks in their drive to force Walker into a recall. They need 540,208 by mid-January.

The strike in Manitowoc is providing a flashpoint that's further galvanizing supporters. A quickly organized rally on Dec. 10 in the Lake Michigan town, heavily supported by the state AFL-CIO, drew 2,000, with buses sponsored by the statewide teachers union, AFSCME, and the Laborers.

"They know if it happens here it's going to happen to everyone else," Miller said.

Thus far there is no attempt to stop the out-of-state strikebreakers who are readying completed cranes for shipment.

VOLUNTEERS

Walker's assault on union power has galvanized members and retirees to collect recall signatures at basketball and football games, in malls, on public sidewalks, and door to door. Because of the cold, a Wisconsin specialty is creating spaces where drivers can

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Join *NYT eXaminer* to look at one of the biggest stories of 2011 — your story. A public discussion about mainstream media's representation of Occupied Wall Street and lessons for the new year.

Sliding Scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

WED DEC 21 • 7:30pm

DISCUSSION: REFLECTIONS ON LIBYA — A STATE IN TRANSITION ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT.

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Clean This!

AN OFFICE CLEANERS' STRIKE IS JUST WHAT OCCUPY WALL STREET NEEDS

BY ARI PAUL

In the post-champagne haze of the first business days of 2012 the white collar workforce of this great city might just find itself in a messy situation.

The 22,000 office cleaners and commercial building workers represented by Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union in New York have authorized a strike if a new deal with the Realty Advisory Board (RAB) isn't struck by midnight Dec. 31. A strike could directly affect 1,500 commercial office buildings, including Rockefeller Center, the Met Life Building and the Time Warner Center. While the union has a long history of issuing strike threats to the RAB and then reaching a deal at the 11th hour, this time is not an idle threat. The givebacks the landlords have demanded from the workers who clean up after them are simply too egregious for the membership to ignore, according to sources within the union.

To begin with, the RAB, which represents the city's large building owners, demanded that a lower wage tier be created for new workers, a move that would create hostility between rookies and old-timers, as well as sow the seeds for a new workforce that would be inclined to decertify the union a few years down the road — not to mention the fact that it would make it impossible to live in the city on a building cleaner's wage.

The top pay rate for this majority immigrant workforce is \$47,000 a year, according to the union. Enma Mehmedovic, who cleans the Sony Building in Midtown Manhattan, said in a statement, "\$47,000 a year is not a lot of money in New York City



WORKER ACTION: Members of local 32BJ march down Broadway hours after they voted to authorize a strike if a new deal with the Realty Advisory Board isn't reached by midnight Dec. 31.

... I'm raising my two teenage children by myself. It takes two paychecks just to be able to buy my kids' clothes and shoes."

Union President Mike Fishman said in a statement, "These workers live in the city with the highest cost of living in the country, and the real estate market here is the most profitable in the country. Their wages afford them only a lower-middle-class standard of living."

The second issue is that the RAB refused to allow members' payments to the union's political action committee to be deducted

automatically from their paychecks, asserting that employers should not have to aid an organization that is actively working against their interests.

As Occupy Wall Street, now homeless after the violent eviction by police in November, searches for a way to move forward, the imagery and timing of this possible work stoppage is just too perfect. For starters, the union said in a statement, "the \$20 billion Manhattan commercial real estate industry has just experienced its busiest third quarter in three years — with sales activity reaching

\$6.3 billion, according to *Crain's*." On top of that, many of the occupants of these buildings are financial houses, corporate law firms and insurance companies. They are buzzing with people in the 1 percent and their apparatchiks.

While the rank and file of Local 32BJ would be marching for their contract demands, they would be emboldened if OWS were on the streets not just picketing, but helping in the union's disruption of the 1 percent's work life.

After all, one tactical goal of OWS has been to disrupt the system to the point that it makes the power brokers pay attention. The strike, which would leave toilets and floors sullied for the stock brokers and associate attorneys, would certainly have that effect. So would having hordes of unemployed and under-employed people blocking building entrances and occupying lobbies.

It would also bring the issue of good jobs to the forefront of the national debate about inequality. Far too often we've heard taunts such as "Shut up and get a job." The office cleaners want jobs, ones with good pay that employers can afford but are resisting. The onus will be on the RAB and its supporters to explain why they so steadfastly oppose their workers being allowed to earn an honest living.

Informal talks between OWS supporters and SEIU 32BJ organizers are already under way. More needs to happen, and while OWS supporters might wish for a general strike to accompany this movement, that is far off in the distance, and something like this is far more real — and just as disruptive.

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14TH TO 96TH ST.

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Manhattan Neighborhood Network
537 W. 59th St.
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444 Amsterdam Ave. (btwn W. 81st and 82nd Sts.)

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Morningside Heights Library
2900 Broadway
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9 W. 124th St.
Trufa Restaurant
140th St. & Broadway
Hamilton Grange Library
503 W. 145th St.
Uptown Sister's Books
W. 156th St. & Amsterdam
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150 W. 100th St.

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BAM
30 Lafayette Ave.
Tillie's of Brooklyn
248 DeKalb Ave.
Tea Lounge
Union St. & Seventh Ave.
Video Gallery
310 Seventh Ave.
Ozzie's Coffee Shop
249 Fifth Ave.
57 Seventh Ave.
Verb Café
Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St.
Pillow Café
505 Myrtle Ave.
Sisters' Community Hardware
900 Fulton St.
Pacific Street Library
25 Fourth Ave.

Outpost Café
1014 Fulton St.

Blackbird Café
197 Bedford Ave.
'sNice Café
315 Fifth Ave.

High Bridge Library
78 168th St. & Woodcrest Ave.

Bedford Library
496 Franklin Ave.

Parkside Deli
203 Parkside Ave.

BRONX

Brook Park
141st St. & Brook Ave.
Mott Haven Library
321 E. 140th St.
High Bridge Library
78 W. 168th St.
Mi Casa Bakery
18 E. Bedford Park Blvd.

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'Tis the Season to Sell Out the Parks

BY ARI PAUL

Every holiday season, places like Union Square and Bryant Park are converted from public common spaces into massive commercial tent cities — a move that brings the city more than \$1 million.

The irony isn't lost on Occupy Wall Street protesters, whose tent city in Zuccotti Park was violently evicted by police in the middle of the night last month.

"If it makes money, then it's okay," OWS activist Jen Waller said on the dichotomy, noting that thousands of people around the country camped out on sidewalks to wait for the opening of big-box stores on Black Friday. "But if you're not making money, or in this case, [if you are] criticizing the system, then you can't do it," Waller concluded.

There are differences to be sure. Merchants intend to leave at the end of the shopping season, and aren't staying overnight. And Zuccotti Park is a public/private park, unlike Union Square and Bryant Park, which are wholly public. But the issue of commercializing spaces like Union Square is still a large one.

"No one asks for this," Geoffrey Croft, the president of NYC Park Advocates, said of the holiday market, which takes up the southern portion of Union Square for more than a month, cutting off what is supposed to be a public space for people who live and work in the area. "It destroys the ambiance of the parks," Croft said.

While holiday markets don't divert resources from other parks in lower-income areas, the money that is generated isn't re-



invested in public space, either. Rather, it goes to the city's General Fund, which is used to finance everything from education to public safety.

"The mayor is using the parks as a cash cow," Croft said, noting that 91 percent of non-tax-based city revenues come from the Parks and Recreation Department.

All of this is happening while City Hall is ignoring real concerns for the city's parks. Last summer, parks advocates and city unions claimed that a cutback in the Parks

Department led to a dramatic decrease in the presence of peace officers in the parks and an uptick in crime.

This isn't to say that parks shouldn't have any commercial activity at all, but bringing in cash for the city should not trump the public's ability to use these public spaces. Commercial tent cities in public parks make it difficult, if not impossible, for people to pursue more meaningful public activities, like playing music, enjoying picnics, or publicly airing grievances. After all, the parks

are built and maintained with taxpayer money.

When asked if the City Council's Parks and Recreation Committee showed any interest in fixing this, Croft said it was a difficult struggle.

"People want parks, but they don't fight for them the way they do when they fight hospital closings or education cuts," Croft said. "The pressure's not there."

THE INDYPENDENT

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—NAOMI KLEIN, author of *Shock Doctrine* and *No Logo*

THE INDYPENDENT DECEMBER 21, 2011 - JANUARY 17, 2012 7

Not the 99%

HOW POLICE UNIONS PROTECT THE PRIVILEGES AND PENSIONS OF NYC'S 'FINEST'

BY ARI PAUL

It fit every Republican's paranoid rant about government labor. A public-sector union turned out its members at a protest insisting that they be immune from prosecution for corruption. But because we're talking about the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA), the biggest union in the New York Police Department, there was no right-wing outcry in response to its demonstrations against the Bronx District Attorney's office's decision to go after "ticket fixing."

The illegal practice of making tickets disappear for friends, family and politicians has long been tolerated by the NYPD and has only recently attracted prosecutorial interest. On Oct. 28 hundreds of officers packed the Bronx courthouse to protest the prosecutions and left their sense of public decency at home. The cops reportedly blocked traffic, sullied the courthouse with refuse, taunted nearby welfare recipients and grabbed journalists' cameras to keep them from documenting the proceedings. Their flimsy message was that ticket fixing had gone on for a long time. (Ironically, when the NYPD defends its labor practices against PBA complaints, it often plays the "This is the way it's always been done" card.) And despite having well-paid public relations personnel, the union still thought it wise to print placards stating, "Just following orders."

It outraged onlookers and readers, who may be shocked to find out that 50 Bronx PBA delegates are reportedly demanding the resignation of PBA president Patrick Lynch because he didn't fight hard enough against the Bronx DA. On the one hand, ticket fixing could be considered one of the more benign problems in the department, as indictments in the Bronx case also revealed police ties to more serious crimes: assault, grand larceny and drug trafficking. However, it opens up the frightening reality that the cops value their impunity, especially when there are probes into systemic racism in the department and a group of officers has already been charged with arms trafficking.

From coast to coast, Occupy Wall Street protesters find themselves in constant battle with the police, with many participants insisting that, from an economic standpoint, the cops, too, make up the "99%" majority. And in cities like New York, protesters point to the fact that cops are unionized, working-class people whose pensions and pay are under attack by the corporate state. But the startling reality of the ticket-fixing scandal and the role of not only police unions but the NYPD's rank and file show a different picture.

The PBA and the other police unions — which represent cops based on their rank —



AT THE BARRICADES: Police and protesters square off Nov. 17, two days after the NYPD raided and shut down Occupy Wall Street's encampment at Zuccotti Park.

are in some senses labor organizations like any other: They bargain for wage increases, manage member benefits and address workplace concerns with management. But these fraternal orders also publicly support members who stand accused of abusing their positions, whether it's brutality against people of color or protesters or using their jobs for personal gain. For instance, Lynch often denounces prosecution of cops, and even continued to defend a rookie cop who was caught on film body-checking a Critical Mass bike rider after the jury returned a guilty verdict.

In a more emotional case in November 2009, the Detectives Endowment Association (DEA) vocally opposed a City Council move to name a street after Sean Bell, an unarmed black man who was killed by detectives, who fired more than 50 shots at him and his friends in a parking lot the night before his wedding. The acquittal of the four detectives by a Queens judge wasn't enough for the DEA, which rubbed more salt in the mourning family's wounds by pressuring the city legislature not to act on the com-

munity's desires.

Cases of police brutality are supposed to be handled by a Civilian Complaint Review Board, but activists often point to the body's relative toothlessness. Lynch told the press in October that an overzealous Internal Affairs Bureau (IAB) — cops call it the "rat squad" — was hurting department morale, but *The New York Times* noted that most of the latest police scandals were uncovered by outside groups, despite an increase in the IAB's budget.

The department boasted in November that the IAB followed through on an investigation that led to the conviction of Brooklyn South Narcotics Detective Jason Arbeeney for planting fake evidence on an innocent couple in 2007. But even in that case, witnesses claimed that the practice in the Brooklyn South Narcotics squad was widespread; it is known as "flaking." The judge in the case, Gustin Reichbach, admonished the corrupt cops, saying their unit "seemingly embraces a cowboy culture where anything goes in the never-ending war on drugs" and fosters an environment where "a refusal to go along

with questionable practices raises the specter of blacklisting and isolation."

That same month a commanding officer and several other front liners were disciplined following a high profile incident in which Jumaane Williams, a black City Councilmember and a black aide to the Public Advocate were arrested during the West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn after they identified themselves and were given permission to cross a police barricade. The punishments ranged from verbal reprimands to loss of vacation time — slaps on the wrist. But Captains Endowment Association President Roy Richter still stood by the police action — which was caught on camera, quickly sparking popular outrage — and tried to pin the blame on the councilman. It's no wonder, then, that New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman told reporters that this was not an isolated incident, but rather "emblematic of the serious attitude problem of the NYPD."

So NYPD management can't police the workforce, and the rank and file diligently



ANDREW HINDERAKER

UNDER ARREST: An Occupy Wall Street protester is carried away by the police on Nov. 17. More than 5,000 Occupy protesters have been arrested nationwide since the movement began in September, including over 1,300 in New York City.

make life miserable for the honest cops who tattle and ruin the fun for everyone else. In 2010, Officer Adrian Schoolcraft leaked tapes to the *Village Voice* revealing how commanding officers in Brooklyn's 81st Precinct fudged crime statistics through pressuring officers to downgrade criminal offenses and setting quotas for issuing summonses. Schoolcraft alleges that in retaliation he was forced into a mental ward at Jamaica Hospital Medical Center in an effort to discredit him. He also alleges that he has been harassed by NYPD officials while suspended from his job and living upstate.

Cops often rally in solidarity with the bad apples the internal mechanisms actually catch, as in the case of Officer Robert Neri, a white officer who in 2004 shot and killed Timothy Stansbury, an unarmed black teenager who had startled the cop on the way to a party in a Brooklyn housing project. Police Commissioner Ray Kelly took the unusual

step of saying the killing appeared to be unjustified, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg visited the grieving family. The PBA was livid, voicing "no confidence" in Kelly's leadership. Neri, already turned into the latest symbol of the city's popular black anger at the NYPD, was voted in as a PBA delegate, a sort of low-level reward from the rank and file for the public humiliation he had to endure for ending the life of a young man who had done no wrong.

In the world of New York City politics, the police unions wield social power. Candidates who need their endorsements and reporters who need them as sources tend to appease them. The union sent a clear message that it won't tolerate a county prosecutor who treats cops like common citizens. Mayoral candidates are listening, as is Manhattan DA Cyrus Vance, Jr., who is on thin ice after bungling several high-profile cases in his first two years in office, including the

rape charges against International Monetary Fund head Dominique Strauss Kahn and a case involving two NYPD officers accused of raping a drunk woman while assisting her into her East Village apartment. Vance likely faces a challenge from the conservative ex-judge Leslie Crocker Snyder, who ran last time with heavy police union support.

The role police and their unions play in a city like New York is especially important as the OWS movement raises the issue of the 99%, which includes the members of the force. Zuccotti Park protesters often try to talk to officers on the scene about economic issues and why working-class Joes and Janes like themselves should support the movement. "There's a lot of room for that message to be delivered to the cops," said Eugene O'Donnell, a former cop and professor of police science at John Jay College for Criminal Justice.

Some in the OWS movement believe that there can be common ground with the cops, because they are unionized, and the mainstream labor movement has come out in support of OWS. The police unions, however, seem interested only in raises and benefits for cops. The union will mobilize members to protest against cuts to their own pensions, which are much more generous than those of other civil servants, but won't take it a step further to support the popular demand that the governor reinstate the millionaires' tax or join other unions in economic justice campaigns.

There's a reason for that attitude. In the NYPD, the police life is frequently all members of the force know. Young cops in particular work irregular schedules, making it difficult to maintain relationships with people outside the department. The camaraderie in the station houses and on the job becomes all the more important for the newbies. Other cops become their closest associates, integrating them into a culture where interpersonal loyalties become more important than showing restraint and upholding the law. Favors are exchanged and no one snitches for fear of being an outcast. And then a cop reads about one of his buddies being dragged out in the press, with Al Sharpton and everyone else bringing on criticism, and the whole affair becomes "us against them."

This is not to say that there aren't honest cops and those who might sympathize with OWS because they, too, have money problems at home or see a bleak economic future for their children. While they still have the ability to make more than \$90,000 a year and retire with a pension at 40, however, it is unlikely that many cops are going to cross over soon. The "law and order" conservatism mixes nicely with a false consciousness that tells them, "I passed the police exam, so why can't anyone else?" even though this isn't an option for most. As Upton Sinclair said, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it."

Veterans of the military, on the other hand, have been vocal supporters of OWS. Perhaps this is because after they serve the system spits them back out onto the street. If state and city governments become so financially stretched that they start axing younger cops and drastically reducing police benefits, this might change.

Until then, they're "just following orders."

DO-NUT BE LIKE THESE UNIONS

Police unions wield power in New York City politics. Here are three of the more visible of these fraternal orders:

Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA): With 24,000 members, it is by far the largest NYPD union, representing the front-line officers. While these officers are the lowest on the NYPD totem pole, its president, Patrick Lynch, is one of the most influential people in the NYPD.

Fun fact: When Lynch, an Irish-American, was elected president in 1999, he ended two decades of Italian-American leadership. According to cop reporter Leonard Levitt, he declared ethnic victory, saying, "Out with the tomatoes, in with the potatoes."

Detectives Endowment Association (DEA): The gumshoes' syndicate's boss, Michael Palladino, is an outspoken advocate. Among many key issues, he opposes the department's use of Breathalyzers on cops after they have fired their weapons. To his credit, he lobbied hard for federal funding for healthcare for sick and injured 9/11 response workers.

Fun fact: In April 2008, the DEA banned *New York Daily News* journalists from a press conference with its acquitted members in the Sean Bell shooting trial, on the grounds that the tabloid had given too much voice to the prosecution.

Captains Endowment Association (CEA): This once obscure union has come into the spotlight in recent years following revelations that a posse of high-level officers raided the home of police whistle-blower Adrian Schoolcraft and had the dissident cop committed, against his will, to the psychiatric ward in a Queens hospital for six days. Several commanding officers (aka white shirts) have been caught on tape using excessive force against OWS protesters.

Fun fact: CEA President Roy Richter defended Anthony Bolonga, the infamous commanding officer who in the first week of OWS pepper-sprayed peaceful, female protesters. He told the *Daily News*: "His actions prevented further injury and escalation of tumultuous conduct." To date, this conduct has not been portrayed in its true context."

—Ari Paul

The Man at the Christmas Tree Stand

PHOTOS BY AMELIA HOLOWATY KRALES &
TEXT BY JOHN TARLETON

Christmas tree vendors. They are a ubiquitous, but little noticed feature of New York's holiday landscape. They don't ring bells like the Salvation Army nor will you hear piped-in Christmas carols at their stands. Instead, they quietly preside over the patches of forest that suddenly appear on the city's sidewalks once a year.

"I love being around trees," says David Stess, a longtime West Village resident who manages a Christmas tree stand on Hudson Street next to a small city park and is also a part-time delivery driver for *The Independent*. Surrounded by fir trees large and small, he encourages you to breathe in the sweet, woody, resinous medley of smells that envelop the stand. "The aromatherapy cannot be denied," he says. "It takes people back to their childhood and time with their family."

Stess, 50, helped unload the truck when the first batch of fresh-cut trees arrived on the day after Thanksgiving. He will work outdoors 30 days straight through Christmas Eve, 14 to 16 hours a day, tending the merchandise, answering questions from passers-by, delivering and installing trees as large as ten feet tall in people's living rooms. At the end of each day, he crashes in his tiny apartment a few blocks from the stand, where he's scrambling to catch up on his rent. After Christmas, he will sell leftover trees from another stand in outer Brooklyn where Russian families still celebrate Christmas on Jan. 6.

Most Christmas tree vendors come from outside New York. Stess describes them as free spirits who "think and act outside the box." In this he is no exception. For the past 20 years, Stess has chronicled the lives of migrant farm workers he's worked alongside of in Maine where he has been acclaimed for his gritty, realist photography. He is still waiting for his breakthrough moment in New York. Meanwhile, selling Christmas trees helps him to pursue his dreams while bringing a touch of nature's beauty to his neighbor's homes.



David Stess has been selling Christmas trees for four years. This is his second year running the stand at Hudson Street between Clarkson and Leroy Streets.



Above: Stess sells a variety of firs that go for \$35 to \$350, and hail from farms in North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee and as far away as Nova Scotia. (For more on Christmas tree recycling, see community calendar, p. 23.)

Below: The hours at the stand are long and the weather can be brutal. "This job is not for the faint of heart. My day starts between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. and goes until midnight or 2 a.m."

Below: Stess sells a potted tree to a customer. "This is the only retail job I've ever done, Christmas trees are the only thing I've ever sold," Stess says.



Above: Stess and his assistant, Seth Zakula, stay busy throughout the day. This is Zakula's first season working at the stand, having moved to Sunset Park, Brooklyn from Wisconsin just three months ago.

Below: Stess trims a tree while Zakula holds the tree steady. Stess is not new to seasonal agricultural work. For 20 years he has been working and photographing the wild blueberry harvest in Maine.



Right: Stess' Christmas tree stand moves about 20 trees a day on weekdays and 30 to 40 on weekends, if the weather is good. At the end of the season, he will have earned about \$10 an hour.



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Reclaiming the Holidays

TAKING BACK OUR WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION FROM 2,000 YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY AND CAPITALISM

By NICHOLAS POWERS

On Black Friday, in a Wal-Mart store in Porter Ranch, Calif., Elizabeth Macias, 32, pepper-sprayed at least 20 other shoppers — including children — so she could snag half-price Xbox 360 video games. Merry Christmas, Wal-Mart shoppers.

On the morning of the same day, a 36-year-old unnamed Target employee in Palm Beach, Fla., was so exhausted from work that she accidentally drove her car into a canal. Target was one of hundreds of big box stores that opened their doors at midnight on Black Friday, with workers expected to clock in as early as 9 p.m. on Thanksgiving night. Happy holidays, Target employees.

Every holiday season America convulses in a spasm of consumer madness. Millions of people dash through malls, pushing and shoving to buy gifts on credit cards smoking with debt (the average amount of credit card debt is \$6,513 per person, and this year the number of Black Friday shoppers who used their credit cards spiked from 16 to 27 percent). Fox News goes into hysterics about secularism. And after the buying, cooking, hosting and eating are over; we collapse, wiped out by the work as miles away bulldozers bury the leftover packaging, wrapping paper and unwanted gifts into landfills. This is Christmas.

Why do we do this? What are we buying? On the surface, the holiday season — that magical time replete with the warmth of family and gifts — seems like it harkens back to

a simpler time. And each time we purchase presents we're trying to recreate that very image — we're buying the experience of innocence.

The major holiday narratives — from *The Christmas Carol* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* to the ritual of lying to kids about Santa Claus — revolve around reclaiming innocence or preserving it. Ebenezer Scrooge and the Grinch are moved by the selfishness of others to give away their stolen wealth. In both stories, the crucial scene is when they witness the very people they were trying to discourage and thwart celebrating pure communion with each other.

Yet before we mistake these scenes as radical moments of transformation, look again. In *The Christmas Carol*, lowly Bob Cratchit practices a form of class masochism by loyally working for Scrooge for years for a pittance. Cratchit only receives a Christmas turkey and a raise due to Scrooge's guilt, not because he stood up to his boss or went on strike. Not exactly progressive values. In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, the Who's of Whoville are paragons of detachment. After the Grinch steals their presents they still circle the tree and sing. But what is missed is that they already bought their presents! Gift exchange could be completed in the absence of material goods because they always just signified an intangible ideal; yet they still had to buy the stuff to initiate the cycle of gifting. The Who's of Whoville are not exactly above crass consumerism.

But the real point is that *The Christmas Carol* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* use the scene of the removed gaze. Both Scrooge and the Grinch suffer from a corrosive cynicism that erodes their relationships with others. Removed from view, they spy on others (either in a dream or from a cave) and are blinded by the blazing light of love, despite their best efforts to quash any semblance of happiness.

And this unconditional giving is what we practice with our children. We provide them with gifts but tell them Santa brought it and watch from a removed gaze, experiencing giving without return. In that moment, we buy innocence back from our children.

But in the adult world, Christmas shopping takes a self-serving turn. In the stampeding shoppers we see the desire for innocence filtered through class anxiety — buying mid- to high-end commodities at reduced prices offers consumers both a jump in their social status and an increased dose of innocence, since the trappings of failure are never systemic but vigorously personalized.

And that is the joy of Christmas morning; you can buy innocence for less than nothing. But what if you didn't hear cheery songs about Christ or see commercials advertising holiday sales? What if the holiday season was quiet? What would you do? It is hard to imagine because Christianity, along with the consumer ritual, have become so entwined with how we celebrate the holiday season. It is helpful to remember that Christmas wasn't always about children and materialist consumption. Nor was it always about Christ. For thousands of years, the Winter Solstice was a time of rowdy, drunken, lascivious merriment — and it took centuries of empire to erode these roots.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

During Christmas, Jesus is everywhere. Churches blaze with nativity scenes. If he

existed, he most likely was born in the summer into the divided Judaic world of 1st century B.C. where anti-Hellenic Pharisees, wealthy Sadducees and the rebel Zealots vied for power. As an adult, he preached about forgiveness and an apocalypse that never came. Later, he kicked over the moneychangers' tables in the temple and was killed for causing trouble. The oral tradition of retelling his story continued for decades after his death and slowly became scripture.

The tiny circle of Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah retroactively created his virgin birth. His nativity appears only in two of the four Gospels, first in Matthew (80-90) then Luke (75-100). Early Christianity was still under the sway of Judaism, as shown by the casting of Jesus as the new Moses in the Gospel of Matthew. As the religion grew, converted gentiles like Luke the Evangelist rewrote Jesus for a Hellenic world, and the Apostle Paul built a church on this myth. This image of a new world Messiah emerged and entered a crumbling Roman empire.

Preaching from the city squares, early apostles drew the poor and middle-class in with their promises of deliverance and salvation. And they faced the sword for it. As devout monotheists in an empire built on polytheism, they were often scapegoats. In July 64 a great fire raged through Rome. Emperor Nero blamed the Christians, and Roman historian Tacitus wrote how they were, "torn by dogs or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination."

Over the centuries, Christianity went from an underground religion to a dominant force in the halls of power. In 312 Emperor Constantine gave credit to Christ for his victory in battle, and under him the church flourished. And it was Pope Julius I in 350 who set the date of Dec. 25 as the birthday of Jesus, which conveniently fell a couple days after the pagan Roman festival



LES PATRICK.COM

of Saturnalia. People could keep to their old ways as long as they covered it with a new, Christian face.

Nearly 2,000 years later, we are stuck with an annual global holiday dedicated to a radical rabbi who wasn't born on that day and preached asceticism and apocalypse.

THE PAGAN ROOTS OF CHRISTMAS

Beneath the snow-laced trees of Northwest Germany, swords clanged as men cut each other into red ribbons of meat. It was 772 and Emperor Charlemagne was on the war path. As he won battle after battle against pagan Saxons, crosses and churches sprung up in his wake. Christianity was the state religion and wherever empire went, it followed.

For champions of Christianity like Charlemagne, Christmas served as a vehicle for bringing pagans into the fold. In the Germanic provinces, Winter Solstice was a ritual that celebrated life in the dead of winter. Yule logs were burned in hearths. Pine trees were decorated because of their evergreen quality. Animals were killed so as not to

waste feed in the winter. Beer was drunk. Merry-making broke out. Afterwards, tribes struggled to survive the freezing months of famine until spring.

Each element of Winter Solstice was transformed into a staple of Christmas. The pine tree became the Christmas tree. The slaughtered pig was transformed into a ham. From the beer-chugging and bawdy singing came caroling. But for centuries the pagan wildness survived. In the High Middle Ages, it was a time of debauched revelry. In 1377, King Richard of England

led 28 oxen and 300 sheep for a giant feast. Rowdy bands of carolers prowled the streets. Sex and gambling spilled outside into full view.

In the 16th century the Protestant Reformation cleaved Christianity and soon Puritans condemned Christmas as a Catholic trap for wayward souls. The Catholic Church tried to steer the festivities toward somber ritual but it didn't work. Pro-Christmas riots exploded and for a week the English city of Canterbury was lit red by fire and fighting. In Colonial America the war over Christmas continued. Puritans fined anyone caught celebrating it five shillings, while elsewhere in New York and Pennsylvania German immigrants celebrated it enthusiastically.

After the American Revolution, English-tinged holidays like Christmas fell out of vogue. As if to show contempt for all things English, Congress even met and conducted business on Christmas Day. It wasn't until tensions between America and Britain eased that the holiday began its ascent in America. In 1822 the poet Clement Moore wrote *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, more commonly

known as *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, which popularized gift exchange. Harriet Beecher Stowe, famous for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, wrote *A Christmas in New England* in 1850, in which a character complains about the holiday's crass commercialism. But it was Santa Claus — jolly red-cheeked and slinging gifts from his reindeer-led sleigh — that brought Christmas to an unprecedented level of popularity in the early 20th century.

Christmas became a federal holiday in 1870, but 141 years later it is again the site of cultural war. It's a yuletide ritual for Fox News to monitor the "War on Christmas" or as they see it, the secularization of America's Judeo-Christian identity. Conservative groups like the Catholic League and the American Family Association threaten boycotts against Wall-Mart and Target, respectively, unless they put front and center that this is about Christ — not Allah, or Moses, or Santa Claus — but Christ.

CHRISTMAS AND THE CAPITALIST CONVEYOR BELT

The global economy is like a vast conveyor belt — and the great speedup comes at Christmas time. At the front of it, raw materials are drilled, mined, ripped and thrown on a belt that rolls into factories where Santa's elves go to work. Most of them happen to be Chinese; they make pink Christmas trees, blinking lights and toys, toys, toys.

And nearly everything has bloody fingerprints on it. When we see Christmas commercials featuring jubilant songs and happy families unwrapping gifts, we are witnessing the whitewashing of the reality of production. This myth primes the pump of holiday spending, which accounts for a quarter of personal spending in the United States.

So Karl Marx was right. Behind the commodity fetish is a production hell. And then there's the trash. At the end of the capitalist conveyor belt is a mountain range of garbage that grows and grows. Each year, Americans create 200 million tons of garbage.

Take, for instance, the conundrum of the

Christmas tree. Want to be more environmentally conscious and buy a fake tree? In 2010, 13 million artificial trees were sold in the United States. Even if you keep that fake tree for the rest of your life, it will take thousands of years to decompose, and the polyvinyl chloride (aka PVC's) used to make the tree release carcinogens into the atmosphere from the production line to the trash heap. What about a live tree? It takes 20 years to offset the carbon emissions of growing and transporting the tree, and of the 50 million trees purchased each holiday season, 30 million end up in landfills.

And what of the plastic wrapping materials involved in packaging all of the gifts that go under the tree? Some of it finds its way to the Pacific Ocean creating a 100 million ton island of plastic, known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. As it slowly degrades, the plastic transforms into smaller particles of polymer, which are gulped down by fish that we catch and eat, filling our bodies with cancer seeds that sprout death.

Back on dry land, the holiday season also means that the pace of garbage production picks up by 25 percent — adding an extra million tons to the non-holiday average. The amount of greenhouse gasses also shoots up, due to an increase in travel. Christmas is a time when the death of the planet speeds up.

But this holiday season, there is a glimmer of hope. In spite of the commercials and consumerism and the myth of innocence, people are angrily camping out at Occupy sites and demanding work. They're taking over foreclosed homes and questioning the sanctity of capitalism. What if, in addition to re-imagining our society as a whole, we created a new vision of the holidays, too? We could peel off the centuries of capitalism and Christianity that have perverted the original meaning of the Winter Solstice. We could drink, eat and wear antlers and make love in the forest. And we could remember that the sun is returning, a day at a time, to its former glory — and so can we.



By ELIZABETH HENDERSON

DISNEY TOYS

While Disney shut down manufacturing facilities in Haiti from 1999 to 2009 due to "political instability," in the region, production is now back in full swing thanks to the Better Work Haiti program, a joint project of the International Finance Corporation and the International Labour Organization. Workers make a whopping 28 cents an hour, and according to various worker accounts, any employee suspected of organizing activity will be fired immediately.



DISNEYSTORE.COM

DR. DRE MONSTER BEATS HEADPHONES

According to Dr. Dre, these headphones are intended to allow listeners to "hear what the artists hear" — which means consumers definitely won't be hearing the political repression of the Chinese prisoners making this hot-ticket item. The number of political prisoners in China has been on the rise since the Communist Party's 1999 crackdown on Falun Gong — a spiritual discipline that combines meditation with moral philosophy.



FLICKR/BEATS/DRE

BARBIE

Since her debut in 1959, over one billion Barbie dolls have been sold worldwide. While the doll's original anorexic proportions (at 5' 9" Barbie weighed only 110 lbs) were redesigned in 1997, the amount of packaging for each new doll has been consistently on the rise. According to *Mother Jones*, it takes 25 minutes to unwrap American Idol Barbie — which features 55 pieces of packaging materials, including 30 pieces of tape and 45 inches of wire.



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HERSHEY'S CHOCOLATE

America's favorite chocolate brand, Hershey's, is lagging behind the competition when it comes to committing to safe labor practices — and in West Africa, where the bulk of Hershey's chocolate comes from, child laborers are paying the price. West Africa supplies 69 percent of the world's cocoa, and 30 percent of children under age 15 in sub-Saharan Africa are child laborers. Hundreds of thousands of West African children continue to work under hazardous conditions on cocoa farms, but Hershey — which sources much of its cocoa from the region — has no measures in place to prevent labor abuses that include child labor.



ONEKITTEN-CORP.COM

IPHONE

With over 1,000-plus parts, there are plenty of opportunities for worker exploitation when assembling an iPhone. Foxconn, the Taiwanese company that manufactures the devices in Shenzhen, China, has been criticized for its abysmal working conditions, including long hours and worker abuse. In 2010 the company experienced a spate of suicides, and 17 workers have killed themselves in the last half-decade. Foxconn's response? Erecting nets around buildings to prevent would-be jumpers from perishing, and asking workers to sign a statement pledging to "treasure their lives."



Manny Jalonschi and Nicholas Powers contributed research for this piece.

GIRLYBUBBLE/BLOG

Iraq's Uncertain Future

BY DAVID ENDERS

MOSUL, Iraq — On the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, thousands of Kurdish refugees have taken up residence in a former prison complex, unable to return to their homes only 15 minutes away.

Most people in the prison complex fled violence and threats from Arab militias in Mosul. They said they would like to move to one of Iraq's autonomous majority Kurdish provinces, but have been prevented from doing so by the Kurdish government.

It is the latest chapter in Iraq's decades of ethnic fighting. Kurds have battled the central Iraqi government for autonomy since the 1960s, finally winning it in three northern provinces along with a U.S.-mandated no-fly zone that accompanied crippling sanctions against Saddam Hussein after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 1991.

Hussein's campaign against the Kurds murdered and displaced hundreds of thousands, and Arab families were brought in to settle traditionally Kurdish areas in the resource-rich north and east. Now the Kurdish government, hoping to alter demographics in and around Mosul, is preventing the refugees from leaving.

I have been traveling regularly to Iraq since May 2003. I first crossed the border from Jordan on that portentous day when President George W. Bush declared "mission accomplished." A few weeks later, U.S. Proconsul Paul Bremer went a step farther, declaring the country "open for business" and laying bare the economic interests that



WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH: (Above left) A member of the Mahdi Army watches over Sadr City in 2004. The Shiite paramilitary group played a key role in Iraq's civil war before it was demobilized in 2008. (Above center) A young Iraqi woman in 2009. The Iraqi government has failed to provide basic services to most of its citizens. (Above right) Followers of Muktada al Sadr show their support for the radical cleric who has emerged as one of the most powerful figures in post-war Iraq.

underpinned whatever rationale was being given for the invasion. In short order, Iraqis, apparently not yet entirely clear on the benefits of shock capitalism, would declare open season on U.S. troops, as it became apparent that the "liberation" was turning into an occupation.

I came to Baghdad vainly hoping that my opposition to the invasion had been mis-

placed. Eight years later, it is hard to see what the occupation has brought the "average" Iraqi. Malnutrition and poverty are widespread. Hundreds of thousands have died as a result of the violence, which contributes to a continued lack of basic services, including clean water, in many parts of the country. Millions have been displaced inside Iraq and in neighboring countries. If we are doing a detached, mathematical analysis, it seems hard to argue that there was any other path, short of carpet-bombing the entire country, that would have killed more Iraqis.

MAJORITY RULE

Certainly, the invasion ushered in majority rule — Shia, who make up 60 percent of the country, are now free to worship openly. But that doesn't necessarily mean they tolerate dissent much better than Hussein did. There are still secret prisons where people are horribly tortured. Forced displacement is once more a tool of the government. Iraqi women have nominally fewer rights than they did under Saddam, and religious minorities feel so threatened that the majority

of them have left the country, or at least fled to the safer Kurdish-controlled areas.

Though plenty of Iraqi actors needed no encouragement to engage in violence against one another, on the eve of the U.S. withdrawal, many Iraqis still blame the United States for empowering those embittered and exiled elites, already set on revenge when they "rode in on the backs of American tanks." These fissures developed into full-blown civil war in 2006 and continue to divide Iraqis. There is some degree of reconciliation taking place, but there are still "no-go" zones for Iraqis based on their sectarian affiliation.

I spent four days simply trying to get someone to take me to Abu Ghraib, on the outskirts of Baghdad. I was told matter-of-factly by Iraqi journalists that I would be detained by the Iraqi army unit in control of the area, which local sheikhs and members of the Iraqi parliament accused of driving Sunni families out of the neighborhood. If I wasn't detained, I risked being kidnapped by suspicious locals. One translator I have worked with for years simply gave me an incredulous look when I asked him to accompany me, followed by: "I'm Shia." Riots erupted in Kurdistan in early December. Kurdish parliamentary elections are set for March, and as in other parts of the Middle East, a youthful population is pitting itself against an entrenched old guard. The two political parties that have jointly ruled the Kurdish provinces for decades are losing their grip as people demand



MOURNING IN IRAQ: (Above) Kurdish tribal elders attend a funeral in October for a bombing victim.



RICK ROWLEY

greater personal and political freedoms as well as accountability in government. The current violence appears to stem from tension between religious political parties and the secular ones that dominate the government and security forces, and could likely presage more violence as elections near. The Kurdish government remains notoriously corrupt, which drives much of the activism and opposition against it.

Meanwhile, Kurdish leaders continue to cultivate separate relationships with Iraq's neighbors, as well as separate deals with foreign oil companies. Kurdish security forces appear poised to take more land, settling decades-old scores. The constitutional article that was to deal with disputed territories in Iraq, long ignored, has actually expired.

BAGHDAD LOCKDOWN

The Arab Spring missed Baghdad. Protests against the government are generally small and surrounded by more police and military than demonstrators, and women's rights activists, including the extremely brave Yanar Mohamed, have been assaulted.

This is the state from which U.S. combat forces will withdraw — "Saddam lite," as some pundits have coined it. The Pentagon will play an extremely limited role — with private militias in addition to the army and police, Iraq is now one of the most militarized societies on earth. There are no hard numbers, but anecdotal data are often useful — checkpoints abound in cities and on highways, sometimes placing dozens of security officers within sight, if not shouting distance of one another. Neighborhoods remained walled off from one another, with single exit and entry points manned by security forces. The United States has agreed to sell armed aircrafts to the Iraqi government, perhaps signaling that U.S. air support, critical to the success of Iraqi military campaigns in 2008 to retake the neighborhoods of Baghdad and Basra from militias, may no longer be necessary.

Certainly the Iraqi military, now outfitted with U.S. equipment, will continue to be a client for some time.

There will continue to be a heavy presence of thousands of U.S. State Department employees and contractors, both at the embassy in Baghdad and a large consulate in the northern Kurdish-controlled city of Erbil. Nevertheless, it remains unclear to what extent the United States will be able to affect Iraqi government policy, as the Iraqi government throughout has marginalized the role of its patron.

NOURI AL MALIKI

Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki is serving his second term, having ascended to office with the backing of the Sadr Movement,



RICK ROWLEY

GIVEN THE BOOT: (Above) The last U.S. combat forces withdrew from Iraq Dec. 18. However, thousands of private U.S. military contractors will remain in the country.

which opposed Saddam and took up arms against the United States in 2004 before agreeing to a final cease-fire in 2008. The Sadrists have leveraged their power on the streets into the largest bloc in parliament, and as the United States drew down its presence, hundreds of Sadrists arrested in past years were quietly released. Once derided by the U.S. military as unimportant, Moktada al Sadr, the cleric who leads the movement, is now arguably the single most powerful political actor in the country.

Maliki himself, once an obscure member of the Dawa Party, a Shiite party organized largely in exile, was outspoken in his op-

position to the occupation in 2005, when he led a parliamentary campaign to force a referendum on U.S. withdrawal. Though his parliamentary measure failed, Maliki's opposition to the occupation helped propel him to two terms as prime minister, during which he negotiated the current withdrawal agreement.

For the U.S. mission in Iraq, the writing has been on the wall since the beginning. Iraqis have consistently opposed the occupation in large numbers, and backed up the rhetoric with attacks on U.S. troops and the Iraqi government.

It is not hard to understand why. Chroni-

THERE MUST BE ACCOUNTABILITY

BY KEN BUTIGAN

Much remains unfinished. A key task is accounting for what the United States did. Before moving our public awareness to the next battlefield, we are in need of stark truth-telling about what went down: tearing a nation asunder, prosecuting a horrendous counter-insurgency campaign and conducting systematic torture, all under official pretexts that turned out to be scandalously false.

To engage in the requirements of restorative justice (which, though often ignored by power-holders, are incumbent on us as a society) first requires an engagement with the truth. Without this, we will not only continue this pattern of waging long and costly wars, we will have missed an opportunity for transformation that is sorely needed.

What we know is that we cannot wait for the power-holders to engage in the truth and reconciliation process. It is up to us. And when we have done this, then we — the citizens of Iraq, the United States and all of the "coalition forces" — can rightly announce a true "declaration of peace."

Ken Butigan is director of Pace e Bene, an organization fostering nonviolent change through education, community and action. This is excerpted from an article that was originally published on WagingNonviolence.org.

cally neglected by the government, Sadr City, the Sadr Movement's base, is home to a quarter of Baghdad's population. It is still dilapidated and overcrowded, but looks better than before. In 2004, someone painted the words "Vietnam Street" on the boulevard where prayers are held every Friday. The message was clear, as the Sadrists fought the United States on two separate occasions. Now they hold the largest single party bloc in the Iraqi parliament.

As the U.S. military withdraws, none of the major issues that plagued Iraq at the outset of the invasion have been resolved, and many have been exacerbated. For many Iraqis, it has been one more exercise in banal violence in the name of natural resources.

One man put it this way: "What did the Americans do this for? The Chinese didn't contribute to the invasion, and now Chinese businessman can operate freely in Iraq. The Americans are still unable to walk in the streets."

David Enders reported from Iraq with support from a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. He is the author of Baghdad Bulletin: Dispatches from the American Occupation.

THE EUROZONE FIASCO

Why Europe's Elites are Demolishing the Continent's Social Welfare States to Pursue a Self-Defeating Strategy



BY COSTAS PANAYOTAKIS

In the narrative of the economic and political elites that have long shaped it, the European project has put an end to the series of bloody wars that afflicted the continent up through the first half of the 20th cen-

tury. In reality, of course, the process of European unification reflected and reinforced, from its beginnings, new kinds of divisions that continue to shape Europe's social and economic landscape. In the early postwar period the gradual formation of the European Community helped to bring together

the various European countries on the capitalist side of the Cold War divide, while in more recent decades the deepening economic integration of the continent, most dramatically exemplified by the adoption of a common currency by 17 of the European Union's member states, has increased economic and class inequality by restructuring European societies along neoliberal lines. In addition to eroding the gains that the postwar "golden age" of capitalism brought to European working classes, this neoliberal model is now in grave crisis, as the contradictions underlying the eurozone project have begun to unravel.

While mainstream U.S. media often attribute the crisis to the overspending of European countries, the reality is that the philosophy structuring European institutions has long prioritized the pursuit of low deficits, debt and inflation even at the expense of chronically high unemployment. In this respect, the European Union has been in line with the neoliberal paradigm that has prevailed in most parts of the world since

the postwar model of development came to an end in the 1970s. While the deficit and debt targets were often violated by most countries in the eurozone (and not just by Greece and the countries on the European periphery), the main thrust of the European project has been to move away from the immediate postwar model, which was predicated on Keynesian social-democratic policies that sought full employment and the growth of social services and welfare states designed to give capitalism a human face.

While the postwar model of "welfare Keynesianism" was predicated on an international economic structure known as the Bretton Woods system, which protected the autonomy of economic policy-making on the national level, the deepening economic integration within Europe has pushed a model of economic development less dependent on the growth of domestic demand and more dependent on international competitiveness. Thus, while rising wages and productivity, as well as a growing welfare state, helped support economic growth in the postwar model, in the neoliberal era rising wages and a large welfare state are viewed as drags on economic growth that damage national competitiveness and reduce exports.

As has been the case in other parts of the world, this shift from the postwar Keynesian model to today's neoliberal model has been devastating for ordinary workers and citizens, even as it helped European capital to recover from the crisis of the postwar model in the 1970s. The process of economic unification up to and including the formation

Understanding the Eurozone: A Quick Q&A Guide

BY JOHN TARLETON

We're told that the eurozone crisis could wreck the global economy. But who really knows what's going on over there? Check out this Q&A to pick up a few pointers.

What is the eurozone?

Described by economist Ann Pettifor as a "monetary union designed above all to promote, protect and subsidise the interests of money-lenders and speculators in the private bank-debt and sovereign debt markets," the eurozone is composed of 17 nations that share a common currency, the euro. Germany is the most powerful country in the eurozone. Other large eurozone economies include France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. Economist Ann Pettifor describes the eurozone as a "monetary union designed above all to promote, protect and subsidise the interests of money-lenders and speculators in the private bank-debt and sovereign debt markets."

What is the Euro?

The euro is the common currency introduced in eurozone countries in January 1999. It replaced local currencies such as the German Deutsche mark, French franc, Spanish peseta and Italian lira.

What is the European Union? How is that

different from the eurozone?

The European Union (EU) is made up of 27 nations, including the 17 eurozone members. The EU maintains open borders among member nations in which goods and services move freely making it the largest trading bloc in the world with a population of 503 million people and a total economic output of \$15 trillion per year or roughly one-fifth of the total global economy.

Several EU nations including Great Britain, have opted not to join the eurozone in order to preserve their own national currencies while a number of member nations from Eastern Europe and the Baltic have not yet met the Eurozone's eligibility standards.

How did the European Union come to be?

The EU's development has been propelled by elite business interests since its inception 60 years ago when six countries (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands) reached an agreement to share coal and steel production. Those same six countries subsequently signed the 1957 Treaty of Rome which created the European Economic Community. The EEC began to abolish tariffs among member nations in 1959.

Incremental steps were taken toward greater economic integration during the 1960s and 1970s. Additional countries joined the EEC including Great Britain in 1973 and Greece in 1981. With business elites clamoring for

a European free trade zone, the Schengen Agreement was adopted in 1986 which called for the free movement of people, goods, services and money. On January 1, 1993, 12 European nations launched a single borderless market. At around this time, the EEC was renamed the European Union and took on broader powers.

What is the Maastricht Treaty?

Named for the Dutch town where it was signed in 1992, the Maastricht Treaty set in motion the creation of a common currency seven years later. It required member states that participate in the euro to maintain very low rates of inflation and to strive for an annual rate of government deficit to gross domestic product that does not exceed 3 percent, a difficult figure to meet especially during a recession when a government's tax revenues plummet and social needs increase.

What is the ECB?

Based in Frankfurt, Germany, the European Central Bank administers monetary policy for the 17 eurozone countries. Its primary objectives are maintaining inflation below 2 percent and keeping private banking interests afloat at all costs. According to a Dec. 16 Reuters report, the ECB is providing hundreds of billions of Euros in three-year loans to cash-strapped private banks even as they hoard the bulk of that money instead of lending it to consumers and businesses.

Under EU statute, the ECB is forbidden to provide credit to governments as central banks in the US and Great Britain are able to do. "The effect is to oblige governments to borrow from commercial banks at interest," writes economist Michael Hudson. "This gives bankers the ability to create a crisis - threatening to drive economies out of the eurozone if they do not submit to 'conditionalities' being imposed in what quickly is becoming a new class war of finance against labor."

What is the Troika?

The Troika consists of the European Central Bank, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. This trio of neoliberal institutions works in tandem, dispatching representatives to indebted countries such as Greece and Italy to dictate the terms of multi-billion euro rescue packages. Like the medieval doctors who bled their patients to death in the name of saving them, the Troika rescue crew invariably requires government leaders to initiate additional austerity measures to receive loans. The loans are then used to repay outstanding debts (or at least the interest on the them) to private banks so as to avoid default. This further damages the recipient country's economy and will make additional rescue efforts necessary again in the future.

and crisis of the eurozone has, moreover, encapsulated the problems with neoliberal globalization more generally.

While neoliberals never tire of presenting free trade as universally beneficial, scholars who have studied the history of national economic development often point out that none of today's economic powerhouses developed by adopting an open-market policy in their early stages of development. Indeed, it is the technologically and economically most advanced countries that are usually the most ardent supporters of free trade, since they (and especially the capitalist groups within them) benefit the most from such policies. This dynamic has certainly been present within the eurozone and contributed to the regional divisions that overdetermine the present crisis.

The adoption of a common currency was especially beneficial to German industrial capital, since the economically less powerful countries on the European periphery could no longer protect their competitiveness by periodic devaluations or by industrial strategies that sought to challenge their subordinate position within the European division of labor. Unsurprisingly, the adoption of a common currency did not just increase the penetration of Southern markets by German industrial products but also decimated the industrial capacity of economically less strong countries.

This regional imbalance was further aggravated by Germany's tendency to bolster the competitiveness of its products even further by squeezing the wages of its workers.

Those who present Germany as the model that the black sheep on the European periphery have to emulate usually neglect to mention that because of this "competitiveness" policy Germany has in recent years experienced rapidly rising poverty rates even among citizens who are employed.

In another sense, of course, Germany is a model of the contradictions that result from the neoliberal shift from a developmental model based on domestic demand to one based on exports. There is something paradoxical about the intense pressure on coun-

tries on the European periphery to emulate Germany by adopting an export-oriented development strategy that supposedly requires a brutal assault on wages, collective bargaining and labor rights. Those who advocate this strategy seem to forget that not everybody can emulate Germany's trade surpluses for the simple reason that for some countries to achieve such surpluses some other countries have to incur corresponding deficits.

The other contradiction of global neoliberalism operative within the eurozone relates to the inherent instability of liberalized financial markets. Financial liberalization may benefit the financial sector, which has been as influential in shaping the European project as it has been in shaping economic policy in other parts of the world, but it has

again and again wrought terrible havoc on the lives of billions of people, whenever asset bubbles burst and in the ensuing climate of panic businesses close down, jobs are lost and people's lives are ruined.

The formation of the eurozone a decade ago inaugurated a short-lived period of easy credit. This easy credit was made available by banks in more affluent European countries, such as Germany and France, to the citizens and governments of less affluent countries on the periphery. From the point of view of countries on the receiving end

eurozone.

When the European debt crisis first surfaced in Greece, the first response of the mainstream media in the United States and Europe alike was to attribute it to the "profligacy" of Greeks and the defective political culture that allegedly fueled it. In addition to misrepresenting the manifestation of a broader systemic problem as a "national" one, this interpretation is giving rise to new divisions within Europe, as the citizens of the so-called PIGS (Portugal, Ireland/Italy, Greece and Spain) have in effect been racialized and treated as the convenient scapegoats for a crisis flowing from the structural imbalances inherent in the neoliberal architecture of the eurozone project.

This racialization provides ideological cover for the brutal assault on the living conditions, pension and labor rights not just of Greeks but of working people across the European periphery. Being at the forefront of the crisis, Greece exemplifies the inability of these policies to address the debt problem. By leading to the collapse of internal demand, the closing of thousands of small businesses, skyrocketing unemployment and the further weakening of a banking sector at the brink of bankruptcy, austerity policies that seek to reduce deficits by cutting spending fail because they simultaneously lead to a collapse of tax revenues.

In this context, workers and citizens across Europe are proving more perceptive than their political and economic leaders. Social and class conflict across Europe is escalating as political and economic elites

The crisis brings to the surface the long-standing contradiction between capitalism and democracy.

of these loans, easy credit fueled a period of prosperity that, as we know from the experience of other countries, such as the United States, might not have been possible at a time of growing economic inequality. The creditors, by contrast, underestimated the risks inherent in doing business within a eurozone that was not economically and technologically homogeneous.

As has often happened in the last few decades around the world, an external shock is often enough to turn unrealistic euphoria into extreme pessimism, giving rise in the process to debt crises that reverberate across the global economy. Thus it was that the financial crisis triggered three years ago by the subprime loans fiasco has over time come to threaten the very survival of the

Continued on page 22

THE INDEPENDENT

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—JEREMY SCAHILL

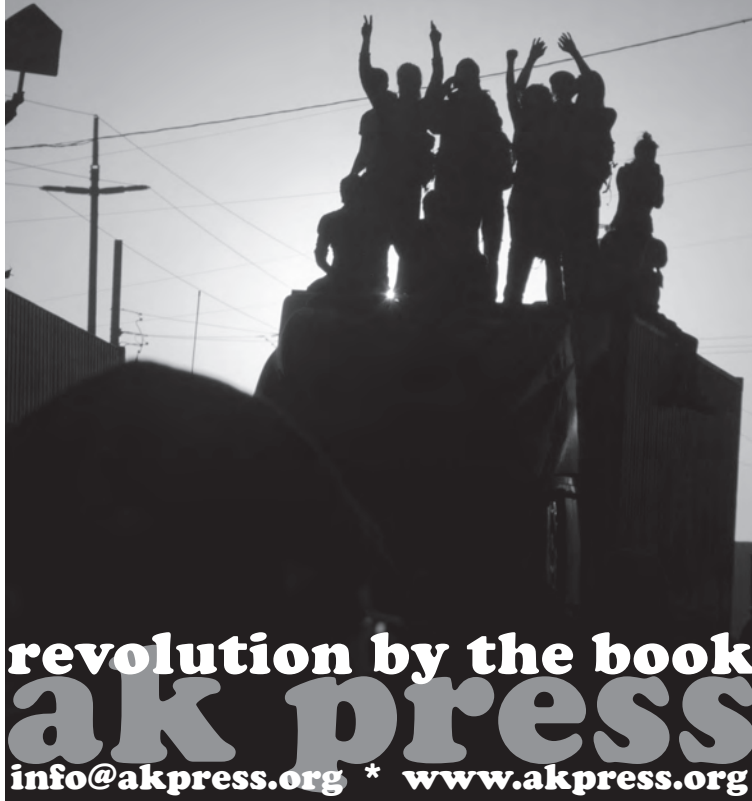
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PHOTO: THE OAKLAND GENERAL STRIKE, BY MARGARET KILLJOY



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BETH WHITNEY

From Katrina to Occupy

Black Flags and Windmills: Hope, Anarchy, and the Common Ground Collective

BY SCOTT CROW
PM PRESS, 2011

In 2005, Austin-based activist Scott Crow set out for post-apocalyptic New Orleans to help find and rescue a friend after Hurricane Katrina flooded the city. Once that was taken care of, he felt compelled to stay and fill the vacuum left by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Red Cross. The result was the Common Ground Collective, one of the largest and most significant anarchist projects in the United States. Along the way Crow took copious notes that form the basis of his new book, *Black Flags and Windmills: Hope, Anarchy, and the Common Ground Collective*, which reads as both a memoir and a how-to manual for the horizontally organized Occupy encampments as they transition into locally based struggles in search of relevancy.

Some of Crow's descriptions of Common Ground recall statements from the original Occupy Wall Street organizers explaining the success of the General Assembly model.

"One of our greatest strengths was our flexibility. There was no command hierarchy that information had to go through, followed by useless paperwork and arbitrary rules," Crow writes. "Often this meant people would take up a project simply because they saw the need. Within a few weeks we moved from negotiating emergencies to other kinds of issues, a frag-

ile sense of stability was emerging in the programs."

Those programs were established after consulting with residents of the Algiers neighborhood where the collective was based in the house of former Black Panther Malik Rahim. They gutted houses, distributed food and water and kept racist vigilantes and police at bay. The idea became not just to rebuild, but to provide resources that had never existed before — their current community projects range from a free health clinic and a women's shelter to a legal clinic and a job training program.

Their success was often met with violent resistance. Crow details police raids on what officers referred to as the "compound" during which he and other Common Ground members found themselves laying on the ground with guns pointed at their heads. This was after he sat with a gun on Rahim's porch several times in an effort to protect residents as white vigilantes patrolled Algiers ostensibly to prevent looting.

Interspersed with his personal narrative, Crow offers condensed descriptions of the movements that inspired his actions. Anarchism is the philosophy that inspired him most, which he is quick to note "... is not chaos. It is self-organization at its root." He also draws lessons from the community programs established by the Black Panthers as well as the Zapatistas, whose project, Crow writes, "suggests to me a living anarchism, not only of communes and small temporary projects, but also of community self-defense, autonomy and the appropriate inclusion of survival

projects and services that build for a future without the state."

Nearly 35,000 people have volunteered with Common Ground since its inception, learning about the political underpinnings of the organization while gutting houses and restoring tracts of wetlands. Now Crow is taking these experiences on the road with his book tour. He says the Occupy movement, which he sees as "the mainstreaming of anarchism and horizontal ideas" inspires many of the people who come to his talks. He encourages them to think beyond what they want to protest, and to consider what kinds of alternatives they would like to create instead.

Crow recalls a moment at Rahim's kitchen table back in 2005, "... when I was joking with Malik about how we were already doing things [that] hadn't been done in [a] long time. It was weird to know it at that time. Then over the months it started to grow, despite all the challenges," Crow says. "That is what I feel like with the Occupy movement. We dream these things and sometimes the reality doesn't look like our dreams, but not like the reality we knew before. If we never dreamed of these things, our world would look different."

Ultimately, *Black Flags and Windmills* is about envisioning a better world and trusting ourselves to believe that our dreams actually contain the paths to make it happen, not as voters, not as consumers, but as participants in a spontaneous, horizontal democracy that looks different everywhere but meets the needs of the people where they are.

—RENÉE FELTZ

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LEO GARCIA

Memoirs of a Hitman

El Sicario, Room 164

DIRECTED BY GIANFRANCO ROSI

DISTRIBUTED BY ICARUS FILMS

PLAYING AT FILM FORUM DEC. 28–JAN. 3

To call *El Sicario, Room 164* a sobering movie experience would be a serious understatement. For 80 minutes the film focuses on a hooded figure narrating, illustrating in a sketchbook and reenacting scenes from his 20-year career as a hitman and foot soldier in the Juárez drug cartel. This release comes in tandem with the publication of *El Sicario: The Autobiography of a Mexican Assassin*, by journalist Charles Bowden. Bowden's 2009 *Harper's* piece "The Sicario: A Juárez Hit Man Speaks," served as the basis for Gianfranco Rosi's documentary, which is shaped by emptiness, anonymity and incompleteness.

No names of people or places — in the press kit Rosi situates the motel where shooting took place "near the border area" — are given. Room 164, a location chosen by the *sicario*, where he used to "secure" victims, makes for a strangely detached setting, its red door the portal to secrets of a parallel universe. Such a description, however, suggests a world of excitement and mystery that the *sicario's* revelations belie. Instead, his story details the raw, street-level implementation of the power structure that enables Mexico's staggeringly profitable drug trade. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) estimates that the cartels have made \$30 to \$50 billion a year over the past two decades.

Initially recruited as a young teenager, the *sicario* learned how to drive, received a car and started trafficking drugs to El Paso. He then enrolled in the Police Academy, which disciplined and groomed him — along with a few hundred others — to be-



DAVE SANDERS

Restaurant workers are both the photographers and subjects of ROC-United's exhibit, "107 Stories Through Restaurant Workers Eyes."

Seeing the Big Picture

"107 Stories Through Restaurant Workers Eyes"

NATHAN CUMMINGS FOUNDATION
475 TENTH AVE., 14TH FLOOR
THROUGH JAN. 27

How much does it matter, after all, who's behind the camera? In "107 Stories Through Restaurant Workers Eyes," an exhibit organized by the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC-United), it's clear from the start who the photographers are, since the exhibition features solely photographs taken by restaurant workers.

At present, the show can be seen

by appointment at the offices of the Nathan Cummings Foundation in midtown Manhattan (not the most accessible spot for an art show).

The Restaurant Opportunities Center was founded in New York City in 2002 to provide support for restaurant workers displaced from the World Trade Center due to 9/11. The national organization, ROC-United, was founded in 2007, and there are currently eight affiliates in cities including Philadelphia, Los Angeles and New Orleans. These days, the organization's work focuses on improving working conditions in the restaurant industry nationwide, and its projects range from Colors Restaurant (a cooperatively run restaurant in lower Manhattan) to free job training. The group also offers photography classes, which

is where the artwork in the exhibition comes from.

As for my earlier question — does it matter who's behind the camera? — in this show, the answer is yes, it certainly does. While Kelle Matsushita's photos provide sharp glimpses of restaurant workers in action, most of these images portray neighborhoods, streets, family members and friends. Several of the photos in the show — like a series of gritty shots of elevated trains, or a compelling image of a gnarled, urban forest — are attributed not to individual photographers, but to ROC affiliates based in New York City and Chicago. You don't know who took these pictures, but you do know that whoever they are, they work in a restaurant somewhere. William Farrington's memorably ominous photo of harshly lit Central Park

branches certainly has nothing to do with restaurants, but that's the point: restaurant workers are more than just, well, restaurant workers. It's not just that they have lives and families, and deserve fair pay for their labor — though of course that's all true — but they also document the beauty and poetry of the city through stories and art. And of course, they are not so much a "they" as a "we" — after all, how many people do you know who've never worked a food service job?

To be sure, "107 Stories" is a show of limited scope, but I hope ROC has more exhibitions like this so that more of these images can be not simply created, but seen.

—MIKE NEWTON

come a high-caliber operative positioned in the gray area of common ground (known as the plaza) shared by law enforcement and the narcotics trade. He became a commander with the Chihuahua State Police and was simultaneously on the payroll of the cartels. The *sicario* has to be unconditionally committed, on duty 24/7 (failure to respond to a phone call is treated as a mortal offense) and ready to do anything for *el patrón* — as well as unscrupulously methodical in procedures of kidnapping, torture and execution.

Sicarios are cogwheels in a highly developed diabolical system: The cartel sends doctors out to revive "patients" so that they do not succumb too quickly to torture. The *sicario* relates how dead bodies left in different positions (face

up or down, with a cut-off finger inserted into the mouth or anus) signal different meanings, and how the supposedly safely buried remains of DEA informants now prove traceable because they contain microchips.

While he takes pride in his professionalism (quick and clean action, no boasting about a job well done), he also asserts the need to be drunk and high on a killing mission — to stave off anxiety, not remorse. He used to be terrified of sleeping next to his wife because he was so on edge that the slightest noise could set off a violent reaction.

One day the *sicario* decided to give up *la vida loca* — the steady stream of drugs, money, cars and women — and embraced God. At first the cartel demoted him; then

he was cut loose with a \$250,000 contract on his head.

Though living on the run and in hiding ever since, he has found freedom through his conversion, judging by the emotional intensity of the way he reenacts the experience. Rosi was reluctant to intrude upon the intimacy of the *sicario's* confessional delivery, so the presence of director and crew is never acknowledged. The film does not feature a single face, nor does it show any other testimonies, news footage or historical information. Apart from a few urban panoramas and deserted street corner shots of Juárez — the most violent city in the world, according to an endnote — only the *sicario's* compulsively jotted-down, childlike sketches provide an image track that supports the story he unpacks.

Staring into his depersonalized countenance, the viewer sees "the true face of the Mexican state," as Bowden puts it, a blank face that exposes how "the statements of American presidents about Mexico mean nothing because they insist on a Mexico that does not exist and that has never existed." He describes the *sicario* as an ominous "messenger from the future. As the modern state eroded and fails to provide security and income for its members, and as a new economy supplants the official economy, *sicarios* will appear in many places — and already have. ... This is not a film about a freak, but about a growing population."

—KENNETH CRAB

OCCUPY TOMORROW

How will the world change — and how will it remain the same — if the Occupy Movement continues to surge in the years and decades to come?

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

You were conceived at Occupy Wall Street,” her mother bit her thumb and giggled, “Under a tarp.” Sol stared at her mom, waiting for an answer. Was she going to the 30th anniversary of the Occupy Movement at Liberty Park or not? But her mother was busy reading the slogan on Sol’s shirt: “Privatize. Because the Masses are Asses.”

Her eyes flinched; Sol saw the hurt but said nothing. They argued for weeks about the city’s plan to privatize the recycling centers and energy grid. At a General Assembly, New York’s mayor showed the city’s budget in red and said selling state infrastructure could raise money to fund food rations. In the past decade, climate change dried nations to deserts. Farmers in the Midwest broke hard earth. Supermarket shelves were half-stocked. Most cities ate from the land around them. But large ones like New York imported some food. A debate raged over raising taxes or selling state property. But recent government corruption scandals boosted a conservative party called the Right to Own Movement who demanded privatization. They asked Sol to argue for them on a popular talk show. And she did, saying the Occupy-backed government was inept. Afterwards, with her face a mask of make-up and microphone tape half-peeled on her jacket; she visited her mother who shouted stories of the battles waged to “green” New York that created those jobs. Neither pushed words into the cold patch of silence where the memory of Sol’s father was hidden.

“Did you have to wear that shirt,” her mother asked but didn’t wait for an answer. “When you were born I wore a shirt that read, ‘Resistance is Fertile’. It’s an old sci-fi reference. Star Trek. The Borg.” But Sol put her face into her hands and said slowly, “Mom. Focus. Please.”

Her mother picked up a guitar and strummed, “You know I was pregnant with you when we closed down the ports. I could hardly see your father through the tear gas.”

“He’s been dead for years,” Sol’s eyes tightened into slits “And so have you. Smoking pot. Singing nothing to no one. You’re a ghost.”

Mother’s eyes simmered then she looked down and strummed a chord. Sol studied her graying afro, her loose dress a splash of red and orange. Towers of books and dishes teetered on the table. Sol hated her messiness, hated her aimless music and fought it by thinking straight and clear about everything. She dressed in a black I-Suit every day, corn-rowed her hair and walked like a knife through friendships, jobs, love as if to cut the invisible strings always tugging her back into The Mess.

“Mom are you going or not?”

Instead of answering she placed a tiny gift box on the table and kept playing her guitar. Sol stood up, “You know why I’m against the Occupy Movement? It was always larger than us. We could never just be a family. It’s why dad left. We weren’t big enough for him.”

“Did you figure all that out with your

therapist,” her mom chuckled. Sol snatched her bag, “I don’t even know why you loved him.” Her hard footsteps stomped down the stairs and Sol was outside the building when her name was shouted. She and the neighbors on the stoop looked up. Her mom threw down the gift box and yelled, “And take off that stupid fucking shirt!”

THE MARTYR’S DAUGHTER

Sol gave her two middle fingers as the neighbors booed. Picking up the box she dashed off. Breathe, she told herself. Just go to the

Everyone knew the famous U.N. address when the new president mic-checked the General Assembly. “We the People,” he called and they responded “Are coming home.”

protest and say your speech. She had been invited by the Right to Own Movement to talk at the 30th anniversary of Occupy Wall Street. As the daughter of a movement martyr she had cache, reporters called for interviews and her name was rising in the newsfeed.



Sol walked down from 96th street and Second Avenue, opening the gift box with numb fingers. Inside was a flash-drive, she plugged it into her I-Suit. It was a black mesh fabric that made her look like a shadow walking free in broad daylight. Most people had personalized suits with images of themselves or a favorite album cover or bright flowers or their name in throbbing light. I-Suits generated energy from body movement which fed into phones or recorders or any one of the digital equipment that could be plugged into it. When she inserted the flash drive into her chest plug a video feed hit her view-glasses and earplugs. Her mother’s laughter filled her ears and on the lens of her glasses she saw a half-transparent film of her parents, young and frisky chasing each other through a park. At the bottom she saw the date meter read 2011, Sept. 20. “I’m going to occupy your bed tonight,” her dad laughed and hoisted her mom up, she kicked him playfully “You’re going to occupy a hospital.”

Date Meter – 2011, Sept. 30. The video cut to her parents under a crinkly blue tarp, sitting on a soggy mattress. She was in his lap, the back of her head on his chest as he stroked circles around her navel. Her arms entwined his neck, hands kneading his hair.

They swayed like a bell, chanting “om.” He looked like a hairy outdoorsman with thick black glasses. She was wiry with a multi-colored afro like a psychedelic dancer. Loud rambling drums cascaded through the tent’s open flap. Sol smiled, she had read about the incessant drumming.

Date Meter – 2011, Nov. 15. The video cut to the camera whipping around blurred faces. Screams rose in the back. The blue tarp was torn off as if by a tornado and a red-faced cop lunged for the camera. Her parents jumped away and filmed tents being crushed by police who were black beetles in riot gear. Shirtless Occupiers emerged some dazed, some fighting, some being folded like pretzels by cops and cuffed.

In the video, mom’s scream stretched her face like a rubber mask. Sol took her view glasses off and sat on a bench at Fifth Avenue on Central Park. Trees swayed above her and light shimmered like army camouflage on her body. Her chest was heavy as a memory surged into her eyes. Dad was in the morgue, half his head blown off and mom screamed so hard her face stretched exactly the same way. Sol remembered carrying her to a chair where they wrapped arms. Her mother was a figurine of cracked glass about to shatter but Sol felt calm. No more Movement. No more wondering if he was coming or going. No more lectures on history. No more whispery excuses. Sol remembered his broken skull, how it looked like a cracked egg and how relieved she was to feel numb.

Sol shook her head as the memory drained back into her. Capitalism. Her parents and most of humanity had fought it the past three decades with frenzied desperation. Why couldn’t mom understand she wasn’t trying to resurrect that zombie system? But how much corruption must we read about before limited privatization was allowed? Sol got up, dizzy with memory. The raging debate between her and her mother wasn’t about headlines and corruption. It was a tug of war over her father’s legacy. Growing up they fought over who was more loyal to his vision. It was what he left them as he traveled to another General Assembly, another protest, another march, another jail, another international conference, another family.

NEW YORK 2041

Capitalism. No one took it seriously. Not after the Global Depression of 2014, when the eurozone collapsed and millions of jobless, starving people filled the city squares. Dirty, ragged, desperate. They shouted from empty bellies in one great voice that echoed in the halls of power. Sol smiled at the memory of the teach-ins at Central Park and the audience whose eyes radiated wild energy. The mic-checks boomed and the General Assemblies lasted for weeks. It was a carnival and a Senate meeting and a rock concert and love-in and protest march and a dance-a-thon all at the same time.

She got up, dusted herself off and walked to 59th Street at Earth Circle. The old Columbus statue was torn down while she was in middle school and replaced by a genetically modified huge mountain pine tree. It towered over every building. It had a



ILLUSTRATIONS - DERRICK DENT

giant base that took four people, arms spread wide to wrap around it. Thick branches zig-zagged like lightning and a musky odor of pine circled it even in dead winter. Sol still had on her view glasses and on it played a scene of her parents under the old Christopher Columbus statue, necking and reading Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* to each other. Sol took off her view-glasses and held them in front of her. It startled her to see 2011, Gray New York on the lens while 2041 Green New York was all around her. Gray New York was ugly rough stone buildings, ugly cement streets and ugly gas cars honking. Torn plastic bags whipped from the trees. Plastic water bottles tumbled on the sidewalk. Ads for shiny expensive watches or cars or jewelry glittered from the walls. Ugly, Sol thought and looked away from the past to the present surrounding her.

Green New York had whole avenues of flowery gardens, buildings had trees on the rooftops that swayed and ducts that channeled rainwater into basement purifiers, instead of brick or stone the buildings had solar walls that converted sunlight to electricity. Off-duty cops sat in pot cafes with steamed up windows. Everyone had carry-bags that they used to shop for food instead of the old throw-away plastic. And neon-colored groups of bicyclists flashed up and down the lanes like schools of fish around whale-like city buses. The few cars that did roll by were quiet electric models that hummed in and out of recharger anchors that looked like old parking meters but with a nozzle to plug into for a quick jump.

And of course there was the Grid. She looked at the sidewalk. It transformed every footstep into a volt that sparkled through conduits. The city streets were torn up and New York rebuilt on top of a miles vast microchip. It took the kinetic energy of its people; the walking, running, door opening, wheel turning and made it into light.

Sol remembered its construction; the haze of dust had seemed endless. But the joy of

the Occupy Movement was contagious. It weathered the worst of the state crackdowns and pushed the White House to begin The Green Deal. She was too young to know what or who or why but once saw her dad stumbling home with bloody lips. He yelled into his phone, "Of course we protest the

Capitalism. Her parents and most of humanity had fought it the past three decades with frenzied desperation.

convention. That asshole is nickel and diming us. We need a Global Green Age. He needs Occupy's support but we hold out unless he pushes for the \$20 trillion over the next 20 years to end poverty and cool the planet."

Sol put her view-glasses back on and punched up a video. On her lens she saw herself age eight held up by her parents in a sea of rejoicing people. It was 2020, Van Jones had been elected president and former Occupy organizers had swept the House and Senate. Protestors from the Arab Spring and the African Renaissance Movement had seized their capitals. Everyone knew the famous U.N. address when Jones mic-checked the General Assembly.

"We the People," he called and they responded "Are coming home. We are occupying not one election or one capital. We must occupy tomorrow." Corporations lost their personhood. How strange, Sol thought that a business could ever be a "legal" person. Newsreels from the time showed billions of people, once homeless or poor swarming like ants over dead neighborhoods and leaving shiny new green buildings in their wake. Cities rebuilt on Grids were networked with other cities. The drug war was stopped, pot cafes and worker-run red-light districts filled with eager tourists. Roads were paved and solar panels flashed in far-flung villages.

New schools, homes and hospitals rose from the rubble of slums. Women's centers provided abortions, free contraception and taught reproductive rights. A free global healthcare system was created; anyone could travel anywhere and show their Health-Pass. 2024 peaked with the U.N. Without Borders legislation that led to an interconnected free global transit system. Sol remembered the photos of stupefied wonder as people stepped out of magnet trains and saw no guards, no checkpoints.

New music, new art, new questions seemed to arrive every day. In Sol's teenage years ideas came and went like the tide but left behind was a fervent loyalty to the Movement. Life before the Occupy Movement was jokingly called "The Old World" and it became a source of contempt and laughter. In New York, you could still rent nostalgic gas cars and for high-school graduation Sol and her friends went on an "old fashioned" road trip. It ended with them yelling slurs at the sad men in small towns that still ran on oil. She remembered her friend, drunk, vomit crusting her chin hollering, "Get off the planet ghost! You belong in the past."

THE "G"-WORD

"Ghost" was a slur for anyone who ate meat or used oil or gas or was careless with trash. Occupiers made it up of course. It marked those who lived in Old World capitalism from those who lived in the New World. Most people now said, "The G-word." But father happily used the slur. Sol recalled as a child they were in a packed elevator when a man reeking of hamburger came in. Father said, "I believe were being haunted."

Others joined in, "Yeah, a ghost just passed through. I feel cold." Another said, "Let's do an exorcism." Sol was scared but yelled it too and the word felt sweet and hot in her mouth.

"Ghost! Get out Ghost!" they shouted at the red-faced man who dashed off. Years later, Sol was taught at school that it wasn't polite to use the slur. Some people don't have a choice on where they were born. "That's bullshit," her father said, "The minute they force us to stop using ghost then they start bringing capitalism back." At night, he'd poke his head in her room while she studied and said, "Boo!"

The sky was becoming rose-colored with dusk. It was getting late; Sol caught the M20 bus downtown to Liberty Park. Wedging through the throng of passengers, she found a spot. The sun needled her eyes and she put the view-glasses on. Her mother's flash-drive was still playing and it was too late to look away. She had seen this scene a thousand times.

Date Meter - 2031, March 4. The infamous March for Tomorrow, a churning river of people with banners that read "Dismantle the Bomb" waving over faces painted white. In the prior decade, militaries around the world refused to fire on protestors as long as they didn't storm the homes of the rich. But

Continued on page 22

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FEMINIST THEORY FROM MARGIN TO CENTER

WED JAN 11, 7PM • FREE

READING: DIANE EHRENSAFT — *GENDER BORN, GENDER MADE: RAISING HEALTHY GENDER-NONCONFORMING CHILDREN*. Dr. Ehrensaft presents her seminal and informative book for parents rearing gender non-conforming children. Ehrensaft understands the struggle of parents, as well as their enduring and fierce love and support for their children.

FRI JAN 13, 7PM • FREE

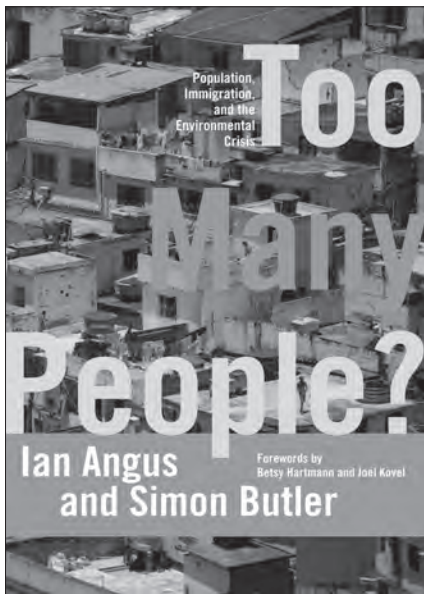
READING: RICHARD GILMAN-OPALSKY — *SPECTACULAR CAPITALISM: GUY DEBORD AND THE PRACTICE OF RADICAL PHILOSOPHY*. Drawing on the work of Debord, Gilman-Opalsky argues that the theory of practice and practice of theory are superseded by social upheavals that do the work of philosophy directly.

SAT JAN 21, 7PM • FREE

READING: SEAN STEWART — *ON THE GROUND: AN ILLUSTRATED ANECDOTAL HISTORY OF THE SIXTIES UNDERGROUND PRESS IN THE U.S.* Stewart will discuss the rapid growth of the underground press in the United States in four short years (1965-1969) from five small newspapers to over 500 with millions of readers.

HISTORY
D STATES

Too Many People? Population, Immigration, and the Environmental Crisis



By Ian Angus and Simon Butler
Forewords by Betsy Hartmann and Joel Kovel

Too Many People? provides a clear, well-documented, and popularly written refutation of the idea that “overpopulation” is a major cause of environmental destruction, arguing that a focus on human numbers not only misunderstands the causes of the crisis, it dangerously weakens the movement for real solutions.

No other book challenges modern overpopulation theory so clearly and comprehensively, providing invaluable insights for both activists and environmental scholars.

“This excellent book is steadfast in its refutations of the flabby, misogynist, and sometimes racist thinking that population growth catastrophists use to peddle their claims. It’s just the thing to send populationists scurrying back to their bunkers.” — Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved*



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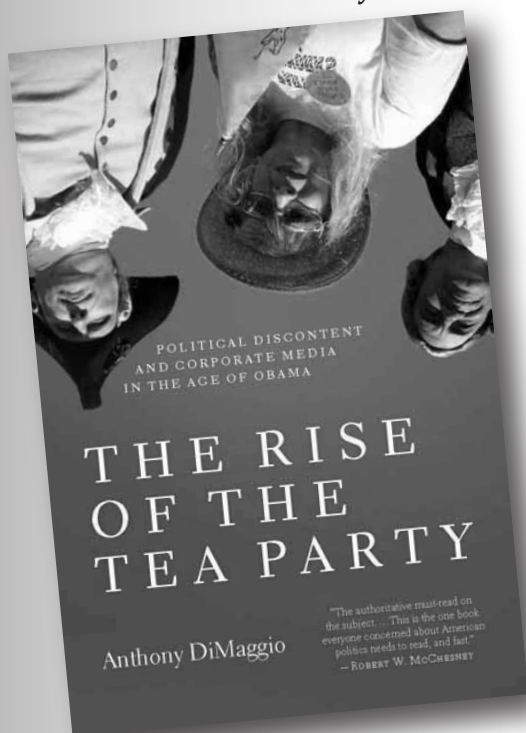
THE RISE OF THE TEA PARTY

Political Discontent and Corporate Media in the Age of Obama

by Anthony DiMaggio

“The definitive book on the Tea Party phenomenon.”
—Deepa Kumar

“The one book everyone concerned about American politics needs to read, and fast.”
—Robert W. McChesney



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Occupy 2041

Continued from page 21

their bloated budgets seemed absurd in the absence of war. So the Occupy Movement mobilized.

In the video, Sol saw her parents run into each other after being separated for years. A raw ache oozed between them. Mom had her glittery guitar and was a rising music star. She had a new lover in tow and a new album. Dad was haggard, lonely and obsessed. In the video their faces convulsed with longing and pride and shame. Sol winced at the next scene. Riot police lowered shields and fired a sound canon as people covered their ears. A blurry silhouette of a man ran at the police then a flash and he fell. Two men hauled his limp body and for an instant between their legs she saw his

smashed head, soggy hair dripping red. At the morgue, her mother screamed and Sol buried the image inside where it fell to a depth she only glimpsed in nightmares.

The bus steamed to a halt and she saw Liberty Park and jumped out. A crowd of thousands milled. The Right to Own Movement people saw her and led her to a mike stand and video projector. “Do you have the recording,” Gilliam asked. He was nervous. The crowd was mostly Occupiers, young and old staring daggers at them. Sol reached in her other pocket and gave him the flash-drive. It had a video history of private property to be shown before her speech.

But Sol didn’t want to speak anymore. The memory of her father swelled her throat. “I don’t know,” she murmured when some-

one threw a sizzling canister on stage. Sol felt weightless with terror as white tear gas enveloped her. Gunshots rang. Hazy shapes leapt in and out of the fog. As she stumbled through the shouting and pushing, someone knocked over the projector and it turned on. Its beam lit the smoke. She had given Gilliam the wrong flash-drive and images of her parents flickered on the white clouds. It was from the original Occupy Wall Street, thirty years ago and they swayed to drums as dad rubbed circles around mom’s navel. Choking and delirious, Sol didn’t know where she was. Or what year it was. Or who she was. But she walked toward the couple dancing in tear gas because they seemed to know the answer.

Eurozone

Continued from page 17

insist on a self-defeating strategy that has not contained the crisis to the periphery but has led it to spread, deepen and knock at the door of the largest eurozone countries, including Spain, Italy and, increasingly, France and Germany. At the same time, however, the risk of losing the benefits coming from the eurozone has forced European political elites to take some incremental steps to address the crisis. Being too little and too late, these measures have not prevented the crisis from deepening. And as the crisis grows, so do the fractures within the European capitalist elites. One of the central issues under debate has been whether the European Central Bank should play a greater role in supporting countries in trouble by lending to them directly and functioning, like most central banks, including the U.S. Federal Reserve, as a lender of last resort.

The ECB has up to this point tried to stabilize the borrowing costs of countries in trouble by buying these countries’ bonds in the open market, but it is not allowed to lend to countries directly. This proscription, which contrasts with private banks’ easy access to low-interest loans from the ECB, is one example of tailoring the eurozone project around the needs of European financial capital.

Germany is opposed to the ECB adopting a less restrictive policy stance, but as the crisis spreads to the core of the eurozone, it finds itself increasingly isolated. Germany has also been opposed adopting Eurobonds, which could ease the market pressure on the most vulnerable countries, preferring to postpone any such talk until even more draconian fiscal restrictions on eurozone countries make austerity permanent.

Meanwhile, Germany and other countries of the European core have profited from the crisis, since, until recently, the investors who fled the bond markets of the countries on the European periphery turned to safer alternatives, such as German and Dutch bonds.

This development has reduced the core countries’ interest rates, saving them tens of billions of euros. In addition, the interest rates such core countries earn on the loans that formed part of the rescue packages extended to countries like Greece, Ireland and Portugal exceed the interest rates they themselves have to pay, thus further adding to the benefits the “rescuers” reap from the rescue operation. In a typical ideological maneuver, the true beneficiary of the rescue operation appears as a benefactor, while the citizens in the periphery who are losing everything to keep servicing their countries’ debt appear as leeches

supposedly living off the largesse of German and Northern European taxpayers.

Needless to say, this maneuver leaves the other great beneficiaries of the rescue operation — the French, German and European banks holding European sovereign debt — out of the picture, thus making large parts of the rescue packages available for the continued support of zombie banks. To add insult to injury, a banker is now Greece’s new prime minister, inaugurating a new trend of unelected technocrats favored by European capital presiding over the bleeding of their countries. Thus, the evolving eurozone crisis brings to the surface the long-standing contradiction between capitalism and democracy. As European elites’ inept attempt to defend the former threatens to sink the eurozone, it falls on ordinary European citizens and workers to defend the latter by taking to the streets and escalating their resistance against a European capitalist class that has long abandoned the pretense of presiding over a social model that lends capitalism a human face.

Costas Panayotakis is a professor of sociology at New York City College of Technology/CUNY. He is the author of Remaking Scarcity: From Capitalist Inefficiency to Economic Democracy.

community calendar

DEC—JAN

SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS AT INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.

WED DEC 21

7:30pm • \$6/\$10/\$15
DISCUSSION: REFLECTIONS ON LIBYA: A STATE IN TRANSITION ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT. Younes Abouyoub, a former U.N. consultant for the Darfur peace process, will discuss the current political situation in Libya.
Brecht Forum, 451 West St
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

SUN DEC 25

4-5:30pm • Free
MEETING: HEALTHCARE FOR THE 99%. Patients need a range of things to stay healthy, including affordable housing, food security and universal healthcare. Come brainstorm with healthcare professionals about how these needs can be addressed.
The Atrium at 60 Wall St
owshealthcare.wordpress.com

TUE DEC 27

9pm • \$10
READING: BRIAN "OMNI" DILLON'S *EAT THE RICH* BOOK RELEASE. Nuyorican's writer-in-residence launches his first book with performances by Nisha Asnani, Bamboo MC, Michael Lee, Chris Milea and more.
Nuyorican Poet's Cafe, 236 3rd St
212-780-9386 • brianomnidillon.tumblr.com

WED DEC 28

7-9pm • \$8 Sugg
EVENT: RADICAL WOMEN HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE — 'TIS THE SEASON FOR REVOLUTION! COME GET POLITICALLY ENERGIZED AS 2011 DRAWS TO A CLOSE. Program will include poetry and a sing-a-long of familiar holiday tunes with tradition-bending lyrics. A hearty supper will be served at 7 p.m.
Freedom Hall, 113 W 128 St
212-222-0633 • radicalwomen.org

SAT DEC 31

\$60 PER PERSON/\$100 PER COUPLE
EVENT: NEW YEARS EVE PRE-FIXE DINNER PARTY AT COLORS. Ring in the New Year at COLORS, a restaurant whose menu reflects the culinary traditions of the 22 countries represented by its worker-owners.
COLORS Restaurant, 417 Lafayette St
212-777-8443 • colors-newyork.com

SUN JAN 1

2pm-midnight • Free
PERFORMANCE: KALEIDOSCOPE: THE ALTERNATIVE NEW YEAR'S DAY. Reflect on the world with 150 performers through spoken word, performance and open mic. Bring paperbacks to support literacy in prison and canned goods to help the homeless.
Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery
212-614-0505 • bowerypoetry.com

FRI JAN 6

10:30am-12pm • Free
PARADE: 35TH ANNUAL THREE KINGS DAY PARADE. In this colorful annual celebration marking the new year, community leaders and local groups join the Latin American community for this parade through el barrio complete with lively music, camels and puppets.
El Museo del Barrio
106th St and Madison Ave
212-660-7165 • elmuseo.org

SAT JAN 7-SUN JAN 8

10 a.m.-12 p.m. • Free
EVENT: MULCHFEST 2012. Bring your holiday tree to a designated city park to be recycled into mulch that will nourish plantings across the city. Trees can also be dropped off at designated sites from Jan. 2-8. For more information on the over 35 chipping sites and 35 additional drop-off locations, visit nyc.gov/parks.
Various locations
311 • nyc.gov/parks



SEASONS GREETINGS: More than 3,000 people attended last year's Three Kings Day parade, sponsored by El Museo del Barrio. This year's parade, on Jan. 6, will mark the 35th anniversary of the parade.

SAT JAN 7

5-11pm • Free
EVENT: FIRST SATURDAYS AT THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM — OUT AND PROUD. Brooklyn Museum opens its doors to the neighborhood for free events, exhibits and activities that culminate in an evening dance party. January's theme is LGBT rights, pride and art.
Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway
718-638-5000 • brooklynmuseum.org

WED JAN 11

7:30pm • \$10
SCREENING: *ALL ME AND AN EVENING WITH WINFRED REMBERT*. With his intensely autobiographical paintings depicting the day-to-day existence of blacks in the segregated South, Rembert has preserved an important, if often disturbing, chapter of American history.
Maysles Cinema, 343 Lenox Ave
212-582-6050 • mayslesinstitute.org

SUN JAN 15

3-9pm • \$5 Sugg
PERFORMANCE: POST-INDUSTRIAL SOUNDTRACK & DETROIT DELUXE. Wear your dancing shoes and explore the global impact of Detroit's musical landscape through a live concert and mixed-media exhibit.
Queens Museum of Art, New York City Building
718-592-9700 • queensmuseum.org

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reader comments

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POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Response to "Demands, Who Needs 'Em?," Nov. 2:

If we simply must have demands, how about: We demand the entire wealth of the North American continent be handed over to the working class? Or, we demand that all capitalists resign from their posts now and dissolve their companies, and cede control of the U.S. government to the people?

Issue-oriented demands NARROW the possibilities. The Communist Party did the same thing in Paris in 1968 when they negotiated away the grassroots' occupation of the factories in exchange for a few measly trade-union-type improvements and increase in wages,

breaking the revolutionary back of the occupations and splitting the workers from the students.

— MITCHEL COHEN

PARTY OF COMPETITION

Response to "A Left-Wing Tea Party?," Nov. 2:

Efforts to equate the Tea Party and the OWS movement are naive. At best, it can be said that both attract people who are disillusioned with power. But the comparison stops there: the Tea Party is the result of years of money and position papers directed against the many and in support of the few. Carefully nurtured and brought into the open when the country reached the "nadir" of a Black president. Highly supportive of 2nd Amendment rights, putting its money where its mouth is, seeing green policies as the Trojan horse that



will defeat capitalism and spending time in the woods practicing marksmanship and God knows what else.

And right they are: the ethos

of the left is cooperation instead of competition, and that includes nature.

—DEENA STRYKER

UNIONS & DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Response to "Labor Finds a Young Soulmate." Nov. 2:

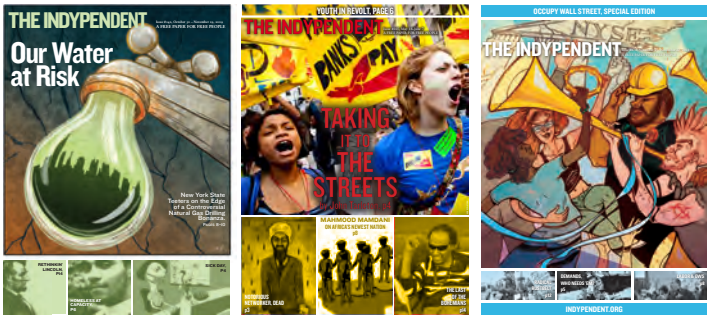
Great question: what does OWS have to offer unions? The answer: its practice of direct democracy, its "horizontality."

This practice of democracy matters because it maximizes participation, not as "foot soldiers" or "masses" but as organizers and individuals who are free to think, debate, organize and facilitate. NYC unions have not lacked progressive political positions or progressive leaders. What they lack is dedicated, active, empowered members. Why? One of the long-standing ob-

stacles to this is the lack of union democracy, either active hostility to democracy on the part of the officers (Carpenters Union) or just institutional barriers to leadership (SEIU 32BJ). Picture the leadership of a major NYC union having to "get on stack." The contrast with the leaderless process at OWS is striking.

Building participation and cultivating initiative in a labor union is not easy — unions like TWU Local 100 are trying, but at OWS unionists can learn principles and techniques of democratic organizing that unions sorely need. If they apply what they learn at Zuccotti Park back at the union hall and on the job, OWS can really prove to be a gift to unionism.

—MATT NOYES



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