

Baltimore's

INDYPENDENT READER

FREE

toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old ...

Spring 2012 Issue 16

Occupy

THE ECONOMY: JOBS AND DEVELOPMENT

THE FACE OF OUR FUTURE: THE STATE'S PLAN TO BUILD A NEW YOUTH JAIL
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PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES AT OCCUPY BALTIMORE
ANOTHER BDC IS POSSIBLE
LET TEACHERS TEACH: MORE TEACHER REGULATIONS ONLY UNDERMINE EDUCATION

Indypendent Reader

*toward building a new society on the
vacant lots of the old ...*

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The *Indypendent Reader* is a local, volunteer-run media source that aims to inform and be a resource for social justice movements in Baltimore and beyond. The project began in 2006 as a collaboration between the Baltimore Independent Media Center and the Campbaltimore Project, and now operates as an autonomous collective. We encourage people to "become the media" by providing space for both new and experienced writers to publish their stories, analysis, and multimedia work. We seek to bring to light Baltimore's rich tradition of social and political activism.

The project publishes both a print paper, as well as a more frequently updated news and multimedia website, indyreader.org. The goal is to create a collaborative project in which concerned individuals and those dedicated to social justice can use the media to speak for themselves, organize, and build liberatory movements. We aim to inform, educate, and facilitate participation in movements and struggles.

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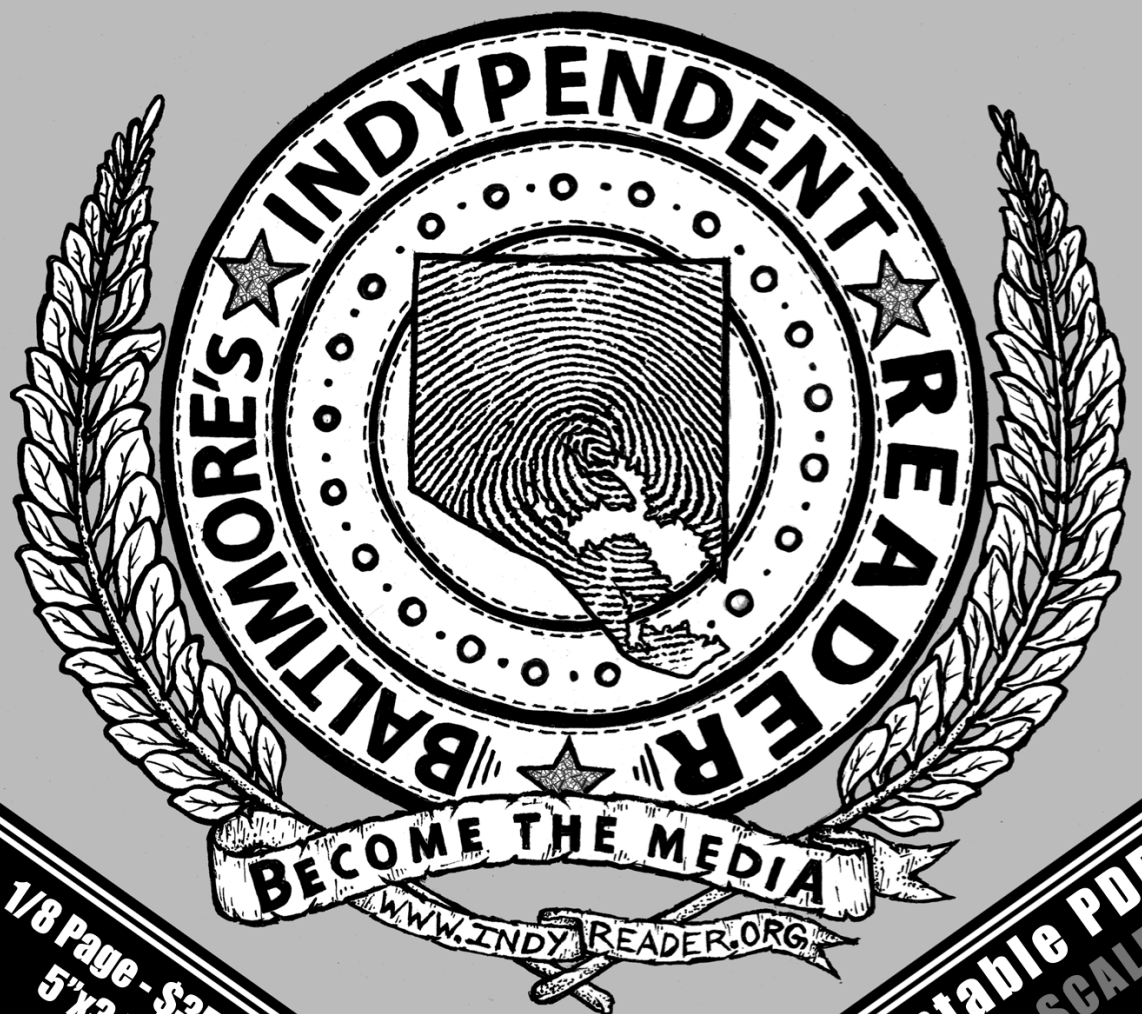
At OccupyBaltimore's former location in
McKledin Square, downtown Baltimore

Layout by Spencer Compton

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OCCUPATIONS: THEIRS AND OURS

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

BY: STEPHEN ROBLIN

After Occupy Wall Street claimed Manhattan's Zuccotti Park in mid-September 2011, Occupy encampments spread rapidly throughout the country and beyond. The efforts of dedicated and courageous individuals involved in the movement—both long-time activists and newly active—have had an impact. Dominant institutions like the mainstream mass media have been forced to give a glance towards the extreme rise in income and wealth inequality over the last thirty years and the corporate domination of the US political-economic system. This is by no means a slight achievement. The prospects for more meaningful achievements will be greatly improved if the evolving Occupy movement becomes more deeply rooted in local communities and connected in solidarity with struggles abroad.

As illustrated by the Occupy movement's impact on the mass media, progressive social movements are crucial in drawing popular attention to systemic neglect, exploitation, and oppression. In current times, this ultimately means elevating to the level of popular consciousness the long-standing occupation of the economic, political, and social life of American society and its pernicious transformation since the mid-1970s. This occupation has been carried out by two dominant institutions: the nation-state and multinational corporations. Linguist and intellectual, Noam Chomsky, has appropriately called this order, which by now is thoroughly globalized, the "state-corporate complex."

THEIR OCCUPATION: THE NEOLIBERAL VERSION

Starting more than thirty years ago, the socio-economic policies pushed through the US state-corporate complex have caused a qualitative shift in the nation's political-economic system. The trajectory from the end of WWII to the early 1970s was one of unprecedented economic growth and overall development for the majority population. Progress was not uniform; nor was it a gift from those in power. Rather, it was to a significant extent the achievements of popular struggles—like the labor, civil rights, and other progressive movements—that were able to influence state policy. Progress has continued on some fronts. On two fronts, however, there has been a sharp reversal: namely, socio-economic development and political democracy.

Since the 2008 financial collapse, the US has had the highest unemployment rates since the Great Depression. The current jobs crisis, as well as the financial crisis that created it, is a symptom of a more than three decade-long assault on economic development. The economic paradigm advanced during this period is commonly referred to as "neoliberalism." While the Carter administration initiated the transformation, the Reagan administration carried it forward with far greater force and zeal.

The major reforms implemented were

deregulation of business and the financial sector, slashing taxes for corporations and the rich, intensified assault on unions and collective bargaining, greater reliance on temporary and part-time workers, reduction in state spending, and privatization of government services. Deregulation created the conditions for the spectacular rise to dominance of the financial sector ("Wall Street") over the US economy. This phenomenon, the "financialization of the economy," has been accompanied by another structural change: de-industrialization, in which the country's manufacturing sector was gutted. The consequences of these reforms and the structural changes they produced have been devastating for working people and families.

During the current neoliberal era, real wages for the majority population have stagnated or declined, while work hours and household debt have increased sharply. Meanwhile, there has been a dramatic increase in income and wealth inequality—so much that economist, Robin Hahnel, has credited this period as being "the most dramatic increase in economic inequality in world history." This development is a dramatic departure from the general trajectory during the immediate post-WWII period (1945 to mid-1970s), when the gains of economic growth were distributed progressively so that society overall was equalizing.

Political institutions have concurrently become increasingly dominated by corporate interests, largely as a result of the skyrocketing costs of elections. And it continues to worsen, especially since the Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in *Citizens United*, which broke with century-long legal precedent and removed the meager restrictions on financing of elections. The costs of the 2012 elections are almost certain to break record highs, exceeding \$6 billion according to some accounts. In short, political servitude on the basis of wealth and power as opposed to popular will has been thoroughly institutionalized.

We see the effects of corporate-dominated politics in the Bush and Obama administrations' handling of the financial crisis. The financial institutions responsible received massive taxpayer bailouts with few strings attached. Citizens, on the other hand, have been subject to the harsh realities of markets, such as foreclosures and un- and under-employment. Meanwhile, these same institutions, which have made record profits since 2008, have rallied their political servants to protect their low tax rates and maintain a regulation-light environment. Now, some of the major culprits of the crisis, like the global financial firm, Goldman Sachs, are bigger and more powerful now than they were before the crisis and still engaging in the same practices that caused it.

With the onset of the economic crisis taking place amid the long-standing assault on economic development and political democracy, the majority population has

been exposed to heightened levels of economic insecurity. In de-industrialized zones like Baltimore, the pain is particularly severe. Once a booming industrial center, Baltimore consistently ranks near the top of Maryland jurisdictions for the highest unemployment rate. In September, the US Census Bureau estimated that about one in four Baltimore residents is living in poverty, a one-year increase of over 20 percent. As put by Susan J. Roll, an assistant professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, "The poor are everywhere." We can add to the list of what is "everywhere" the estimated 40,000 vacant properties that "pockmark" the city's neighborhoods, as well as the homeless population, which increased almost twenty percent during the past two years.

This is just a glimpse of the domestic front of the occupation administered through the US state-corporate complex.

OUR OCCUPATION: A THREAT TO THEIRS

It is instructive to reflect on the responses to our *counter-occupations*. For the elites occupying the state-corporate complex, the actions of individuals involved in the Occupy movement (and all progressive movements) contrast sharply with their ideal of the "model citizen": a passive, obedient, and apathetic individual, who is disconnected from others in any truly democratic sense, engrossed with consumerist pursuits, and content with deteriorating well-being and democratic voice. This much is made clear from the official responses to the Occupy movement throughout the country, especially in cities like New York and Oakland where local governments met peaceful protesters with massive police force and brutality. Even in cities where the official response was more subdued, as in Baltimore, the ideal is well demonstrated.

In Baltimore, hundreds of individuals took their cue from Occupy Wall Street and in early October 2011, set up an encampment at McKeldin Square in the Inner Harbor. The response from the Mayor's office indicates that the local movement is viewed as a threat. Never engaging the movement positively, the Mayor's office monitored it very closely while communicating with local business elites—like Brian C. Rogers, chairman of the financial management giant, T. Rowe Price—over the mutual threat.

According to the Baltimore Sun's Justin Fenton, Rogers, "whose \$7 million annual income places him solidly in the top 1 percent," "was among a handful of business executives who lobbied for the protesters' eviction during their stay at the harbor." Andy Freeman of the Swirnow Capital Management Co. was another among this handful. Calling the encampment a "refugee/homeless camp," he urged the Mayor to "do what Mayor Bloomberg did in NY" and remove the blight from the Inner Harbor with force.

The Mayor's office acted on their calls over the objections of unions, religious groups, and citizens who supported Occupy Baltimore. It sent a clear message: outrage and indignation at the over three decade-long assault on economic development and political democracy should be contained "within the currently established guidelines," which precludes over-night protest at city parks. Since the city government shut down the encampment in December, a heavy police presence has been maintained at Occupy Baltimore and its affinity groups' actions.

This response is in perfect accord with the state-corporate complex and its occupation of the economic, political, and social life of American society.

WHERE WE STAND

So how does the Independent Reader relate to the progressive movements that oppose this occupation and, in doing so, struggle to establish their own occupation, one based on equality, liberty, democracy, ecological sustainability, and other social justice values?

We start from the premise that it is simply not possible to remove ourselves from history and report and analyze its unfolding in a so-called unbiased, impartial, and objective manner. This does not mean that we reject good journalistic standards. Indeed, we hold dear standards like reporting facts and perspectives with utmost honesty and accuracy, and being transparent with respect to a writer's relationship to her subject matter. Rather than feigning impartiality (often a sure sign of obedience to political and economic elites), we employ these standards with purpose. And our purpose can be succinctly described as follows: "toward building a new society on the vacant lots of old . . ." Ultimately, it is our belief that in order to build a new, more decent society, the economy, along with the other spheres of social life, must be occupied.

This issue of Independent Reader, "Occupy the Economy: Jobs and Development," follows our past issues in raising local voices involved in this ongoing struggle. Here, they investigate and analyze the contours of their occupation and the challenges and promise of ours.★

Stephen Roblin is a member of the independent Reader collective. His an independent researcher, focusing on the US domestic economy and US/Horn of Africa relations, with a special focus on Somalia. For a copy of the introduction with full citations, contact him at stephenroblin@gmail.com.

THE INDYREADER TALKS TO: ANOTHER BDC IS POSSIBLE

The Independent Reader interviewed Another BDC Is Possible a month after their public meeting with Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC) president, Jay Brodie, in November.

Indyreader: What is your organization's background? When did it form? By whom?

AnotherBDC: The group formed after a meeting that arose from Occupy Baltimore. However, participation has been broader than just people who identify as Occupy participants, especially as we continue to outreach to other organizers and bring them on board. Many of the people involved have been involved in various attempts to educate, agitate, and organize around issues of development for years in one form or another (for instance the City From Below conference in 2009).

Indyreader: Can you describe the BDC, specifically its internal structure and institutional function? Does its internal composition represent Baltimore in your view?

AnotherBDC: The Baltimore Development Corporation is a "quasi-public" entity set up by the City of Baltimore to facilitate economic development, formed from the merger of the Charles Center-Inner Harbor Management, Inc., Howard Street Market Place, and the Baltimore Economic Development Corporation in 1991. It employs around 50 people directly and has a yearly budget of just under \$10 million, according to the 2010 tax form 990 it is required to file with the IRS; nearly all of this budget is provided by the City of Baltimore. The relatively small size of this budget is probably deceptive; the power the BDC has to shape the development process in Baltimore is greatly amplified by its role in facilitating the transfer of public assets to private developers. While it doesn't have the authority to do this directly (everything it does is subject to at least nominal oversight and approval from the City Council), it is responsible for coordinating with developers behind the scenes and bringing proposals to the table. In other words, it doesn't get to pick the meal, but it is the only one

creating the menu. The BDC thus facilitates the transfer of current public assets (like city owned properties, which it may also assemble on behalf of developers before a sale) as well as future ones (e.g. the tax breaks, PILOTs, and transfer of future tax revenues towards supporting private development projects, TIFs) which subsidize so much of big development in Baltimore. Its board is lacking any true representation of Baltimore. It's composed of appointed city officials and members of the business community, especially from the financial sector. There's no representation from labor, for instance, or from community groups.

Indyreader: How does it relate to other power centers, mainly city government and the corporate sector?

AnotherBDC: The conception that the BDC is the secret shadow government is appealing, but we think ultimately incorrect. The BDC is one particular node in the network of urban power that brings together the developers who know how to work the system, the city government officials and agencies tasked with planning and urban development, the nonprofit foundations which facilitate certain kinds of projects, the multinational corporations that profit from the various kinds of outsourcing arrangements, and the banking interests that profit from the process of financing all of this. One way to see the BDC's function in all of this is as a kind of standing "back room": close enough to the city for deals to be cut, but far enough away that the government is isolated from the bad decisions it might make.

Indyreader: A member of your organization was recently quoted by the Baltimore Brew saying, "Baltimore residents are basically presented with a menu. The menu only has one option on it, and they are told they can either choose what's being offered or they can go hungry." Can you explain in more detail how the BDC relates to the public?

AnotherBDC: The menu the BDC offers to Baltimore is largely composed of development projects which all follow the same strategy: attract new residents (and businesses intended to serve them) in order to grow the tax base. It largely leaves off

any options designed to satisfy the needs of current city residents, concentrating on development projects that largely provide jobs that are precarious and near minimum wage levels, and which don't, for instance, materially improve the conditions in the neighborhoods which need the most help. "Food deserts" (areas without easy access to healthy and affordable food) are a good example here: if we are going to subsidize development, why not subsidize grocery stores in neighborhoods that need them before subsidizing yet another tourist hotel in the harbor?

The big problem here is that the BDC is subject to democratic oversight, but not open to democratic participation. As a conduit designed to translate the power of private development capital into action, on the part of the municipal government that makes it possible to invest this capital profitably in urban development, the BDC doesn't really function as an agency which facilitates broad-based participation. If you're not coming to the table with the resources to carry out a development project, you're not going to get help from the BDC, even if you're affected by the development projects it carries out (it reshapes your city, financed in part by the taxes you pay.)

So the problem is ultimately bigger than the specific issues the BDC has with transparency and accountability, or the specific cozy relationships they have with certain big developers: the problem is that the development process by and large is structurally driven by wealthy interests who can then use urban development to become more wealthy, even as the city justifies this process with respect to the presumed benefits this development will bring to ordinary residents of the city.

Indyreader: How would you characterize the BDC's economic development ideology? How does this ideology manifest in real-life policy terms?

AnotherBDC: The ideology is basically one that sees the economic welfare of the larger community as a side effect of economic development oriented towards private profit. In other words, it's a kind of "trickle down" strategy: to help the poor, we have to publicly subsidize the rich. Practically, what

results is development projects like the Inner Harbor, that create low wage, precarious jobs. A great example here is the debacle of the Baltimore Grand Prix, originally hailed as this magnificent success bringing all this money into Baltimore, but which has quickly become something of a cruel joke on the city. Not only did the race generate far less spending than predicted, mismanagement and poor financial planning has essentially bankrupted the race organizers, who still owe the city close to \$2 million in unpaid fees and taxes. The BDC was the agency that reviewed and signed-off on the estimates of how profitable the race would be for the city. The other effect of this ideology is that the BDC, in approaching the problem of economic development in Baltimore, through this trickle-down lens, doesn't function as we think it needs to: designing projects that directly benefit the community by design, rather than as an afterthought. For instance, why not find ways to create community-owned development projects? Why not help create worker-owned companies through public subsidies? Why not build a sustainable, locally-focused economy that empowers communities devastated by years of disinvestment?

Indyreader: Another BDC Is Possible focuses on three demands: transparency, ethics, and participation. Why did you choose these areas? What specific changes would you like to see here? And how would it change the BDC's relationship with the public and power centers (city and corporate)?

AnotherBDC: By organizing our critique of the BDC under these three headings, we can bring a degree of intelligibility to a very complicated set of problems. Transparency: the BDC is notoriously opaque. There's been considerable legal action, largely initiated by developers who felt they were getting unfairly cut out of the process, to make their operations more open to public inspection. Ethical development: if you're going to create jobs with public money, you need to create good jobs. This is a fight that's being waged by organizations like the United Workers, which we are honored to act in solidarity with. And finally, Participation: the other BDC we think is possible would be one which Baltimore residents are proud



to have working on their behalf, which works alongside them, which builds trust rather than breeding suspicion, and which is unafraid to embrace new models and best practices for involving communities in the development process.

Indyreader: You all organized a meeting attended by 100+ Baltimore citizens with BDC president, Jay Brodie, on November 7th, 2011. How did this meeting come about? What did you intend to achieve? And what came out of it?

AnotherBDC: We decided it was important to take the energy of Occupy Baltimore, and the outrage at an economic system increasingly organized by and for the 1%, and focus some attention on the way that system manifests itself locally. The BDC headquarters at 36 S. Charles, just blocks away from the occupation at McKeldin Fountain, was an obvious place to start. There's a lot of people who

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agree that there are some serious problems with the BDC: our action followed the United Workers' "Haunted Harbor March" which highlighted the injustices workers face in the Inner Harbor, calling for fair development principals. It also saw, a few days later, the release of Carl Stokes' city council report on TIFs and PILOTs, whose analysis was substantially aligned with the perspective we presented on the steps of the BDC; and that weekend saw Baltimore United in Leadership Development's (BUILD) march through Harbor East, drawing the connections between tax breaks Downtown and austerity measures for the city's schools and recreation centers. All in all, probably a bad week to be Jay Brodie. If there wasn't so much concern with what's going on with the BDC, and with the development model they represent, it probably would have been easier for them to ignore our demand for a public meeting.

Our intent was to begin a conversation with this first action: both with the BDC and, more importantly, with allies who wanted to help change the development regime in Baltimore City. In our conversation with the BDC, we secured a promise from Jay Brodie to meet with a subsequent delegation, as well as a commitment to begin posting their meeting minutes online as a token gesture of a desire to act more transparently (which, to their credit, they have started doing). But the meeting was also an opportunity for us to reach out to community stakeholders who shared aspects of our critique of the BDC, in this instance the United Workers, who have been agitating for "fair development" in the Inner Harbor; Bmore Local, who were on the front lines of the struggle to

stop the Walmart 25th St. project; and Rev. Heber Brown, III, a Baltimore City preacher and eloquent advocate for social justice and anti-racism. This is an important part of our political vision for our work on development: we don't have all the answers and we can only speak for ourselves. To really make our campaign meaningful, we need to facilitate these kinds of larger conversations.

Indyreader: This past fall you, along with Red Emma's Bookstore Coffeehouse, co-hosted a presentation by Carl Davidson, on Spain's "Mondragón and Solidarity Economy." Can you explain to our readers what the Mondragón cooperative experiment is? Also, how is it relevant for Baltimore?

AnotherBDC: We're hosting a series of events exploring alternative models for development and planning. Carl Davidson's talk on Mondragón was part of this, as was a talk by Josh Lerner of the Participatory Budgeting Project. Mondragón is one of the most successful cooperative initiatives

in the world: 85,000 workers owning their own businesses, linked together in a network which runs universities, provides employment benefits, operates its own banks, and does advanced research and development, which all started as a small anti-poverty effort set up by a Catholic priest in the Basque country in the 1950s. It's a powerful example that other kinds of economic development are possible; in this case, a model that brings democracy into the workplace and builds community economic power, and on a rather large scale. We don't see any reason why such a model shouldn't be something explored in Baltimore: the LA Times, for instance, recently reported on the Mayor of Richmond, CA, who has started a program to bootstrap worker cooperatives on the Mondragón model, to begin rebuilding the urban economy there.

Indyreader: What are your future plans?

AnotherBDC: We're going to continue our dialogue with the BDC and bring together a representative delegation to meet with Brodie and other members of the BDC in March 2012, assuming he doesn't go back on his promise.★

ANOTHER BDC IS POSSIBLE:
www.anotherbdcispossible.org

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 101

BY: JOHN DUDA

In a city like Baltimore, we see very large differences between what happens in which neighborhoods; these differences are a result of the decisions that get made around urban development. It is crucial to understand how a city's economy is built, these prioritizations, and how things could be done differently.

DEVELOPMENT

"Development" is a strange word: it sounds like a natural process. In reality, "development" is anything but natural: policy decisions, from zoning to tax rates to direct public assistance help determine what kind of "development" takes place. "Development" is often treated as automatically a good thing, but we should know better. Some kinds of "development" displace people so that other, wealthier people, can move into the same area. This kind of development is called "gentrification." Other kinds of development, like those focused on making it easy for big chain stores to be built, can cause small, locally-owned businesses to disappear. Other kinds of development may hurt the natural environment by encouraging the use of cars instead of mass transit. Development is the result of choices made about the kind of city they want to build, and different choices mean different kinds of development. The question is, who gets to make these choices?

DEVELOPERS

A developer is a person or an organization who has enough money to be able to reshape the urban landscape in a way that they think will benefit them. Wealth and assets translate into the power to rebuild the city the way you want to; although the public does get a say because projects need to be approved (and often financially supported) by the city government, this say often happens at the last minute, and with no alternatives on the table. Most developers are for-profit entities—rich people trying to get richer. There are, however, an increasing number of non-profits engaging in development activities, and a small but growing number of models for public and cooperative development.

PLANNERS AND PLANNING

Planners are responsible for coming up with an economic vision for the city and its neighborhoods that goes beyond single projects. Those in the city government have a chance to see their ideas made real. Theoretically, development is supposed to follow planning, but often plans are made up to present the goals of private developers as public benefits. In Baltimore, much economic planning has focused around developing a tourism and entertainment industry in the Downtown and Inner Harbor, with city and state support for stadiums, malls, and other attractions. Unlike the industrial jobs they are meant to replace, however, this kind of economic vision offers low-paying service jobs, not meaningful careers.

SUBSIDIES

As long as benefits for ordinary citizens—like rec centers, affordable mass transit, and functional public schools—have to contend with shrinking budgets, the benefits for developers are in no danger of going away. These benefits include:

PILOTs: If a developer claims that a project wouldn't be financially viable if they had to pay property taxes, a PILOT ("payment in lieu of taxes") can let them off the hook.

TIFs: TIFs (Tax Increment Financing) starts with a developer's promise that their project will raise property tax revenue in the surrounding area. Then the city agrees to use that increased amount to help the developer's project. Usually, they do this by earmarking the promised increase to pay the interest on public bonds that will generate the cash that should materialize tomorrow, today. The property tax dollars captured by TIFs don't support schools or rec centers; they just go to pay off the bond-holders.

LOANS AND GRANTS: Below-market interest rates, or even just piles of free money are also used to support development.

ENTERPRISE ZONES & TAX CREDITS:

Development in certain areas may be eligible for extra breaks on taxes that would normally be owed by a developer.

There's other kinds of assistance that are offered to developers that don't revolve strictly around money, but are just as important:

LAND-BANKING: The city often does the hard work of buying up and assembling lots of small properties into something big enough for a developer to be interested in. Sometimes eminent domain can enter into this process: the city can legally force one person to sell and vacate their property so they can give it to a developer for their project.

SOCIAL COSTS: If workers in a development are paid wages too low to support themselves, if a development causes environmental problems, the city is often left picking up the check for these costs. We say these costs have been "externalized" by the developer, who doesn't need to worry about it.

BDC

The Baltimore Development Corporation is technically not part of the city government, although its board is controlled by the Mayor, and nearly all of its funding comes from Baltimore City tax dollars. Its mission is to connect private developers with city properties and the kind of city subsidies detailed above.

THERE ARE THREE PROBLEMS WITH THE BDC:

1) The BDC is not transparent. Many of its decisions are made behind closed doors. In fact, the BDC fought for years to close its operations to public inspection because it argued that as a private non-profit, it was not required, as government agencies are, to hold open meetings.

2) The BDC does not make sure that the projects it supports will pay a fair wage, provide adequate benefits, or treat workers with dignity. Rather than pursuing strategies designed to empower the economy at the community level, the BDC helps big developers with big projects, under the flawed assumption that benefits will "trickle down."

3) The BDC is not participatory: ordinary people are not invited to the planning table to collaboratively produce a shared vision for the city they live in; as a consequence, the BDC helps build a city based in outdated—and discredited—visions of what an urban economy should look like.

PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES AT OCCUPY BALTIMORE

BY: JENNY GAENG

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM: THE BALTIMORE INDYPENDENT READER

Everyone who passed through McKeldin Square between October 4th and December 12th of 2011, saw a cluster of tables and tents. They saw Occupy Baltimore. Within that, some of them saw a homeless camp. Yet, others saw history in the making. Some stayed because they were interested or curious; some had nowhere else to go. And, finally, others believed firmly and fervently that the time had come for revolution.

CHANGING REALITY

“I was there when thunder rolled in the streets of Baltimore,” Timothy B. A. McClary, Sr., tells me, his voice heavy, “In 1968, I was five years old. I saw the Black Panthers come through and ask us if we owned our store. We said yes. They draped a black shroud across our door and said, ‘Stay open’.”

Yet, his family’s store, like the rest of the thriving neighborhood McClary remembers from his youth, is long gone. Now, like at least 4,000 other inhabitants of Baltimore City, he is experiencing homelessness. He does not dwell on the years that led him there. Instead, McClary rails against and organizes to end that which has caused the economic downfall of his hometown.

McKeldin Square’s 24-hour encampment was shut down by the police a few months ago. However, McClary and other committed activists are quick to affirm that this is only the beginning.

McClary adds, “I’ve been occupying Baltimore all of my life.”

BUILDING COMMUNITY AS PROTEST

McClary arrived at McKeldin Square in late October, about two weeks after the global Occupy Wall Street protests¹ had taken root in Baltimore.

At its inception, Occupy Baltimore had a dedicated, if temporary, workforce. Two days after the first planning meeting, almost a dozen committees had mobilized to provide food, medical care, media, security, and more. General Assemblies (GAs) were formed, in line with the larger Occupy movement, as a space for activists to come together, in meeting-style format, for important decisions and conversations. They were held every night at 8pm. For the first week, nightly attendance surpassed 200. The tenuous alliance between radical and reformist activism was immediately tested, as we spent almost every night debating whether or not to apply for a permit.²

While some have characterized the protesters as your typical dirty hippies, godless anarchists, etc., others have lauded the Occupy movement for its mass appeal. The “We are the 99%” meme has become the unofficial slogan, implying that almost all Americans have a united bone to pick with the financial elite.

THIS PAST FALL, 2011’S OCCUPY BALTIMORE MOVEMENT INSPIRED MANY INDIVIDUALS TO ACTION. ON THE SAME TOKEN, IT ALSO INCITED A GREAT DEAL OF CONTROVERSY AND ARGUABLY EXEMPLIFIED, IN MICROCOSM, MANY OF OUR SOCIETY’S SYSTEMIC ISSUES. IN THIS ARTICLE, GAENG BRINGS TO LIGHT SOME OF THOSE INTRICACIES, AS WELL AS DISCUSSES POSSIBILITIES FOR THE MOVEMENT’S POST-OCCUPATION FUTURE.

However, this meme overlooks the separate identities within “the 99%.” The systemic oppression that plagues our society was regularly replicated in microcosm at McKeldin Square. Women, queers, people of color, and other marginalized individuals were often subject to bigotry, and/or seemingly had their concerns routinely dismissed by the (white, male) group at large. An early attempt at sexual harassment prevention training was shouted down during the General Assembly, derided as a “personal issue.” Reports of rape within the encampment were largely dismissed as a right-wing conspiracy. Violators of the behavioral code were kicked-out of Occupy Baltimore—but usually on a purely symbolic level—as they usually remained in the square to offend another day.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Indyreader would like to acknowledge the incredible seriousness of the rape accusation. The report of rape at the Occupy Baltimore camp, as well as the incidents that surrounded them, expose a number of issues that deserve critical examination. In Corey Reidy’s upcoming online series “Occupy Baltimore: Looking Backward, Walking Forward” (p. 14), she will analyze this issue both from the stance that many felt that OB’s reactions silenced women and their historic and ongoing struggle against protectors and perpetrators of sexual violence. It also didn’t center around an ethic of care and/or expose systemic epidemics such as rape. Instead, OB reacted from a place of fear from the character assassination attempts by opponents (such as Fox News). Also, the series will delve into the importance of examining how US ideological institutions, like the mainstream media, manufacture stories about the realities we sometimes face under domination, such as rape, as tool to continue to control us. Reidy will examine why it was so hard for Occupy Baltimore, and many movement struggles, to balance both the ethic of caring for a potential survivor and working to expose systems that lead to sexual violence, as well as analyzing how patriarchy and other dominating forces use stories of the violence they create in order to attack us and our struggles.

Many people saw this, and returned nonetheless. Rebecca Schleider, 30, was an active member of the now-defunct

Anti-Oppression Committee, which held workshops about rape culture, homophobic slurs, and internal oppression in social movements. “Human rights and issues of equality are the most important issues,” she asserts. “If you don’t take care of them, all you’re going to end up with is a change in management.”

Although she admits that McKeldin Square was not a safe space,³ Schleider could not resist being part of “a critical moment in our country.” She came to Occupy Baltimore after witnessing the day of protest in New York City, that temporarily stayed Occupy Wall Street’s eviction. “Seeing people reclaim public space in such a defiant way was very important to me.” She continues, “At Occupy Baltimore, groups met each other and shared resources that they wouldn’t have otherwise. It’s kind of like having a commune, except everyone’s included.”

“I was drawn in by the potential for a coalition that could transcend entrenched divisions and my own sense of hopelessness,” recounts Jeff Brunell.

The 28-year-old Charles Village resident was new to activism when he spent the first few weeks of October sleeping in McKeldin Square. “I’m privileged to have found Occupy relatively accessible.”

Since our first planning meeting, Occupy Baltimore has utilized the consensus model of decision-making. The philosophy behind consensus is non-hierarchical “direct democracy,” or, anarchy (depending on whom you ask). In consensus, the goal is to arrive at decisions that all concerned parties

within a group collectively agree upon. The process is commonly long and arduous, with necessary compromises often made. The intention is that every voice will be heard, and that the end result will be long-lasting, based upon this democratic system of inclusion. However, the system of hand signals and stack-taking, which are involved in many forms of modern day consensus decision-making, can be alienating to first-time participants. And it often takes a while to get everyone’s voices heard.

“We sit down, complain, and strategize about strategizing about strategizing,” McClary said of the General Assemblies. “We soon find ourselves out of time, looking back and having done virtually nothing.”

GETTING DOWN TO (BIG) BUSINESS

As a post-industrial city, commonly described as “apocalyptic” in its decay, Baltimore is a shining example of our failing economic system.

“I watched as Baltimore got looted all over,” McClary tells me with furious intensity. “There used to be a thriving, intense beat at the heart of this city. It’s now slowed to an almost nonexistent pulse—except for the Harbor.”

Baltimore has over 40,000 abandoned properties compared to around 4,000 people experiencing homelessness at the last census. As companies like Wells Fargo continue to practice predatory lending and illegal foreclosure, both of those numbers are rising.

The degradation of the City’s steel industry, highlighted by the recent closing of the Sparrow’s Point Mill,⁴ has given way to a questionable replacement industry: tourism. Hospitality work comprises a relatively large percentage of jobs in Baltimore, with the Inner Harbor and Harbor East as the longtime focuses for taxpayer-funded development. Not only does the influx of corporatism go hand-in-hand with human rights abuses, but it also comes at the expense of the neighborhoods in East and West Baltimore that are losing their schools, firehouses, post offices, and recreation centers—to the promise of another luxury hotel on the waterfront.



Plaque at McKeldin Square Park, former base of Occupy Baltimore. Photo: Clayton Conn.

While nationwide solidarity campaigns pitted Baltimore occupiers against corporate giants, like Bank of America and Wells Fargo, others chose more local targets.

Another BDC is Possible is one of those locally-focused groups. They arose originally from Occupy Baltimore participants. They have since spread to encompass a large variety of activists concerned about the state of development within the city. Another BDC aims to critique the Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC), hold it accountable for its decisions and actions, as well as offer alternate routes. Defined by the organizers, “The Baltimore Development Corporation is a ‘quasi-public’ entity set up by the City of Baltimore to facilitate economic development.”⁵

Another BDC is one way that activists are attempting to tackle Baltimore’s economic disparities. Though the path ahead looks far from easy. *Another BDC* participant John Duda states:

I think there are two steps [in going forward], one is that: we need to do the work of bringing communities together to seriously talk about this [the BDC]; we have an opening. We need to make sure that all communities can come together and really talk about what they want and put together . . . a really, really comprehensive set of well-researched/well-argued demands and suggestions and proposals. We also need to educate ourselves about how these things work—what the current mechanisms are, what the current structures are. And they’re complicated . . . But also talking about alternatives; talking about some of the ways you can do development differently. Whether that’s through letting neighborhoods drive development processes. You let a neighborhood decide what it wants and then you give them the tools and the technical assistance they need . . .

Or you can think about things like worker cooperatives. If you want to build jobs, what kind of jobs are you going to build? You can develop jobs that will actually provide living wages, provide healthcare, provide ownership stakes in companionship, hence democracy at the workplace level. Same with land trusts; if you’re going to do community development, how do make sure that land stays affordable? If you’re going to do development how do you forestall gentrification? . . . we should put a little democracy back in. And we

should put democracy that is a new kind of democracy, that’s real democracy. And hopefully that will lead to greater things in the future.⁶

Activist groups like Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), the United Workers, and others, have been organizing around these issues for years. But many participants believe that the attention commanded by the Occupy Baltimore name is what it will take to really mobilize the city. “We have achieved our primary goal of bringing awareness,” McClary continues. “As we move forward, we’ve already accomplished the mission.

MOVING FORWARD

Rather than leaving it to the General Assembly to decide what moving forward entails, affinity groups have started taking action under the auspices of the movement. Occupy Our Homes Baltimore (OOH) has moved quickly on one of the city’s most turbulent issues: housing.

Baltimore has over 40,000 abandoned properties compared to around 4,000 people experiencing homelessness at the last census. As companies like Wells Fargo continue to practice predatory lending and illegal foreclosure, both of those numbers are rising.

Inspired by the OOH movement in New York and other radical housing rights groups like Take Back the Land,⁷ Occupy Our Homes Baltimore has already been organizing eviction defenses and is rumored to be developing new strategies.

Other affinity groups have also been mobilizing around the City’s plans to close or privatize thirty recreation centers and build a \$104 million youth jail. They are conscious that these issues primarily affect the black community, which has been thus far underrepresented in the movement. This past January brought a five-day pop-up occupation entitled Schools Not Jails, that was organized by activists from Occupy Baltimore and The Baltimore Algebra Project.⁸ The action primarily served both to protest the city’s plans to build the \$104 million youth jail and to further reclaim the designated space. The “pop-up” action garnered incredible media attention largely due to creative tactics employed by the activists and undoubtedly by the city’s use of excessive police force as a response to the demonstration(s).⁹

“As a post-industrial city, commonly described as “apocalyptic” in its decay, Baltimore is a shining example of our failing economic system.”

“Before Occupy Baltimore, activists and concerned citizens, parents, churches, all had individual struggles they were fighting on a daily basis,” says Ben Pfeffer, 22, who has helped organize community meetings about the rec center closures, “Now, we have the opportunity to mobilize these potent community forces into a city-wide umbrella of vocal participants. Issues that have plagued this city for years, alongside more recent injustices, are ripe for redress by a critical mass of citizens.”

THE LONG-RUN?

Occupy Baltimore is still less than half a year old. In that time, it has created many new activists and transformed many seasoned ones. Although many participants are skeptical of the movement’s capacity for organization and structure, no one denies that it is full of potential.

“It’s a toddler,” quips Brunell.¹⁰

- 1 Occupy Wall Street (OWS) officially began on September 17th, 2011. Within weeks it became an international movement. While the Occupy movement has employed a variety of tactics, the onset of the movement focused on occupying public (or in some cases private) space in order to carve out micro-societies that have demanded an end to the perpetual and perverse economic injustices that super capitalism creates.
- 2 Occupy Baltimore applied for a permit twice. The request was denied both times.
- 3 Safe(r) space refers to both a physical location that aims to create a hostility-free, harassment-free, and rejection-free environment for those who have diverse realities/identities, as well as a non-physical location that allows commonly oppressed individuals to build community and form strength via strategies of resistance and collaboration.
- 4 According to a March 2nd, 2012, Baltimore Sun article, by Steve Kilar, after a re-opening of the month-long closed Sparrows Point Mill this past January. The Mill is once again set to close at the end of March 2012 - with potential plans to reopen in the Fall. Around 100 workers are expected to be laid-off from the closing, with more anticipated in the temporary closure.
- 5 Indyreader Talks To: Another BDC Is Possible, “Occupy the Economy” Baltimore Independent Reader Issue 16; Spring 2012.
- 6 Indyreader interview with John Duda at the Public Meeting with the BDC, on November 7th, 2011.
- 7 Take Back the Land is a Miami, FL based organization committed to preventing evictions, as well as rehousing homeless folks into foreclosed homes. They have been fighting and organizing since 2006.
- 8 “The Baltimore Algebra Project (BAP) is a fully youth-run non-profit organization that tackles math illiteracy and seeks to empower youth within the city school system. We also focus on building coalitions with youth across the country that are involved in the same struggle as us. But our priority is here, in our community and our home.” (www.baltimorealgebraproject.org)
- 9 For more on this issue, please read this issue’s piece by activist Casey McKeel entitled “Reflections on Occupy Baltimore and the Fight Against the Youth Jail.”

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TIME TO DEMILITARIZE: VETS AND CIVILIANS ARE DONE WITH WAR

BY: **SERGIO ESPAÑA** AND **JIM MORSE**

Morse, a local Baltimore activist, ten year army veteran, and Iraq Veterans Against War member, and España, a member of the Baltimore chapter of the Civilian Soldier Alliance, discuss the benefits and necessity of divesting from the US military-industrial complex.

The last combat troops have left Iraq. Mission Accomplished! So let the ticker tape parade begin. With all the sacrifices veterans made over the last eight years in a valiant effort to protect our freedoms “over there” so we wouldn’t have to defend them “here”, shouldn’t people be lining the streets in jubilation? Despite the war and the ever-expanding “war on terror” having proven to be extremely profitable for defense industry corporations (such as Halliburton, Boeing, and Northrop Grumman), the tolls the war has inflicted on the largely poor American and Iraqi families are so vast and severe that Americans are reticent to participate in any reminder of it.

In Baltimore City alone, over \$1.6 billion in local taxes has been allocated for warfare over the past decade.¹ But one does not need to know the details of bureaucratic budgeting to see the domestic price of war. It is apparent in many other ways: It can be seen in the decaying public school system that continues to have its budget slashed every year. It is obvious in the predator drones that now circle our border. It is felt by the hard-working immigrants who find themselves detained in private prisons run by former military contractors. It is apparent in the military tactics and weapons used by police forces on protesters. Such militarization comes at the cost of funding alternative models of community development. For instance, maintaining our bloated and needless nuclear weapons stockpile costs more than providing a 4-year college education for over 3.5 million Americans, annually.²

With that said, over the past decade our losses were hidden to ensure our complacency for as long as possible. Our off-budget wars were placed on America’s credit card only to be rolled into debt discussions and kicked around like a political football. Those of us at home who had the capacity to question took our time to build effective opposition. Meanwhile the government’s Vietnam-esque decision to discontinue honoring our lost comrades by displaying their returning flag-draped caskets obscured the inevitable sacrifices a nation makes when it chooses to go to war.

But the harsh reality of war cannot be hidden from veterans, the brave men and women of our US military, who, in many cases with great misgivings over the politics of their mission, literally gave all. No amount of Orwellian spin can remove the graven images of death and destruction

from their minds. No political platitudes can give them back the time lost with loved ones. No empty promises can assure them that the “conditions on the ground” will ever really improve. Nor will any yellow ribbons help the one in three women suffering from Military Sexual Trauma³ or the one in four veterans enduring Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).⁴ And indeed, no ticker tape parade can rectify our government’s lies and deceit regarding the “liberation” of the Iraqi people as Iraq has been left in shambles, with over 200,000 dead,⁵ 70% of Iraqi children suffering PTSD,⁶ and a decimated infrastructure. Meanwhile, back at home, arcane and misguided policies like the Patriot Act and the expanded National Defense Authorization Act have drastically rolled back our civil liberties. Thus, it is no surprise that many veterans have returned to discover their fight for liberty and justice for all continues here at home.

Apart from the traumas of war, mismanagement of the US economy by Washington plutocrats has pillaged the “land of opportunity.” The unemployment rate for young veterans is 20%, double that of the national average,⁷ while Congress is now considering proposals that would slash military medical and retirement benefits.⁸ With diminishing hope and little opportunity for sustainable employment, many vets have turned to protest and community organizing. They have formed organizations such as Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and Civilian Soldier Alliance (CivSol), and many are now participating in the Occupy movement in order to address their grievances.

As hundreds of thousands of Occupy protesters took to the streets in 2011, many veterans saw them as the personification of the ideals they were told they were fighting for.

VETS OCCUPY WALL STREET AND BECOME ORGANIZERS

As hundreds of thousands of Occupy protesters took to the streets in 2011, many veterans saw them as the personification of the ideals they were told they were fighting for. Wrapped in the patriotism of military participation in civil disobedience, which dates back to the Revolutionary War mutinies and the Bonus Army Occupations after World War I, many veterans continue to stand with Occupy. Their acceptance into the Occupy community has contributed to the movement’s political legitimacy

by demonstrating how members of the very institutions of control and warfare are standing against militarism and acknowledging the perversion of the status quo. Examples include Marine Shamar Thomas’ shaming of NYPD officers who defended Wall Street against demonstrators protesting the massive income and wealth inequality in our society, and veteran Scott Olsen being severely, and unjustly, injured for peacefully attending a demonstration. This resulted in Occupy Oakland’s successful shutdown of the ports, led in part by local members of Iraq Veterans Against the War.

On a more personal and healing level, veterans are finding places to speak freely about the unjust nature of America’s current wars without being branded treacherous malcontents, which often comes from individuals who never served a day in their lives. Inside the current protest movements, these veterans found people who do not judge but rather listen; people that understand the nature of their sacrifice and the lack of said sacrifice by the nation as a whole; people who believe that you can be simultaneously against a war and not the troops; people who welcome them home and offer them a shoulder to cry on. In short, they have found friendship, and that is worth more than any ticker tape parade. For not only are these growing bonds inspiring, they are essential to the movement’s success.

There is no doubt about the coalescing of shared goals between civilians and veterans, and the Occupy encampments have not been the only spaces where this is well demonstrated.

In 2010, veterans from IVAW and civilians from CivSol and other ally organizations came together to launch Operation Recovery: Stop the Deployment of Traumatized Troops. Since its launch, the campaign has successfully raised awareness of the need to provide adequate care for the tens of thousands of troops, who are suffering trauma but are receiving inadequate care or no treatment whatsoever.⁹ By doing so, they are demonstrating the consequences of a decade of misguided warfare. Local organizers throughout the country, both civilians and veterans alike, have worked together to perform outreach at Veterans

Affairs (VA) centers, coordinated pro bono therapy for vets who have yet to receive medical care, spoken out about the costs of war, and protested military and financial institutions responsible for this madness.

Since June, 2011, IVAW and CivSol members have also engaged in a

A veteran demonstrates his support for the Occupy Movement while participating in the London 2011 protests.

sustained organizing effort in Fort Hood, Texas, one of the largest military bases in the country with one of the highest suicide rates in the nation.¹⁰ The joint campaign brings in volunteer organizers from throughout the country to help with active duty outreach, while also supporting healing and activism workshops organized by Under the Hood, a local anti-war coffee shop.¹¹ Organizers then return to their own local chapters to share their lessons and further strengthen antiwar organizing. In 2012, outreach efforts have expanded to Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state. A growing number of experienced veteran and civilian organizers have exchanged their skills and experience with related social justice movements, including the growing Occupy movement, which have aimed to draw attention to how various injustices relate to the socio-economic inequalities that permeate our nation.

As we continue to challenge injustices throughout our country, organizers across the country continue to recognize that

ensuring an active resistance to the corporate militarism which perpetually creates, enforces, and accelerates these disparities is essential. Major General Smedley Butler, one of the most decorated Marines in US history, made it clear: "War is a racket. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives." And with half of the federal budget going directly into the military and defense industry,¹² there is little doubt of the effects of the war economy at home.

DEMILITARIZE THE ECONOMY

In order to protect the continuously rising profits of defense contractors and the growing Homeland Security complex, politicians continue to espouse that war is essential to our economy. For example, chairperson of the House Armed Services Committee, Howard McKeon (R-CA), has argued that "cutting our military—either by eliminating programs or laying off soldiers—brings grave economic costs." But this line of thinking fails to account for how using these funds in socially constructive

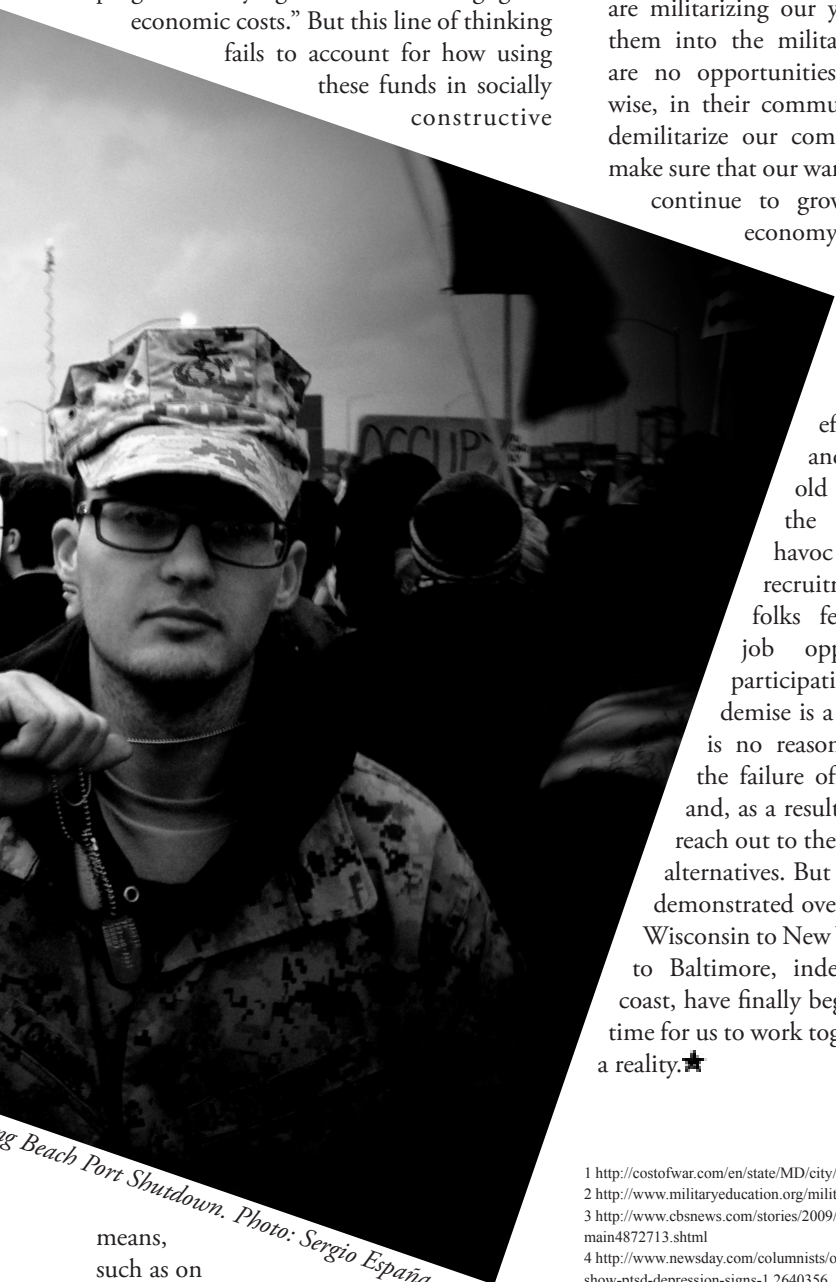
is costing each household about \$100 a month, you're paying a price for this war." But that was in March, 2008. As we begin 2012, such pandering to public opinion is losing its effectiveness given the lack of actions backing it up. Thus, the Obama administration has increased military spending, while threatening military intervention in Iran, expanding drone attacks overseas, and ensuring troops stay in Afghanistan indefinitely, as referenced in his recent State of the Union speech.¹⁵

The question now is: What are we going to do about our debilitating dependence on military spending? Geoff Millard of the DC chapter of IVAW believes that the answer lies in demilitarizing our economy. This past October, while attending a national conference of poor-people's movements hosted by Baltimore's United Workers, he said:

We are militarizing our police force, we are militarizing our youth by sending them into the military because there are no opportunities for them, job-wise, in their communities. If we can demilitarize our communities we can make sure that our war economy doesn't continue to grow into our sole economy.

Demilitarization will only come through a sustained and joint effort by civilians and veterans, between old and new poor. As the recession wrecks havoc at home, military recruitment continues as folks fearing the lack of job opportunities decide participating in our own demise is a stronger out. There is no reason for this, save for the failure of their communities and, as a result, of our country, to reach out to them with support and alternatives. But such alternatives, as demonstrated over the past year from Wisconsin to New York, from Oakland to Baltimore, indeed, from coast to coast, have finally begun to develop. It is time for us to work together to make them a reality.★

- 1 <http://costofwar.com/en/state/MD/city/baltimore/>
- 2 <http://www.militaryeducation.org/military-equipment/>
- 3 <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/03/17/eveningnews/main4872713.shtml>
- 4 <http://www.newsday.com/columnists/other-columnists/1-in-4-vets-show-ptsd-depression-signs-1.2640356>
- 5 <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=3321>
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- 9 <http://homepost.kpbs.org/2011/01/new-study-two-thirds-of-veterans-with-ptsd-not-being-treated/>
- 10 http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2011/01/06/Fort-Hood-suicide-rate-jumped-in-2010/UPI-69241294326724/
- 11 <http://civisol.org/content/digging-in-to-the-operation-recovery-campaign>
- 12 <http://www.warresisters.org/sites/default/files/FY2012piechart-color.pdf>
- 13 <http://www.ips-dc.org/reports/071001-jobcreation.pdf>
- 14 <http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/archive/2010/March/Pages/DefenseWatch.aspx>
- 15 <http://www.truth-out.org/obamas-mission-accomplished-moment-and-military-first-policydestabilizing-planet/1326380401>



g Beach Port Shutdown. Photo: Sergio España.

means, such as on education or healthcare, actually results in a much stronger economic outlook.^{13,14}

As former President Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) predicted, our economy's dependence on military spending for job creation has rendered defense cuts as politically untenable. This false dependence has been used by politicians to sell unnecessary wars to the public—wars that have created profit windfalls for defense industries, while leaving us with less funding to improve our infrastructure or ensure basic social services.

President Obama tapped into the country's growing awareness of the domestic costs of war as part of his theatrical performance in the lead up to his election: "When Iraq



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THE BALTIMORE CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM HAS IMPLEMENTED STRICT REGULATIONS OSTENSIBLY TO ENSURE HIGH QUALITY TEACHING PERFORMANCE. BALTIMORE CITY SCHOOL TEACHER, IRIS KIRSCH, ARGUES THAT THE NEW REGULATIONS WILL ACHIEVE JUST THE OPPOSITE.

BY: IRIS KIRSCH

"I've been a first year teacher four years in a row," said the person leading the workshop for Baltimore city teachers. This was not the most reassuring thing I'd heard all day. I couldn't help wondering why we were being taught by this young teacher who cheerily admitted to classroom management problems and had never required her 11th graders to write a research paper.

The new teachers in the workshop looked relieved to be handed a day-by-day map for a research essay. The problem, however, was that about 70% of the teachers in the room were experienced or veteran teachers. Most of us have always done research papers with our students, and most of us already had the rest of the year mapped out, making a mandatory three-week long unit highly problematic.

This strange scenario took place at a professional development workshop, mandatory for teachers at Baltimore City schools, with the purpose of aligning the school curriculum with the Common Core standards. Common Core is the new national curriculum being rolled out by the Obama administration. On this day, in late January, all teachers at so-called "opt-in" schools signed forms promising to have their students write very specific research papers. Although these projects are pretty interesting, critical, and rigorous, the requirement represents a dangerous trend away from regarding teachers as professionals.

Unfortunately, that's the direction schools are heading: teacher-proof teaching that keeps good instructors from really reaching their students.

To maximize learning, the ideal mix of teachers in a school is a few new teachers, a majority of established teachers, four to twenty years into their careers, and a few true veterans with more than twenty years of service. The established teachers are comfortable with the materials, the students, and the bureaucracy. They can mentor new teachers, learn from each other, and collaborate effectively to the advantage of the students. New teachers infuse energy and hope, while veterans provide perspective and contribute to institutional memory.

But this year in Baltimore, many established teachers suffered a serious blow: from end-of-year 2010-2011 to mid-year 2011-2012, our ratings dropped markedly. On a three-point scale from "unsatisfactory" to "proficient," many teachers' ratings fell one, or even two, levels.

At the Title 1 Baltimore high school where I teach, three of the most committed teachers fell from proficient to unsatisfactory in that timeframe. All of these teachers spend hours on the phone with parents and students, attend sporting events, chaperon dances, and sometimes even provide child care outside of class, so that students can complete their work. All of their classes are highly rigorous; the kind students dread going to, but come back from college raving about. But, these remarkable teachers all had minor technicalities they could be cited for, and now their jobs are in jeopardy.

Race to the Top links teachers' performance evaluations to their students' performance on a very narrow set of indicators. Even still, they've found it tricky to trace direct connections from students' achievement, attendance, and follow-through to individual teachers. So, instead of

Yes, I said it: many teachers would be more effective at raising student achievement without the regulations.

looking at individual-teacher-impact (which is impossible to measure, since students have other factors in their lives), principals have been called upon to rate a percentage of the teachers unsatisfactory, if the overall performance of the school is unsatisfactory. Unsatisfactory evaluations are a necessary first step towards firing teachers.

Allow me to say here that, contrary to popular belief, there are very few bad, negligent teachers. That said, there are a few people trying to do the minimum in every corner of life, and the public schools are certainly not spared by the plague. The vast majority of teachers who I've known try to do a great job, and generally do, to the degree that their efforts are not curtailed by overly structured expectations. Yes, I said it: many teachers would be more effective at raising student achievement without the regulations.

The few underachievers would be hard to fire under any system because they put their energy into doing the minimum of their requirements and protecting their jobs. Providing emotional support for students is not in the contract. Those teachers who go above and beyond, who truly do set high expectations for their students and still give them the support they need to meet those expectations, have no recourse if they are fired for minutia. The fact is this system sees

teachers as interchangeable. Principals are not being asked to identify the teachers who need some help, and then give those teachers honest mentoring and support. Principals are being asked to do the opposite. They are being asked to find a certain number of teachers to fire. And that is outrageous.

These positions, once opened up, will be filled primarily by inexperienced teachers coming through alternative certification programs, like Teach for America. This obviously upsets that ideal balance of new, experienced, and veteran teachers. There are schools in Baltimore City—where students have been mis-educated for years and desperately need the best teachers available—where 60% of the teaching staff is in their first three years. And now, even those of us who are generally excited to mentor new teachers are frantically crossing T's and dotting I's to keep our jobs. Under these new regulations, we don't have the time to mentor new teachers.

That's where scripted curricula comes into the picture. According to award-winning author Herber Kohl, in his beautiful book, *Stupidity and Tears: Teaching and Learning in Troubled Times* (The New Press, 2003), "Scripted curricula are intended to ensure that even the worst teachers will be able to deliver adequate learning."

While the newly installed Baltimore City requirements are not scripted, they are in the same vein—they are solely structured for the lowest common denominator, and there's no room for people ready and able to go beyond.

As school districts across the country tie themselves to "value-added" contracts, the already unsustainable teacher turnover rate will increase. This will further place the fate of our children into the hands of bureaucrats, because new teachers are less critical of what they're told; they're too busy trying to keep their heads above water. And tying our evaluations to the students' scores on high stakes tests also shoves power into the hands of educational decision-makers, and takes it further out of the communities.

The Common Core is still being developed, as is our society's contemporary view of democracy. As the current political crisis unfolds, it will be increasingly important to trust teachers to infuse a healthy, critical view of government and capitalism. A future populated by those taught only to answer

questions correctly is indeed a frightening one.

It is important to note that these problems affect low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately. Education author and activist Jonathan Kozol, quotes the Education Trust, "a politically moderate advocacy institute," in *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (Broadway, 2006), saying, "high poverty . . . schools tend to employ a disproportionate number of inexperienced, low-paid teachers." The specific verbiage is telling; the implication being that these inexperienced teachers are favored largely because they are low paid.

Teachers, students, parents, and community members alike must stand together to fight this alarming trend. We are living in a fascinating time; a very tangible shift of power and resources has occurred over the last 30 years or more, and the working people of this world are getting into position to take some of it back. We need strong communities made up of strong individuals in order to ensure that this moment is not a flash in the pan, but the birth of a movement. To do that, we need strong schools, where courageous teachers are trusted, as professionals, to encourage real critical thinking from our students. Working people won't win a race to the top; we have to rise slowly, but rise together.★

THE INDYREADER TALKS TO: LOCAL UNION ORGANIZER CORY MCCRAY

Cory McCray, a local union organizer with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 24, discusses the recent struggle to unionize Comcast workers and explains why he believes unions are essential for the uplift of local workers.

Indyreader: You just finished working on a campaign to unionize local Comcast workers. Can give some background for our readers?

McCray: The campaign targeted a sub-contractor for Comcast. It covered the jurisdiction of DC, Maryland, and Virginia. It has over 100 technicians employed for the company. Comcast subs most of their work out to sub-contractors who come out to the customer's home to perform work on internet, cable, or telephone services. The issues had to do with mainly hours of operation. Most technicians worked six days a week from 7am to 9pm. The wages have consistently been racing to the bottom since 2000, even though their competition, Verizon, pays a living wage. The working conditions were another big issue. There were many deductions from the workers' checks that they felt weren't just, but the workers were scared to bring this to the Department of Labor because they felt as though they may incur some type of retaliation.

Indyreader: How did it turn out? How were you involved?

McCray: The election results are public knowledge and the results were 40 "Yes" votes for the Union, 58 "No" votes, and twelve "Challenge" votes. I was involved because I was tasked with educating the employees about the benefits of having a contract for their wages, benefits, and working conditions. As an organizer for the IBEW, I was also tasked with educating the workers on what to expect from lawyers, union busters, and supervisors.

Indyreader: Did management attempt to intimidate workers seeking union representation? If so, what specific tactics were used?

McCray: Yes, management used means of persuading workers who supported the campaign to vote against the workers' best interest. In December, management brought a lawyer on staff that specializes in labor law. At that time, captive audience meetings were held every day by management, and this started when the election date was agreed upon. During this time, management used two methods of persuasion: incentive and fear. On the incentive front, the first week (January 9th to January 27th), checks were given to employees for the [pay] deductions [due to customer complaints that] they accrued over the weeks. (Every job was judged and based off of accuracy and efficiency. If the customer of Comcast called the operations office and complained that their cable, telephone, or internet was inoperable, the worker could receive a demotion in his performance rate pay and may not receive pay for the recall job that he was sent out to do. The problem with this system was that

even if it was a customer error, they were still penalized. Several employees informed me that [as part of the anti-unionization incentives] their pay rate was bumped up from a C Pay Rate to an A Pay Rate.) On the fear front, there were several rumors spread throughout the plant that if the Union was voted in on January 27th, then the shop would close on January 28th.

Indyreader: Have you come across worker intimidation in previous campaigns? How do you work through it?

McCray: Yes, worker intimidation is common during organizing campaigns. The way to work through it is to prepare the workers who sign authorization cards for representation about some of the basic tactics that are used by union busters, such as confusion. If they spread half-truths about the union, the worker isn't going to know what to believe and will usually adhere to what the norm is, instead of stepping out on faith and getting a contract for their employment. I also try to explain to the workers the importance of sticking together and being informed. When you are one worker standing up to the employer, it is easy for the employer to illegally retaliate, but when you are one hundred workers, the employer is more likely to listen and want to negotiate. Some employers have to realize that every relationship is a partnership. The worker needs the employers, just as much as the employer needs the workers.

Indyreader: You say the "worker needs the employers." But what are your thoughts on cases where workers have attempted to take over management and collectivize industry? A famous case that comes to mind is when, in 1977, 5,000 steelworkers in Youngstown, Ohio, were told that the steel mill was going to be closed. So they fought to take over the mill and manage it themselves. It wasn't successful, for complicated reasons, but it does raise important questions: Do workers really need employers? Can they manage the workplace democratically? What are your thoughts on these questions?

McCray: It sounds as though you are talking about worker co-ops. I think that they are a good idea and believe that it is a good tool to have workers take stock in the company, understand some of the risk, and feel a sense of ownership.

Indyreader: In our phone conversation on January 29th, you mentioned that non-unionized workers can face "slavery-like" conditions. Can you elaborate on that?

McCray: Well, when a worker has to work six days a week for more than twelve hours, for low wages, with no benefits, and no retirement—not to mention, has the possibility of having money deducted from his check, if it is a technician error or customer error, yes, I believe that is modern-day slavery. And no American citizen, or citizen in our global economy, should have to work under those conditions—because it only weakens the benefits that were gained by those before us.

Indyreader: Baltimore is not exempt from

racism within the working class. It has the effect of dividing black, Latino, and white workers. Have you come across this issue in your organizing experience?

McCray: In reference to organizing, no, but in everyday life, yes. The job market is tight and when things get tight, many people are only concerned about their own well-being and forget that as a unit we are always going to be stronger.

Indyreader: Do you think unions play an important role in addressing racism?

McCray: Yes, unions will always play an important role not only in addressing racism, but also inequality and unjust actions. Being in a union, I was always taught that all workers deserve a fair wage, affordable health care, and a dependable retirement, no matter what race, age, or gender you are. With this model it gives the American society a strong economy, in all neighborhoods.

Indyreader: This issue focuses on jobs and development, and it pays special attention to the Baltimore political economy. For decades, union membership has been on the decline—from its peak in the mid-1950s at almost 35% of the labor force to the current level of less than 12%. With this trend in mind, do you think there is a role for unions in helping to advance the longterm cause of increasing quality employment and advancing overall economic development?

McCray: Yes, the middle class was built off of the backs of union workers and workers willing to stand up to injustice. The gap between the 1% and the 99% was smaller when union density was high. When the decline began, the gap between the 1% and the 99% grew larger at an accelerated rate. The only ways to fix this income gap is to have corporate loopholes closed, and have corporations and millionaires pay their fair share. This existed in the 1950s and 60s, which is why America was a leader in the global economy.

Indyreader: On a personal level, how has union organizing impacted you?

McCray: Union organizing has given me the ability to open my eyes and see what the non-union workers have to endure. It has given me the ability to have courage and speak out against injustice and to fight for workers. It has given me the opportunity to be a solution for the workers, and a problem to the corporations that don't want to pay their fair share!

Indyreader: Outside of union organizing, you give a lot of talks around Baltimore. What topics do you focus on?

McCray: I focus on worker rights, living wage, and protecting the working/middle class. Every day I wake up feeling as though the American dream is under attack. When I see elected officials, corporations, and millionaires attacking pensions, living wages, social security, and any other right that workers have fought for, there is a level of frustration that consumes me. To me, when they attack those issues, they are saying that

it was okay for our parents and grandparents to have these rights, but future generations are out of luck. We should never be looking for ways to go backwards, but always looking to push forward and leave future generations more than what we started with. But with the direction the country is going in, we are going to be the only generation that was left in worse conditions than our grandparents.

Indyreader: How do you relate your experiences and personal story to ordinary Baltimore residents, like senior citizens, youths, working people, and so on?

McCray: Well, growing up in a single-parent home with a mother that worked every day, living check-to-check, and struggling to pay the bills, I understand the value of being in the middle class. Seeing workers without the ability to retire with dignity and seeing some seniors struggle to pay for their medicine or have to take new mortgages out on their homes that they spent all their life paying for is heart breaking. That is why we fight for the working and middle class. When I see education cuts to the budget and recreation centers being closed, that is why we fight for the working and middle class. When I see workers' pensions being changed to 401ks, tier systems being instituted for young workers, unaffordable college costs for students, etc., that is why we fight for the middle class. The cards are stacked against young workers, and that is why it is going to be imperative that young workers get off the sidelines and get in the game because I was always told, "If you are not sitting at the table, then you are on the menu!"

Indyreader: From an organizing perspective, do you have any ideas or recommendations on how to better encourage Baltimore youth to "get off the sidelines"? Are there any individuals and/or organizations you think are doing this effectively?

McCray: I would encourage Baltimore youth to become more involved in the politics of Baltimore City. I would encourage the youth to be invested in their community. I would encourage the youth to demand a respectable education, in order to keep pace with the global economy. There are tons of young groups within Baltimore that resist being spectators and know that this is a contact sport. Those groups that I salute, for doing a good job mobilizing and organizing are: The Baltimore Algebra Project, Safe & Sound, Baltimore United in Leadership Development (BUILD), Baltimore City Youth Commission, Baltimore City Young Democrats, Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle, and the list could go on. As far as individuals, the list would be too long to name. I would say that the talent, that is within Baltimore, is deep-rooted, and, as the struggle gets worse, I believe more people will step up to the challenge.

Indyreader: For people who may be interested in inviting you to speak at community events, how can they get in touch with you?

McCray: I frequently blog at corymccray.com and my email address is corymccray@gmail.com.★

MARYLAND'S 2013 BUDGET AND THE WHY MARYLAND HAS AN UNFAIR

Since the national economy started shrinking in 2007, most Marylanders have felt the sting of high unemployment, food and energy price increases, and low wages.

In Maryland, State and local governments have been cutting back in the face of increased need and misery. People lack access to healthcare, housing, and heat in the winter. Public schools are losing \$550 million per year in State aid, and local governments have cut about \$243 million from their contributions to schools.¹ Meanwhile, Gov. O'Malley says that the State has reduced spending by a cumulative \$6.8 billion compared to the baseline budget he inherited when he took office in January 2007.²

The answer to our fiscal crisis, however, is not further cuts, but reforming our antiquated, unwise and unfair tax system.

SHARING THE BURDEN

Marylanders across the income spectrum pay about 10% of their income in State and local taxes except that the 20% highest up on the income scale pay an average of only 7.3%.³ When lower-income people pay a higher share of income in taxes than those who are better off, it is called a "regressive" tax structure, and it has been in place for many decades.

As in nearly every state, the property tax and sales taxes are regressive, and Maryland's state/local income tax is virtually flat. That is, it taxes nearly the same proportion of income no matter how poor or rich the taxpayer. A "progressive" tax system taxes those with more wealth or income at a higher rate. This is fairer because it takes into account that individuals and families need a certain floor of income to obtain food, clothing, shelter, health, education, and other basic goods and services. A progressive tax is also more likely to boost demand to get the economy going in tough times.

Beyond considerations of fairness, there are economic reasons why progressive taxation makes sense during an economic slump. In the present recession, most people have lower income from business or employment, and the value of real estate and stock investments have also plummeted. Business managers, in turn, are reluctant to hire more people because they believe that customers are unlikely to buy more goods and services. In short, there's a massive demand shortage, which is why corporations and the wealthy are hoarding instead of investing. Tax breaks for them, therefore, will do nothing to stimulate demand.

However, when working and low-income people get extra income, for instance through a targeted tax reduction, they tend to spend all of it quickly, thus boosting demand and triggering business investment.

In short, increasing taxes on the wealthy and redistributing the money to working and poor people makes moral and economic sense. These are some reasons why state and local governments, including Maryland, needs to transform its tax structure from

unions, and activists have been calling on officials to reform the tax system to make it progressive, instead of regressive. By doing so, the state could increase revenues while closing the budget gap.



Sign made at Occupy Baltimore encampment in McKeldin Square. Photo by: Clayton Conn.

regressive to progressive. An additional reason is that doing so makes fiscal sense in a time of State and local budget deficits.

According to United for a Fair Economy, if the top and bottom 20% of income earners were to "flip" their shares of Maryland State and local taxes—the bottom 20% would pay 7.3% tax rates while the top 20% would pay 10% like most of us do—Maryland's State and local governments would have raised an additional \$4.2 billion in 2008, more than a 15% increase in total revenues. This amount is four times the currently-estimated State budget deficit of about \$1.1 billion.

This double benefit is one of the primary reasons why public service employees,

The State's general fund fell ten percent between 2008 and 2010, while gross state product actually increased 3.5%.

The Governor and General Assembly responded with several more rounds of cuts to state programs. We've seen cuts to community mental health programs, services to the disabled and those struggling with addictions, Medicaid, and other programs that provide Marylanders with relief.

Community mental health programs have received inflationary adjustments in only three of the past sixteen years. The public mental health system took five rounds of mid-year cuts, during FY09 and FY10, totaling more than \$56 million. Services to people with developmental disabilities and addiction services have also seen substantial reductions.

The State 2012 budget has over \$230 million in cuts to Medicaid (medical assistance for low income Marylanders and for elderly in long-term care facilities). This comes on top of \$93 million in reductions in fiscal year 2009. (In 2010 and 2011 the ARRA—the so-called "stimulus" bill—provided extra federal Medicaid funds, and large cutbacks were not made.)

Medicaid cuts have created an environment where it is hard for those enrolled in the program to find the services they need. It is important to put a human face to this problem.

Medicaid Matters, a coalition of over 65 organizations, published the story of eight-year-old Malik from Baltimore, who needed some complicated dental work. "The dentists seemed okay as long as they were just doing cleanings," said his mother, "but when more involved work was needed they sent me elsewhere. We went to four different dental offices but my son never really got the treatment he needed."

Another problem exacerbated by the tight Medicaid budget is a reduction in community care slots. "If we could increase the number of slots, it would enable seniors and disabled consumers living in long-term care facilities to receive care at home at a much lower cost," states Laura Carr, a Medicaid Matters board member.

These examples give just a tiny glimpse of the deprivations faced by Maryland residents who need access to health and education services over the past four years.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SQUEEZE AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The 23 counties and Baltimore City are also making big cuts to spending. Their revenues from sales and income tax declined, a consequence of demand shortage. The main source of local revenue—property taxes—

BUDGET NEED FOR PROGRESSIVE TAXATION

STATE AND LOCAL TAX STRUCTURE

BY: CHARLIE COOPER

was hit even harder. As a result, fewer people are working for government either at the state or local levels. Teachers and other school staff have been laid off, and many school activities have been terminated, especially in the arts.

Maryland lost about eight percent of its total property tax base between July 2009 and July 2011—over \$60 billion. When the Department of Assessments and Taxation issues its 2012 report, several more tens of billions of dollars in assessable value will probably have disappeared from the tax rolls. This means that local governments have to raise property tax rates, raise other revenues, or cut back on services. They have responded with service cuts, and one area that has been hit hard is education.

According to the Maryland Association of Boards of Education, seven of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions have reduced funding to public schools, below the level the State defines as "Maintenance of Effort." This means that local governments are providing less funding per pupil than they did in prior years. Wicomico cut \$14 million (over 27% of the amount needed to maintain effort) and Montgomery lowered its contribution by \$209 million, almost \$1,500 per student.

In short, some jurisdictions are beginning to disinvest in our youth's education.

TAXES AND THE BUDGET: RECENT HISTORY

Now, as the General Assembly contemplates the State's budget for fiscal year 2013, despite nearly \$7 billion in cumulative reductions to services and about \$2.5 billion in increased sales tax, the State's structural budget deficit is nearly as large as it was four years ago.

Deference to corporations and elites seems to put the budget deliberations in a straitjacket. In 2011, the Governor and the General Assembly let the so-called "millionaire's tax" expire. This surcharge hit taxpayers with incomes over \$1 million per year with an extra 3/4 of 1% on the amount over \$1 million. For example, a family reporting \$1,001,000 in taxable Maryland income would have \$1,000 of income affected by the millionaire's surtax and would have paid \$75 more due to the millionaire's tax than they are now required to pay. Not much if you're a millionaire.

In addition, the General Assembly killed a proposal known as "combined reporting" designed to prevent national corporations from avoiding the Maryland corporate income tax by creating "shell companies" in lower-tax states. According to the Department of Legislative Services, these two measures would have brought in about \$225 million annually.

On December 21st, 2012, the Spending Affordability Committee of the General

Assembly estimated the structural deficit at \$1.1 billion and recommended reducing it by half in the FY 2013 budget. "The recommendation is sensible and responsible and the Governor should seek to meet it," said Neil Bergsman, head of the Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute.

"However, in doing so, the Governor should use a balanced approach. Maryland has already cut \$2 billion from annual spending for education, health care, transportation, public safety, and other important services since 2007," Bergsman concluded.

THE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2013 AND BEYOND

The 2012 General Assembly session was largely consumed with the budget debate. The Governor, Senate, and House all developed proposals that would have closed between 50% and 70% of the long-term structural budget gap by a combination of tax increases and reductions to the baseline level of services that are provided under existing law.

There were key points of similarity among the plans as all three:

- Cut Medicaid very significantly. The Governor claims that key provisions will result in more efficiency and will not harm patients.
- Shift some responsibility for teacher pension contributions from the State (which now covers 100% of this expense) to the local level. Local governments are particularly strapped for cash since their revenues depend on real estate taxes that have been severely depressed by the recession. Education advocates believe that eventually the pension shift will cause cuts in the classroom.
- Raise taxes most significantly on high earners.

The Senate's tax plan was much broader and would have raised significantly more revenue by requiring working and middle class individuals and families to pay small amounts. This plan challenges our definition of what is a progressive tax. Whereas the Governor's and House's budgets would not raise income tax on any individual with under \$100,000 or joint filer with under \$150,000, the Senate plan asks a family with \$55,000 (corresponding to about \$32,000 in Maryland taxable income) to pay an extra \$44 per year.

The Senate also would have provided an enhanced earned income tax refund whereby workers on the lowest rungs of the income ladder (approximately the bottom one third) would actually experience an income tax reduction. And the Senate has a special tax

surcharge of about \$2,000 per year for filers with over \$500,000 in taxable income.

As has been widely reported, the House and Senate failed to agree on taxes or the pension shift on the final day of the session. The Senate President insisted on passing new legislation to expand gambling. When the House did not concur, the revenue bill died, and an extra \$500 million in budget cuts to education, health, local aid, and State agencies were enacted. Now there are widespread calls for a special session to avoid the deep budget cuts.

TOWARDS PROGRESSIVITY

As the drama plays out on whether there will be a special session, Maryland is confronted with stark choices. Further cuts to services deprive people with real education, health, and social needs and will cost many hundreds of State and local workers their jobs.

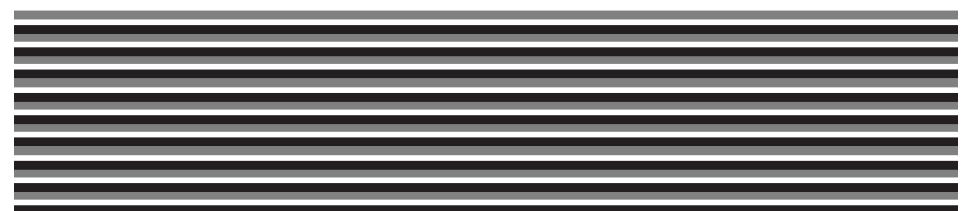
It is reasonable to say that all three basic budget proposals would move the State – however incrementally – toward a progressive tax structure. The Governor's income tax plan would have raised about \$400 million, less than 10% of the \$4 billion in additional revenue available if the tax rates of the top 20% and the bottom 20% of the income earners were flipped. It received plenty of criticism for not being progressive enough in that it was not pointed at the top 1%.

The Senate plan would do a better job of closing the budget gap, taxing the rich, and helping the very poor, but it also included small increases for earners in the range of \$30,000 to \$100,000, many of whom feel they can afford no additional burden.

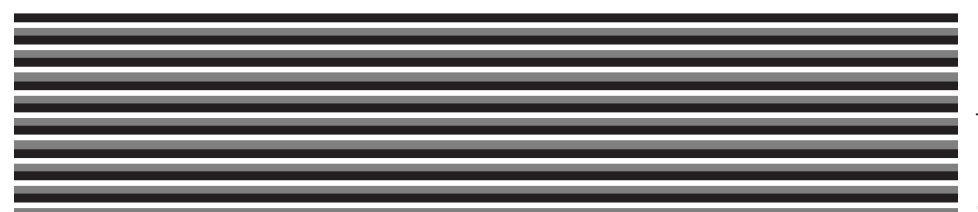
The House, by standing firm on not taxing these middle-income people, would leave a bigger structural deficit and require more cuts in the near future. The dilemma for progressives is to decide which is worse for lower- and middle-income families – budget cuts or small tax increases.★

Charlie Cooper is retired from a 38-year career in child protection and child health. He writes an occasional op-ed column for the Baltimore Sun. He is an activist with interests in money in politics, finance and banking, youth development, and peace. He serves as Chair of the Maryland Education Coalition.

1 State cuts based on analysis by Department of Legislative Services; local cuts based on analysis by Maryland Association of Boards of Education.
2 <http://marylandreporter.com/2011/12/30/omalley-says-gas-and-flush-tax-hikes-may-be-part-of-2013-budget/>
3 United for a Fair Economy: http://enews.faireconomy.org/2011/flip_it_to_fix_itstate_fact_sheets.pdf
4 Info on budget from Department of Budget and Management, Fiscal Year 2013 Budget
Highlights and Fiscal Briefing by Department of Legislative Services.



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LOOKING BACKWARD WALKING FORWARD:

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF OCCUPY BALTIMORE

BY: COREY REIDY

The revolutionary stage, in so many ways, is a microcosm of the world we live in. Few stages represented this more than that of Occupy. The Occupy movement came on the heels of a year in global revolt: global imagination had been ignited and 2011 saw international upheaval. Modern theorist, George Katsiaficas, calls this phenomenon “the Eros Effect,” meaning that through social/communal love for each other, for our fellow human beings, one group’s impact feeds into others’. This radical domino-chain is based on instinct, intuition, and inspiration. In lived actions we inspire one another, incite one another to action, and struggle through and for one another.

The Occupy movement sprung into existence on September 17th, 2011, as Occupy Wall Street (OWS) began its battle for the every-person against the forces of super capitalism. Through a series of events and choices, thousands and thousands poured into the streets of NYC, igniting a new movement in the heart of the capitalist empire. The Occupy movement encapsulates many things; that has been both its power and its pitfall. It recognizes the violent forces of capitalism, as well as the hope that could lie in its ashes. Taking on memes like “We are the 99%” the movement has sought for solidarity across our differences. It has shouted both that the gross economic disparities can be easily conceptualized, in that the majority of the world’s wealth lies within 1% of the population, and that the other 99% bear the brunt of their splendor. The meme also cries that: We are many, and they are few. Together we have the power to overturn this system of profound exploitation and injustice. In an age when protest/direct action tactics appeared forgotten, millions took to the streets, marched, rallied, sat-in, and fought to reclaim public space.

As a protest tactic, the Occupy camps’ reclamation of public space served a number of functions. First, the Occupy movement called together scores of individuals, who often had very little in common—let alone a unified political vision—to create space and time to organize with one another. Occupy came into being against mass systemic/economic inequality. It was not a movement based around a specific target goal, nor detailed with a plan of action. Protesters knew they needed to scream at the injustices wrought by capitalism, but Occupy needed an establishing goal—a target to strive for and achieve, in order to found a revolution. The initial objective was to create an encampment: to claim space and time to learn about what each other wanted, and then learn how to build. In reaching across populations and visions, Occupy needed a target to achieve in order to garner focus; and in order to plan subsequent steps, it needed space and time, carved into its commencing outline.

Second, it was a cry to take what wealth and greed have stolen. For many, reclaiming public space was a direct affront to hegemonic forces that decide what is theirs and what is ours.¹ Reclaiming public space, in order to protest against mass reign and inequality, was a collective decision to take and to give to one another. The public affront was also a way to be visible, occupying space around the clock was a way to let hegemony—and to let one another—know that the people were moving. The encampments were spaces to learn how to build a movement and then to begin directly building it.²

Occupy came to Baltimore as the movement swept the country. The physical occupation lasted for two months. Since the McKeldin Square eviction, Occupy Baltimore (OB) has taken varying forms. People may come together and build off of one another’s revolutions, through shared love, instinct, and inspiration. We may realize that together: “We are Many” and “They are Few.” Yet, within that realization, we must also comprehend our variances and distinctions. Millions have sought, despite and because of our differences, to find common ground in the shared injustices that capitalism has perpetuated on our bodies. The ways in which capitalism has attacked our bodies differently, however, is immediate and entrenched. We are not the same. Capitalism, and any force that seeks to dominate, strives to divide us and separate us, so that we must then aim to parse apart who can rule one another. We are indebted to history. We cannot pretend that we inherit the same worlds or the same injustices. We organize within these realities.

OCCUPY BALTIMORE

Occupy Baltimore was an experiment in not only creating prefigurative spaces and communities to articulate action and protest, but also to further actualize those politics with individuals from a wide net of perspectives, experiences, and identities. Through doing this, we inevitably encounter the manufactured realities with which we divide ourselves. These are the strongest at keeping us suppressed.

We are children of the power structures that breed us. We weave the systemic webs that strangle us. We cannot escape the world that has oppressed and defined us. And when we decide to say “no,” to say that this does not have to be the world that exists, we invite the inevitable struggle against the cruel injustices that history and present have written. Each movement has its own particular fight. Occupy Baltimore has shared a complex net of issues with the movement at large, has had its own, and has found those that reside in many modern accounts of struggle.³

OB had its initial meetings on October 2nd and 3rd, 2011. It began occupying McKeldin Square⁴ on October 4th. Autumn happened

fast. A movement erupted and people swung into action from multiple vantage points. As fall turned into winter—many camps were evicted—including Baltimore’s. OB lasted approximately two months until its eviction on December 13th, 2011.

Then, by the time the eviction had rolled around, the movement itself was already looking very different. While the McKeldin site still held space for people with varying perspectives to ally together, as the weeks bore on, the movement seemed less rooted in a specific location. “Affinity” groups were forming and people were planning eviction defenses, publicly critiquing the city’s economic structure via creative tactics, protesting the city’s prison-industrial complex, and, in general, moving the organizing away from the square and onto specific political campaigns. Many took time to reflect on where the occupation had gone, where it is, and what to do now. Reflection can be a revolutionary tactic.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY

We organize through the activist rhetoric of: “Big R” Revolution and “small r” revolution. “Big R” Revolution is the kind you hear about in the papers. It is the masses out in the streets demanding for immediate game-shifting change, whereas “small r” revolution is our everyday struggle. It is the war we wage against a cruel system; revolution is deciding to build a world around a multiplicity of shared utopic visions.

The global revolt of 2011 was the start of a “Big R” Revolution. Yet, it could not have happened without the foundational tactics of “small r” organizing. Every Revolution is indebted to the Revolutions that came before it and, more so, to the revolutions that aim to change the world every minute via living ideology.

The Occupy movements are undoubtedly indebted to modern radical organizing; through many General Assemblies (GAs) being founded on consensus process, to organizing through committee structures, and even to organizing across list-serves, Occupy came into existence and modern radical organizing offered practiced strategies—so that the movement could actualize from a starting framework.

The idea behind consensus is utopic in its visioning. Through conversation, listening, and aiming to hear as many varying voices as possible, you hope to subsequently reach a common agreement. This process is often long and arduous. However, the yielding result aims to be one that has fielded any initial concerns/problems. Consensus also works to represent those that the decision will serve, through collective creation, as well as set for a smoother way forward once the agreement is in practice. This being said, a great deal of critique has come against

this type of participatory/direct democracy structure. Many claim that instead of doing something, they’ve merely been meeting about meeting and talking without doing. Consensus-based processes can seem very alienating to those unfamiliar with it—it often works off a shared language (hand signals, terms, etc.) and the loudest voices in the room can often overpower the common majority. Those with formulated critiques can often out-argue those working to find their articulation. Another simple condemnation is that, while we may like to believe that everyone’s opinion has resonance and value, we are not all always capable of being rational human beings. One of these dilemmas can also be a benefit, when people have more experience or a clearer understanding of the concept in question, there is validity in believing that their opinion should be given additional weight.

There is no clear consensus on consensus process. Consensus is a prefigurative practice. Even if every situation is not ideal in terms of decision-making, the ability for everyone to speak exists. In the attempt, power relations are restructured. It is a practiced framework, with a horizontalist-driven mindset; it is a given starting point, with an essential anti-authoritarian ethic, with which to progress upon.

OB did experiment with its original consensus model. At a few GAs, the large body broke up into a series of small groups. Within these small groups they debated either one decision or a set of decisions. This method invited multiple voices to speak in smaller, potentially more welcoming contexts. It also allowed for further humanization, via direct participation. Lastly, it fostered more prompt decisions. At the end of the small group discussion, a group representative would speak to the full GA. This tactic was often employed in order to empower voices that would often stay silent while in the larger group.

OB also experimented with stack-taking.⁵ Sometimes only allowing people to speak once or twice in a conversation. Frequently, stack-takers would search the crowd for someone who hadn’t yet spoken before putting someone who had spoken back on the speaking order. Meeting styles will inevitably shift as Occupy shifts. For experienced activists, giving lessons learned and offering tools for movements is imperative. There is no “R” movement without the “r” in the constant. There is no set course. We learn as we do. Or as the Zapatistas⁶ say, “Asking, we walk.”⁷

AFFINITY GROUPS

We act and we learn. As Occupy Baltimore grew, problems quickly arose. This can only be anticipated in any movement or reality. Yet, particularly in one such as Occupy, where a mass of individuals realize that

OCCUPY BALTIMORE (OB) HELD AN ENCAMPMENT AT MCKELDIN SQUARE PARK FROM OCTOBER 4TH THROUGH DECEMBER 13TH, 2011. DURING AND SINCE THE MCKELDIN OCCUPATION, ACTIVISTS HAVE CONTINUED UNDER THE BANNER OF THE MOVEMENT THROUGH A VARIETY OF WAYS. THIS IS AN INTRODUCTION TO AN INDYPENDENT READER EXCLUSIVE ONLINE SERIES THAT WILL EXAMINE THE MOVEMENT AT ITS INCEPTION, THE PROBLEMS THAT AROSE, ALONG WITH ITS STORY AS IT CONTINUES FORWARD. THE SERIES IS TITLED, OCCUPY BALTIMORE: LOOKING BACKWARD, WALKING FORWARD.

the world in which we live is violent and unjust, and further, also have a vast array of perspectives, experiences, and lived realities. In the beginning months of Occupy Baltimore, “affinity” groups began to quickly form. One of the original and largest initial affinity groups developed out of many people’s need to work alongside those they trust or those whom they believed carried similar goals and visions. They were spaces for

Occupy organizers to feel as if they were implementing a post-McKeldin foundation.

Every Revolution is indebted to the Revolutions that came before it and, more so, to the revolutions that aim to change the world every minute via living ideology.

Other affinity groups, both from that initial umbrella and outside of it, have sprung up, including: an agitprop group, the local-economics-focused group Another BDC is Possible, the pop-up organizing body/occupation Schools Not Jails!, B-Heard (Baltimore Higher Education for a Real Democracy)—which aims to unite professors and college students in radical higher-education centric organizing—and Occupy our Homes (OOH), which believes that housing is imperatively a human right and that there should be community control over land. The establishing of affinity groups, in many ways, was one of the Occupy encampment’s original purposes. It was meant to have bridged together a diversity of people—both who had organized together and those who had not. Then together learn what is necessary in order to attack and to build; and then to actualize those creations. The camps, in many ways, were the start of weaving people together in order to build a movement. Yet, they weren’t meant to last indefinitely. And one of the only ways Occupy could survive post-eviction is if it sprung into a multiplicity of approaches and struggles that threw out the idea of one common strategy. For strategy implies that we have a clear conception of what we must become. There is no single answer or strategy; only a multiplicity of tactics and paths.

Occupy has often been decried for not having an apparent aim. This has understandably separated many. The power of the Affinity groups is that they often have a common vision/goal of a different world, one without the rampant injustices capitalism executes on us. Yet, beyond that, they do not aim to focus on some set of future specific goals. For in the long-term, we will be gone—and while it is essential to organize in prefiguration, we cannot get caught up in our utopian specifics. For our utopic visions and what we organize around, should be

ever continuously unmade and remade. Our visions should be fluid; evolving as we evolve and changing and as the world changes. There is no world after the Revolution, there is always Revolution/revolution.

The affinity groups not only made the movement survive the reflective stages of winter. They also have organized with the broad prefigurative visions of changing this unjust world through focusing on the short term issues of “Now”; what must we be changing now? For the revolution is now and if it is not, there is nothing.

All of this being said, it is always essential to see the duality in everything. By implementing one path forward, you bar another.

OB was a powerful resonated so quickly across a plethora of experiences. And to Occupy, it was in many ways the critical gateway towards politicization. You took common space to gather revolutionary tools. The Baltimore Affinity groups have largely functioned as a coming together of different experiences. Nevertheless, common among those bridgings are those who are already further along in their political narratives. Affinity organizers often have experience and ideas towards organizing for what needs to be accomplished in the now.

The affinity groups have a great deal of promise and power. Yet, they have also been criticized for subtracting the more experienced organizers from the larger movement. There is much to analyze within these claims, particularly as the affinity groups are part of the larger movement and are comprised of a diverse body of organizers with vast differences of experience. We must note though that one cannot change the foundations of a corrupt reality unless more and more and more of us say “no” to the world as it is now and learn from each other across a plethora of narratives. In moving forward, we must learn how to take these multiplicities that hold so much power and promise, and intersect them for broad multi-pronged power.

WALKING FORWARD

“We are the 99%” may unite us, as common members of humanity, fighting against an unjust system. Yet, it also invisibilizes the multiplicity of identities/realities that we’ve been dealt. In intersectional feminist analysis, we can elucidate that we all have various realities with which oppression has delved into us. In order to have a comprehensive viewpoint, one must examine all these means. We must parse apart and sequence together

the making of what categorizes us: race, sex, gender, age, class, ableism, sexuality, etc. We are all but a weave of identities. The politics of oppression teach us that we must use these lived-experiences against one another in order to determine who has value over another. We actively decide/create who is oppressed through reenacting that historical oppression.

As like every movement and community, we are indebted to this history. If we decide not to accept the violences of our world, we in turn accept struggle. We struggle against this world that defines and separates us.

In moving forward, we must unflinchingly recognize what separates us and how. We must be aware of that which diverges our experiences—for through the contrary you annul someone’s lived reality and remove the tools necessary towards attacking that which perpetuates. Then further, we must strive to find the root of why we are served different states of oppression. We must understand the function that they serve. We must examine what creates our identities and why we cling to them.

Every step we take must be through a prefigurative radical critique. We are human. We respond at times out of fear, anger, and pain. This should be utilized towards building a movement and a new society. We must ever continuously try to base our actions/reactions upon that which we are aiming to create.

Autumn turned into Winter. Winter has turned into Spring. We learn through doing. And while that will inevitably invite a score of mistakes and failures, we must do. If we do not, we recreate the system that divides, attacks, and oppresses us. If we do, and through our doing we say that we do not accept this world that we’ve inherited and mutually perpetuate, we will still inevitably feed the dominant system through our learned actions. However, we will also destroy and build something new. If we do nothing, there is no chance for either destruction or creation.

We come together across varying experiences but ultimately we have similar goals in that we see the destruction of now and wish to build something new. We want an answer. But there is no single answer, merely a multiplicity. In moving forward, we must recognize all our separate and shared oppressions and elucidate how they came into existence and the purposes they serve. Those who find commonality in their experiences must create separate spaces in order to comprehend their lived realities, and give one another fuel for organizing in the common whole. For in the end, we must work to come together. We do not have to be the same or utilize the same tactics. A multiplicity of people and visions and tactics—with a common purpose—can untangle the violent forces of capitalism.

Only through this widespread web of multiplicities can we create a new horizontal world.

Occupy Baltimore forced many to look at systemic issues in microcosm, as well as on local, national, and international scales. It also forced others to grapple with creating a path forward. It brought together a new force of activism in the city, whether that is through OB itself, the affinity groups that sprang from it, or outside groups that formulated in critique. Now that force is building, through broad-larger-movement initiatives, as well as locally focused direct organizing groups, actions, and campaigns. Movements can last for months, years, and decades, and, hopefully, create new worlds. The new world we create is what we decide. In whatever movements we are in, if there are problems, we move forward working on them and through them. We may pause for reflection but we must not stop in movement.

As the “Eros effect” presupposes, we inspire one another, incite one another to action, and struggle through and for one another. This is our way forward. ★

1 It should be noted that we create and define these hegemonic forces and the powers that they hold over us. We are the system and we reinforce how it relates to us.
2 It is essential to not invalidate the history that, in many ways, we are “reclaiming” already occupied soil, as this land was stolen from indigenous peoples.
3 It seems a blatant injustice to write and describe the dynamics within Occupy centering around race, class, sex and gender, sexuality, ableism, and so on and so forth. I, one hundred percent, do not mean to eliminate those questions from this analysis. However, I want to do them some degree of justice—explaining multiple sides, with in-depth research. In the upcoming Indyreader online series, I will examine controversial issues, such as the camp’s rape accusation. We will approach it from a critical feminist narrative, understanding ‘rape’ in its full weight. Critiquing the potential of those who may have used the accusation in order to slander and destabilize the movement, as using rape and the idea of rape as a tool in order to advance a narrative is one of the most horrific patriarchal violences. On this same token, we will examine how disheartened many activists felt as many from within OB reacted to this moment solely from saying it was right wing slander, rather than engaging with it from a radical perspective for uncovering the details; as well as utilizing the public attention that had arisen, to discuss the systemic roots of sexual violence and, further, ways to combat it. These gender issues, along with a plethora of others, the series will analyze. It will also look at critical class issues, such as the fast arrival of the city’s enormous homeless population to the camp—and the strengths and the trappings it brought—as well as what it means along the movement’s narrative. Going on and on, we will analyze race, and the necessity of building a movement across this city’s enormous racial divide; in order to have a revolution, whatever its name. We must look at the problems OB imposed towards this idea, the way the city responded, and the way the city is moving forward. The series plans to attack these and numerous other issues in an in-depth way. This footnote is long because it is imperative that this article recognizes the necessity of discussing these intersectional issues in order to destroy oppression and create a new world. Yet, it seemed wildly inappropriate to try to give these issues the justice they deserve in such a brief analysis. If you want to be a part of looking at these issues, in this upcoming series, please contact me: corey@redemmas.org.
3 The decision to occupy McKeldin Square was immensely controversial. There were other proposed sites, such as the site of the proposed youth jail and Johns Hopkins—sites that liappeared to have more resonance with those who had been the targets of the city’s greatest violences. We will analyze this more in the Indyreader online series. McKeldin was chosen for numerous reasons: it is a city “free speech” zone, it is in an incredibly public arena, and many believe it symbolizes not only international corporate greed but also Baltimore’s contorted values through seeping money into corporations rather than its population.
5 Stack-taking is the consensus process tool where those who wish to speak raise their hands. They are then added to a stack, so that people do not speak out of turn but rather when they are called upon.
6 The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) is a radical organization in Chiapas, Mexico that has engaged in direct antagonism with the Mexican government. They have also created an intentional community that adheres to their own collectively decided upon mandates. They are a blend of anarchism and Marxism. They are internationally recognized for their communiques, critiques, and actions.
7 Popularized Zapatista phrase, stating that there are no blueprints. We learn as we do.
8 I would like to state that much of this article comes out of inspiration from John Holloway’s work.

THE FACE OF OUR FUTURE: THE STATE'S PLAN TO BUILD A NEW YOUTH JAIL

THE STATE HAS PLANS TO BUILD A NEW "YOUTH JAIL" IN EAST BALTIMORE THAT IS PROJECTED TO COST MORE THAN \$100 MILLION. RESEARCH INDICATES, HOWEVER, THAT IT IS BOTH UNNECESSARY AND COSTLY. STACEY GURIAN-SHERMAN ARGUES THAT EFFECTIVE PREVENTIVE ALTERNATIVES ARE AVAILABLE. IN ANSWERING WHY THE STATE HAS SO FAR REFUSED TO TAKE THIS COURSE, SHE SITUATES THE PROPOSAL FOR THE YOUTH JAIL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM.

"They just assume the worst." Eighteen-year-old Lawrence (all names have been changed for this article) is referring to the social workers who come into Baltimore neighborhoods like his. Policy mandates call for them to remove hurt or neglected children. However, Lawrence feels it is done without appreciating that working parents simply cannot afford some supervision, let alone structured daycare. He also has frustration with other agencies, such as police, juvenile services, and adult probation, where kids left to fend for themselves end up. Lawrence is one of them.

What Lawrence has seen in his short lifetime is a brand new detention center on Gay Street, and plans to build more juvenile facilities. This includes the so-called Youth Jail that will house teens charged as adults. Despite a state-commissioned report that finds this new facility is unnecessary, Governor Martin O'Malley is pushing for it. Whether it is built will define the future for generations of Baltimore youth to come, and most notably those in the African American community.

Lawrence is one of the ten African-American youth who started a jobs skills training program last summer with the Youth Know

How (YKH) Initiative, a program of Fusion Partnerships, Inc. Both organizations are part of an alliance of over 30 organizations campaigning to stop the building of the Youth Jail. This writer is the YKH Director, and she was the facilitator of the rigorous 40-hour training hosted by the Coppin Heights-Rosemont Family Computer Center on the campus of Coppin State University. Four months after Lawrence and five other youth completed the training, they met again to discuss their thoughts on the proposed Youth Jail and the importance of skills-building programs.

When he was very young, Lawrence's mother was addicted to drugs, and his other adult family members spent time behind bars. He was scared when his grandmother could not pay the bills. He was angry when he was left hungry. His grandmother warned him to stay out of trouble but she had no means to back it up. Lawrence shakes his head. "I started hanging out with older kids. Rec Center wasn't there. I didn't want to be out on the streets."

Despite their age, the two youngest youth know full well the need to stay actively engaged. Hadari, fourteen, says that the training and his subsequent paid internship



BY: STACEY GURIAN-SHERMAN

AND THE CAMPAIGN TO DEFEAT IT

at the Family Computer Center, “bettered me as a person, and keeps me out of trouble.”

Robert, thirteen, another good student, says the value of this kind of program goes beyond what you learn. “It can give youth confidence. They find out they can do it. Once they do it, they do it again.”

Bersheba wastes no time agreeing. Exceptionally articulate, she reflects on recent school closings and consolidations. “It’s sad, because classes are already overcrowded,” which feeds into a dislike for school. That leads youth to do “what’s out there, hustling. I’ve known little boys who started at 10 years old and they’re still there.”

She graduated from high school, where she participated in ROTC. Yet, there was little guidance from family members or school counselors to keep moving forward. She now supports herself and her grandmother with a job that has no benefits. “I’m 24 years old and I can’t make it with just a high school diploma. With the economy going down, they make it harder for youth.”

Ryan, who just turned eighteen, appreciates one benefit of incarceration. “If it wasn’t for jails a lot of people would be dead.” He

figures it is better to be alive in jail than dead on the streets. Still, he says, “It’s not right.”

He has seen how a manageable problem “escalates” for youth like him. Ryan recounts a very recent situation with his ten-year-old cousin who was in a fight at his elementary school. The police were called and “took him out in handcuffs to baby booking.”

He knows there is another way. “Before you put your hands on someone else’s kid, I think you should talk about it with them.”

These youth see new jails open, recreation centers closed, and old dilapidated schools deteriorate further. Deep down, they know that the system is betting against them. And, they are right. Decades of reports and research back up their intuition.

THE INHERENT RACISM OF INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Simply by virtue of being African American, all of the youth in the jobs skills program are 20 to 50 times more likely to be in the juvenile or criminal justice system. This phenomenon is called, “Disproportionate Minority Contact.”

But, the bureaucratic phrase masks the troubling truth. The prison-industrial complex is fraught with pervasive and intransigent racism.

In her stunning 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander notes that between 1960 and 1990 the US incarceration rate quadrupled. With the highest rate in the world, “the United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid,” a regime notorious for its system of racial segregation and oppression (and supported by the US during most of its tenure).

In major urban areas, “as many as 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records.” Alexander vividly details how this has relegated them to “a growing undercaste, permanently locked-up and locked out of mainstream society.”

Statistics in Maryland and Baltimore show the same trends. A report from the alliance campaigning to stop the jail shows that “99% of the youth locked up in the Baltimore city jail are African-American, while African-American youth make up only 75% of the city’s youth population.”

CHARACTER VS. CIRCUMSTANCE

People of color are stigmatized by unfounded character flaws not attributed to their white counterparts. This is used to deny access to opportunities. It is also one of the catalysts for mass incarceration.

Disparate treatment of African Americans and whites was reported in a landmark 1998 study, “Racial Disparities in Official Assessments of Juvenile Offenders: Attributional Stereotypes and Mediating Mechanisms.”¹ The research compared similarly situated youth between these two races. The conclusion was deeply troubling. Probation officers consistently concluded that African American youth committed offenses because of deficiencies in their internal attributes, such as disrespect for authority or acceptance of criminal behavior. However, white youth were portrayed as victims of negative circumstances, such as internal family conflict or hanging out with the wrong peers.

The distinction between character and circumstance is crucial. Character flaws are seen as making youth not only less amenable to rehabilitation, but also in need of harsher punishments. It is no surprise that African American youth were more likely to be



Baltimore city police confiscate Rec Center prop made by activists for January 2012's Schools Not Jails! pop-up occupation. Photo by: Casey McKeel.

THE FACE OF OUR FUTURE

...CONTINUED

BY: STACEY GURIAN-SHERMAN

detained, charged with a criminal offense, and committed to confined institutions. Even more troubling, probation officers of all races were equally likely to view African American youth as damaged. Researchers concluded that this did not result necessarily from personal bigotry, but rather complex prejudicial norms within systems.

"SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE"

The pattern of treating youth of color more harshly starts in schools, a major factor in the phenomenon known as the "School to Prison Pipeline." A 2011 study showed disturbing discrepancies in suspension rates, in Washington DC area school systems, including Maryland.² In Montgomery County, although African-American students make up only 21% of the school population, they accounted for 71% of suspensions due to "insubordination," which otherwise is "a relatively rare offense in the county."

African-American students were much more likely than their white counterparts to have suspension used as a punishment for "soft" infractions, including, "disrespect, defiance, insubordination, disruption and foul language."

In other words, disparate treatment for similar character behavior. And, once again, the experts cautioned that the "disparities appear to have complex causes." One contributing factor is "unintended bias."

Further research has found a troubling correlation between suspensions and deeper system involvement. In a groundbreaking study in Texas, students who were suspended or expelled for a discretionary violation were "nearly three times as likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system the following year."³

"Zero Tolerance" disciplinary policies that impose automatic punishments for school infractions have caused inequitable rates of suspension for African-American students. As they go through the "pipeline," this has created a needless influx of children into the court system and an artificial need for more juvenile and adult jails. In North Carolina, school-based incidents jumped from 46 to 1,200 in an eight-year period. Schoolyard fights or mouthing-off to teachers led to students being led out in handcuffs. It caused one judge to conclude that "Zero tolerance is zero intelligence."⁴

The "School to Prison Pipeline" is a costly phenomenon. A 2011 report, by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration," found the money spent on juvenile confinement to be "jaw-dropping." States spend \$5 billion to put youth in juvenile institutions. Maryland and Florida were singled out as having some of the most lopsided budgets. They "spend twice as much on facilities as they do on probation supervision and nonresidential treatment services." Yet, the vast majority of youth are

never sent to residential placements.

GOVERNOR'S NEEDLESS PUSH FOR ANOTHER JAIL

Governor O'Malley insists on moving forward with a plan to construct a 120-bed "Youth Jail" specifically for youth less than eighteen-years old charged as adults. The jail does address a valid need, but it is the most expensive and least beneficial option.

The current physical facility to house these youth is inhumane. In 1999, Human Rights Watch issued the report, "No Minor Matter: Children in Maryland's Jails," finding dangerous and deplorable conditions in the Baltimore City Detention Center (BCDC), where these youth are held. In a scathing 2002 report, the US Department of Justice found these conditions violated inmates' civil rights, and ordered the State to take significant remedial action. Plans were begun to house underage youth in an exclusive jail. Based on a 2007 State report, the decision was made to build a large facility under the auspices of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPS). However, this plan was not made well-known.

In 2010, when advocates became aware of the proposed Youth Jail, they immediately mobilized to educate the public and organize opposition. Their first effort was to persuade the Governor to have an independent review. He agreed and it was conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), a highly respected research organization. The report, "Critique of Maryland's Population Forecast: No Call for a New Youth Detention Facility," found the State's plan for a 180-bed physical plant to be inflated.⁵ In 2011, the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Corrections Services (DPS), the Open Society Institute Baltimore, and

The per youth cost for the proposed Youth Jail is approximately \$650,000, compared to about \$40,000 for a new school, and less than \$1,000 for a recreation center.

the Annie E. Casey Foundation requested a second NCCD study to perform a new population forecast and provide options.

This second NCCD study, "Bed Space Forecast for Baltimore Youth Detention Center," found a significant decrease in Baltimore's youth population and juvenile and adult arrests as well.⁶ There has been a seventeen-percent drop in youth living in Baltimore since 2000, and a corresponding one-third drop in the number and rate of reported youth crime. Given that these trends are forecasted to continue for the next 30 years, NCCD found no more than 120 beds were needed. In other words, by

just accounting for "the status quo" the State could reduce its projection for a Youth Jail by 33% from 180 to 120 beds.

The NCCD report did not stop with population and arrest forecasts. It outlined five distinct scenarios for reducing, and even eliminating the need for any youth jail. Governor O'Malley accepts the forecast for needing a 120-bed Youth Jail. However, he is completely ignoring the other significant portions of this state-commissioned study, which point to the possibility of eliminating the need for the new Youth Jail.

At the heart of the NCCD scenarios is the startling finding that over two-thirds of the youth charged as adults, now held at BCDC, never end up with an adult conviction. A whopping 38% are transferred back to the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). Another 14% are sent home for reasons including dismissal of charges or a determination of not guilty. An additional 14% are mostly released on bail, with a fewer number put on probation.

The conclusion of the NCCD Report is daunting: "these youth—who are never convicted in adult court and never serve time in an adult prison—spent an average of three months in an adult facility."

Only seven percent of current youth at BCDC ever end up sentenced to adult prison.

It makes little sense to devote capital and operational costs for a DPS jail when the vast majority of youth will end up back home or in the juvenile system. NCCD's five alternative scenarios show the State has viable choices. Four scenarios reduce needed bed space. The most promising scenario challenges the State to break out of the status quo of continued incarceration and completely do away with any new facility. It presents a clear choice for the future of youth, especially those in the African American population: more expensive incarceration or cost-effective successful community-based programs.

Two scenarios show how bed space can be modestly reduced to approximately 80 or 100 beds by simply instituting court processing reforms. Strategies include identifying cases likely to head back to the juvenile courts and expediting those cases, and reducing bail hearings from nineteen to two days. Two other scenarios would reduce the bed space to approximately 45 beds by holding only "youth who have the highest likelihood of remaining in the adult system after detention."

Only 25% of youth currently detained end up with an adult conviction, with less than one-third sentenced to an adult prison. These same results could be achieved by the State passing legislation mandating that all

youth cases start in the juvenile court. Given that the vast majority of youth never end up in the adult system, this is both a sensible and practical solution.

The NCCD report poignantly cautions that even these smaller facilities would be "relatively expensive." The request from DPS to the State's legislative body to fund the proposed Youth Jail bears this out. Despite a 33% reduction in bed space from 180 to 120 beds, the building costs (and staff costs as well) would only be reduced by \$11 million, just a ten percent decrease. \$80 million for 120 beds means even a 45-bed facility would also be exorbitant.

THE MOST PROMISING SCENARIO: BUILD NO JAIL – INVEST IN YOUTH

Moving beyond the do-nothing status quo approach, and even past the NCCD scenarios for straightforward changes in policy and practice, lies the tantalizing proposition that no facility needs to be built. The key to the NCCD report's fifth scenario is to shift away from incarceration and towards more community-based programs.

A recent Baltimore Sun article confirmed the decreases in arrests found by NCCD. "Police are arresting fewer juveniles—3,464 last year, compared with 8,147 in 2007," a 58% decrease. The article adds, "Adult arrests have plummeted from more than 100,000 in 2005 to fewer than 50,000 last year."⁷

Dr Andrés Alonso, Baltimore City Public Schools CEO, characterized this as a "seismic shift" in declining juvenile and adult arrests. He maintains that not just population decreases have contributed to these trends, citing community-based strategies that had significant impacts on crime reduction. He points to the 34% decrease in school suspensions, and the "city diverting 450 youths from the juvenile justice system to community-based programs."

This means that more investment in these programs can further reduce arrests.

The fifth scenario in the NCCD report calls for "community-based alternatives to both detention and out-of-home placement," plus increased treatment center beds. These strategies would free-up detention beds that would then be available to hold youth charged as adults.

As recently as 2010, before recent closures of treatment centers, "DJS was predicting less-than-capacity use of its secure custody facilities." Plans are now underway for the construction of a new DJS 48-bed treatment center. Detention beds used to hold "hard-to-place" youth would now be freed-up as they move into the treatment center.

Additional DJS detention center beds would become available by expanding existing alternatives. The NCCD report discussed further use of current alternatives utilized by DJS in Maryland and Baltimore. This includes day and evening reporting centers, community supervision programs, house arrest, and electronic monitoring. These



Activists constructed agit-prop "schoolhouse". Photo by: Casey McKeel.



A Maryland State Trooper makes himself a nuisance during construction. Photo by: Casey McKeel.

alternatives provide a comprehensive strategy that closely supervises youth so that court requirements are met, new offenses avoided, and positive youth development provided.

In response to the NCCD report, the alliance of more than 30 community-based organizations detailed many cost-effective alternatives to incarceration.⁸ The \$80 million for constructing a new jail could fund improvements for the 70% of Baltimore City schools that are in poor condition or need renovations to make them technologically competitive. Shifting funding from the proposed Youth Jail could also fund recreation centers or Youth Villages that provide an array of comprehensive positive support and services, such as mentoring and career support. The per youth cost for the proposed Youth Jail is approximately \$650,000, compared to about \$40,000 for a new school, and less than \$1,000 for a recreation center.

The Casey report, "No Place For Kids," points to the promise of "rigorous career preparation and vocational training," and wraparound services where pooled funding sources provide an array of services and treatments. It also discusses the proven results of evidence-based models, including intensive family treatment through Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT). Unfortunately, DJS does not seem to have the wherewithal to effectively fill available slots even though there are plenty of Baltimore youth in need. In 2011, the Maryland Department of Legislative Services found that DJS utilization rates "sunk below 80%." Rather than remedying the problem with referrals, DJS chose to reduce its budget by eliminating ten FFT slots and twenty MST slots in Baltimore alone. This again shows DJS's misguided budget. The Casey report shows these strategies are both more effective than detention and more cost-effective. The highest cost per youth for evidenced-based services is \$9,500. The lowest cost for comparable time in a detention center is \$66,000.

The challenge is not instituting new strategies, but getting them to work in Maryland. Like evidence-based models, Maryland is already involved with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI). In many states, JDAI efforts have successfully reduced both overall rates of juvenile incarceration, as well as racial disparities in detention.

DJS has had a ten-year association with JDAI, including the last five under Governor O'Malley and his two DJS Secretaries. Unfortunately, repeated reports by the Casey

Spending many millions of dollars to build, and then operate, this proposed Youth Jail is tantamount to conceding the high price of failure in Maryland.

Foundation show that Maryland's efforts are noteworthy only for failing to show results achieved by other states.

A decision to invest in youth coupled with effective leadership in Maryland could certainly bring about desired outcomes for youth and budgets. The Casey report showed tremendous cost savings by doing what is right for youth. In Ohio, training schools and corrections facilities cost \$57,000 and \$35,000 per youth, respectively. However, community-based programs that were just as effective (or better) for most youth, cost on average only \$8,500 per youth. Nationally, the general per youth cost for a comprehensive jobs skills program is only \$17,000 per participant, and \$1,000 for a quality mentoring program.

For Maryland, increasing alternatives to decrease detention bed space has added benefits. Freed-up detention beds means a new Youth Jail does not need to be built and youth can be properly served in DJS facilities. Housing youth charged as adults in juvenile facilities has benefits down the road. Citing national research, the NCCD report

shows that confinement in adult facilities "lower[s] the chance of a good outcome for these youth," and "a greater likelihood of future re-offending."

Alternative strategies can also be put into place more quickly than building a monolithic new jail. For youth currently crammed into temporary trailers at BCDC, the remedies cannot come soon enough. At a recent legislative briefing in January, DPS officials repeatedly stated the jail was needed to comply with the DOJ mandates. Yet, they never discussed the viability of the other NCCD scenarios for providing speedier remedies, or eliminating the need for the jail.

The Governor's decision to ignore the NCCD scenarios suggests a disturbing lack of confidence in his State agencies to implement these strategies.

This may be understandable given DJS's years-long inability to institute reforms other states have enjoyed. It is not, however, acceptable. It means settling for a status quo of racially disparate mass incarceration. Troubling at any time, but even more so when Maryland faces as much as a \$1 billion deficit. Spending many millions of dollars to build, and then operate, this proposed Youth Jail is tantamount to conceding the high price of failure in Maryland.

Alternatives to not building the Youth Jail are less costly, more effective, quickly implemented, and far better for our youth. They would continue the momentum that city officials say has contributed to dramatic decreases in juvenile and adult crime. It is, as the NCCD report declares, a "win-win" scenario.

FACES OF OUR FUTURE

The youth at the Coppin Family Computer Lab are living proof that the "win-win" of positive alternatives truly works. Middle school students Robert and Hadari are making community contributions by developing an instructional guide, and making announcements for an upcoming

job fair. Bersheba is using funds earned from the jobs skills program for a certificate in childcare services at Baltimore County Community College. Having completed his subsidized employment, Lawrence is looking forward to graduating from high school on schedule and finding permanent work. Sheila is a twenty-year old high school graduate who had a subsidized position at a beauty salon to gain real world work experience. And Ryan will be using his earned funds to take computer training and safety courses in order to get a leg-up on working in warehouse stocking.

For Lawrence, elected officials opting for another jail is the status quo. "The government is still going to build more jails," he says, pessimistically adding, "They have their mind made up." Still, he knows what he would rather see funded.

"The money from my taxes, I'd rather see rec centers that have programs and little snacks," because "some people want to change their ways."

Bersheba agrees. She knows the "value of programs that keep youth off the street," with staff who are "role models." For her, there is no choice when it comes to more incarceration. She wants opportunities funded that "give us a view to our future."★

www.stopbaltimoreyouthjail.com

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8 Proposed Alternative Action Plan for the Construction of a Youth Jail in Baltimore City

REFLECTIONS ON OCCUPY BALTIMORE

THE FIGHT AGAINST THE YOUTH JAIL HAS GIVEN OCCUPY BALTIMORE ACTIVISTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ROOT THEIR EFFORTS IN LOCAL STRUGGLES FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

AND THE FIGHT AGAINST THE YOUTH JAIL

BY: CASEY MCKEEL

When a call went out in early October to “occupy” Baltimore, roughly 200 people gathered to discuss possible locations for an encampment. One initial proposal was to occupy the site of a proposed youth jail in East Baltimore, a facility that would cost the state \$104 million—money that could be used for an under-funded public education system and neglected recreation centers. The location was publicly proposed by high school student Shaquille Carbon, a member of the youth-led organization called the Baltimore Algebra Project (BAP), which fights for fair and just education in the city.

In its fight for better education in Baltimore, the BAP has been involved in the struggle against the youth jail for over two years, along with a coalition of over 30 different organizations. In the Fall of 2010, the BAP, along with Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle (a local progressive policy think-tank), Union Baptist Church, Kinetics Faith and Justice Network, and many other allies, held an action called Youth Justice Sunday at the proposed jail site.

Participants cut the lock to the property’s surrounding fence and then entered the site in an act of civil disobedience. They then brought books into the site to bring attention to the fact that while the City and State could find funding for a new prison, they still had yet to find the funds to save a deteriorating school system.

Although there was a great deal of enthusiasm for occupying the proposed youth jail site, the McKeldin Square location in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor was settled upon. This site, overlooked by offices of banks and corporations, followed the trend of other Occupations across the country by focusing on economic issues—this would be the beginning of Occupy Baltimore.

Reflecting on the decision, Carbon expressed frustration with being the youngest person in the room that first night and feeling like his voice was not heard. Indeed, criticism of the young Occupy Baltimore soon centered around its seeming lack of diversity and its lack of connection to local issues and struggles. Though early conversations around issues like development, as well as the youth jail, led to the creation of parallel groups which began to work on these more specific local problems, the larger Occupy Baltimore movement maintained its focus on broad issues, such as income inequality and wealth distribution. Such criticism has followed Occupy groups across the country.

As encampments were evicted nationally, the Occupy movement continued to evolve. In Baltimore, this evolution has meant a more intentional focus on the local systemic issues that activists in the city have been working on for years. This focus has allowed Occupy participants to link up with existing local movements to create space to begin dialogue, strengthen and build upon relationships, and forge new ones.

At the same time, such new coalitions and relationships have come with many

challenges. As Occupy participants work to find their place among local struggles, important discussions of race and class have taken center stage in a tough dialogue.

In January, members of Occupy Baltimore teamed up with the BAP to organize a five-day occupation of the proposed youth jail site. Known as Schools Not Jails, the action started with fiery speeches from local civil rights leaders and long-time activists in front of the city’s detention facility. The group then marched to the fenced-off site, while chanting “We want education, not incarceration!”

Upon arrival, a select number of participants entered the property as wood and building supplies poured over the fence from the hands of dozens of supporters. The group then built a symbolic schoolhouse to illustrate the demand that the city and state invest in education, rather than jails. The demonstrators inside were later arrested.

Despite a heavy police presence, the occupation remained peaceful. Each night throughout the week different groups held teach-ins outside the site on crucial issues: the prison-industrial complex¹, nonviolent resistance, and systemic critiques of the modern criminal justice system and possible alternatives.

The week culminated with a demonstration at War Memorial Plaza in front of City Hall. The group turned the plaza into a temporary recreation center, with demonstrators playing games such as jump rope, football, soccer, and hula hoop. The action symbolized the demand that the city prioritize prevention rather than incarceration, as well as bring light to the city’s recent plans to close and privatize recreation centers.

Occupy Baltimore’s decision to take on the youth jail came several months after Shaquille Carbon’s original suggestion, but not too late. Carbon, recognizing his initial disappointment at the first Occupy meeting, expressed satisfaction in seeing the idea come to fruition five months later, as well as the action bringing national coverage to an issue that previously hadn’t received the media attention it deserved.

Jay Gillen, a teacher who works with the Baltimore Algebra Project, commented:

With the rise of the Occupy movement, Red Emma’s and Occupy Baltimore have intentionally funneled media attention to support the Stop-the-Youth-Jail work. Particularly impressive has been Occupy’s combination of moving the issue forward energetically, while ensuring that youth and community members most directly affected, remain at the forefront.

Indeed, the main goal of many of the participants from Occupy Baltimore has been to take the momentum, which has been built around this global phenomenon of increased activism and revolt, and use it to highlight local struggles in Baltimore

and, ultimately, to inspire increased activism around these issues.

“I am hopeful and thankful for how this multi-year campaign against the youth jail has gained traction and grown,” said Rev. Heber Brown, III, a community leader and long-time activist, who has fought against the youth jail. “It’s one of the most sustained efforts I’ve ever been a part of in my years of activism here in Baltimore, so that is encouraging. . . This campaign against this youth jail has really invited a diverse crowd to give energy to the issue of the prison-industrial complex here in Baltimore.”

Brown went on to underscore that, even if the different groups involved with this issue can’t always work together, they are still working towards a similar goal, even with the many challenges that exist:

I cannot ignore the racial dynamics that are tied to the prison-industrial complex and to those who organize to fight against it. I have long-maintained that those who are most directly impacted by the prison-industrial complex should be the voices that provide leadership to efforts that struggle against the prison-industrial complex. And I’ve also maintained that people of privilege should use that privilege in responsible ways when working in concert with oppressed communities. As it relates to

Occupy Baltimore, I am thankful for its focus on local issues and the space it is creating for white people of privilege to use that privilege for this cause, i.e., stopping the youth jail. I am also thankful for the possibilities of more imaginative expressions of community and activism that Occupy Baltimore has helped to nourish.

As the evolution of the Occupy movement here in Baltimore continues, there is a shared dream that after these issues are won, the hard work of defining community, building relationships, and working together doesn’t end. The momentum for systemic and democratic change that is sweeping the globe should continue to be channeled to bring attention and broaden participation in important local struggles, in addition to national and global struggles, and work towards linking movements and building unity.★

Casey McKeel is a community organizer and photo journalist. She is a member of Schools Not Jails and Another BDC is Possible. She is also a founder of Bearings Bike Project.

¹ The prison-industrial complex refers to the rapid expansion of the US inmate population due to the political influence of private prison companies and businesses that supply goods and services to government prison agencies.

THE INDYREADER TALKS TO: OCCUPY BALTIMORE ORGANIZER SHALLON BROWN

Stephen Roblin from *Independent Reader* interviews Shallon Brown, organizer with Occupy Baltimore, about the movement's relationship with labor unions and its prospects for the future.

Indyreader: Can you tell us about your background and role in Occupy Baltimore? How did you get involved? How have you contributed to the movement?

Shallon Brown: I work as a software developer and just finished my Master's degree last year. I've lived in Baltimore for ten years now (originally from Frederick, MD). I got involved after watching the hundreds of protesters arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge in New York in September. At that time, I saw how the concept of occupation was spreading worldwide and I became curious if Baltimore was doing one. Sure enough, [the occupation of] McKeldin [Square] was set to start up a few days after I began looking into it. I came down on the first day (October 4th) and have been with the movement ever since.

Indyreader: Did you have much activist/organizing experience before Occupy Baltimore?

Shallon Brown: Not nearly as much as some of the Occupiers I have spoken with. Many of them have been involved in activism for several decades. While I have worked in passing with organizations such as the United Way, I can't say it has ever been nearly as life-encompassing as it has been with Occupy.

Indyreader: Why do you think working with unions is important, specifically with regard to addressing the unemployment and overall economic insecurity crisis?

Shallon Brown: I believe unions are a key platform for not only speaking directly with the working class, but addressing them in such a way that is sympathetic and non-threatening. It's important that we branch with those who have forged labor rights for many years, such that we can consolidate efforts effectively. Several union leaders have already commented that they need to learn from us as far as finding new ways to get people energized (even as they thought they already knew it all). So in truth, we both can learn from each other, which I believe to be the core of any lasting relationship. Unions also provide many Occupiers a chance to engage their core demographic as well. Hearing stories of those making minimum wage and supporting a family really keep you motivated like nothing else. Their struggle is very real.

Indyreader: Is there a relationship between Baltimore-based unions and OB? If so, how would you describe the relationship? And how has it developed over the course of OB's young life?

Shallon Brown: Yes, I would say there is a great relationship with local unions. It started with a Labor Union solidarity group in the early stages of OB. Many people had worked with labor unions before. From that, a few of us set off to contact heads of local

unions and try to see if we could get some solid demonstrations planned and ongoing support from them, primarily in the form of knowledge as the best way to get the attention of the general public and spreading the word. We've had several successful protests that have engaged hundreds of people in activism and helped us keep the movement going. We've gotten several formal amendments of support and press releases from local unions, and it's been absolutely amazing to see how many of them love the Occupy concept and the main reasons we are out fighting for a better existence.

Indyreader: The Mayor's office made clear early on that it wanted to close the OB encampment at the Inner Harbor's McKeldin Square. I know that unions came to OB's aid. Can you describe to our readers how unions have aided the movement in this way and in others?

Shallon Brown: The local unions worked to actually speak with the Mayor one-on-one, as well as provide formal mandates of support. Both the Baltimore Mayor and the Mayor of DC work closely with local unions, as they compromise a large portion of their key constituency. As a result, they are more inclined to listen. In addition, the unions made it clear that they had a strong desire to avoid a scenario like what happened in Oakland, CA. They wanted to ensure that everyone involved was safe, that our rights were respected, and that if/when clean-out occurred, it was done respectfully and nonviolently.

Indyreader: You were a lead organizer for the December 6th union action in Baltimore City. Can you describe the action, its purpose, and those involved in organizing it?

As the chant goes, you cannot evict an idea whose time has come.

Shallon Brown: The purpose was to march to City Hall and present a formally written letter to our Mayor, care of Fred Mason, President, Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. We wanted both to show our solidarity through the march, but also really to engage the local union members in the process and get some more people down to the square to talk with us. Asa Wilder (another Occupy participant) and myself spoke with the local electrician's union and they helped us choreograph the event. Many of the 99% are still unaware of our message, how we use hand signals, what we do each day, etc., so demonstrations like that help us directly connect with our community.

Indyreader: The concern over "co-opting" the Occupy movement has been raised. Some have claimed that major union leaders are trying to co-opt the Occupy movement

by transforming it "into a vote-producing arm for the Obama 2012 campaign." For example, Glenn Greenwald, a writer for Salon.com, wrote on November 19th that the, "SEIU's effort to convert and degrade the Occupy movement into what SEIU's national leadership is—a loyal arm of the DNC and the Obama White House—has become even more overt." Greenwald and many others believe that it would be a strategic disaster for the movement to transform itself into an election machine for the Democrats. Do you think the concern over co-optation by unions is legitimate? Do you think this is a particular issue for OB?

Shallon Brown: While I understand the logic for the concern, I don't know how much of it is based around fact and how much of it is based around a distrust of the general concept that unions do in fact have hierarchy, and as such can be seen as functioning somewhat like a corporation and all that comes with that, for better or worse. That realization aside, from what I have read, while I think the Democrat party as a whole would love to find some way to revitalize their base in much the same way as the Republicans did with the Tea Party, I think many of the leaders see the Occupy movement, and its constituency as a real field of landmines. In addition, I think unions have the same concerns. This movement at its heart is not as cut-and-dry political as the Tea Party. The Tea Party evolved and came under a microscope for its criticism of the bank bailouts and general disgust [with] the growing national debt. As a result, that movement was much easier to steer. This movement encompasses such a wider array of society's issues, it's better categorized as a social movement than a political one. Social movements take many years to impact large scale change historically. Many of the

core issues, such as the growing divergence between classes, the growing healthcare cost problems, and huge student loan debt are issues that unions have been fighting for over the course of many decades, and in some cases centuries now. It's quite natural for us to be with them in this fight. However, I think Occupy Together¹ will always remain a separate entity and do a lot more than just help the unions in their causes though. Case in point, Obama himself was recently mic-checked.² That's because there is a healthy contingent of Occupy participants who don't consider themselves under any current political party because they think the system as a whole is broken, and that includes to a certain degree the current President. It's demonstrations like that that make it clear this movement is much more than a cheerleading squad for the Democrat party . . . It's about broad social cries for people to wake up from their dissolution and general tune-out to how our country is run and to re-engage in the process and their local community issues. We cannot sit around and be sheep to the system. It needs to be tackled head on, and

that is going to include holding some of our local and national Democrat politicians' feet to the fire.

Indyreader: Where do you see OB going in the near future? How would you like to see OB's relationship with unions develop?

Shallon Brown: That's an excellent question. In general, I think OB is now on it's way to phase two. Exactly how we evolve is anyone's guess. But I think it's now going to be about how to spread the Occupy message and really creating direct change in our community as a result. We are really getting into the nitty gritty of some large issues that many of us have a huge stake in transforming. Trying to prevent the Constellation Energy/BGE merger, attempting to save homes from foreclosure, cleaning up our inner city schools, and performing more demonstrations around divestment from banks are just a few examples of things that will continue to happen. I would like to see unions continue to walk with us, as one of us, in keeping the movement growing. It's vital that we work every single day to bring back the American dream. We've now got people's attention, and the movement has spread worldwide like wildfire. The concept isn't going anywhere . . . as the chant goes, you cannot evict an idea whose time has come. I would love to see Occupy find some local politicians who support us and our message for the coming election cycle, and ideally see some Occupy-friendly politicians put into office. I think here in Baltimore, we have a real shot if we can find the right candidates.

Indyreader: How has participating in Occupy Baltimore impacted you on a personal level?

Shallon Brown: Honestly, it's the personal connections that have meant more to me than anything else. I think a lot of people forget that it's not just the broader message of wealth inequality and political corruption that keeps us going. It's actually the connection we feel with our fellow protesters. I can honestly say that there has never been a time in my life where I have felt so surrounded by so many people who honestly "get it" in terms of human rights and social causes. When you are around other Occupiers, it feels like you are around family. They have big hearts and great ideas for how to get things done and make a lasting impact. It's refreshing, to say the least. There are people I have met, as a result of this movement, that I hope to stay in contact with for the rest of my life, as both activists and friends.★

1 editor's note: Occupy Together is an unofficial online hub for the global Occupy movements

2 editor's note: On November 22nd, a group of Occupy protesters interrupted a speech by President Obama delivered in Manchester, New Hampshire.

COOPERATION WITHOUT CAPITAL: AN INTRODUCTION

BY: **BLAKE UNDERWOOD**

UNDERWOOD INTRODUCES HIS UPCOMING INDYREADER SERIES *COOPERATION WITHOUT CAPITAL*, WHERE HE WILL EXPLORE THE STATE OF AND IDEOLOGY BEHIND WORKER COOPERATIVES, BOTH IN BALTIMORE AND BEYOND.

Now entering its second year, the current wave of global revolt has captured the radical imagination and inspired many thousands of activists, organizers, and politicized citizens to take to the streets in response to a diverse range of political, economic, and cultural contractions. From democratic uprisings stretching across the Middle East and anti-police brutality riots in London, to anti-austerity protests in Wisconsin and the broad movement of occupations found in countless American cities, activist organization has arguably reached a level of global concentration not seen for more than a decade.

Workers' unions and labor struggles have always been a central element of long-term social justice work. However in the current environment, it seems a rare case where such elements are found to be a central organizing apparatus of the most visible actions and movements. In the United States, only the aforementioned Wisconsin protests maintained a labor-led base, while also gaining national and international attention. Now apparent is the necessity for workers to seize upon the opportunities created by the broad, diverse social movements emerging across the globe, and in doing so, to expand the importance and legacy of these movements by presenting a more acute challenge to the domination of capital.

Though not a solitary vector of resistance, the importance of labor justice can hardly be overestimated, as work often remains the chief interlocutor between capital and its subjects. Worker-cooperatives have long been a tool of the libertarian left, used to mediate the connection between capital and its subjects by fomenting horizontal labor relations and attempting to build communities from the bottom-up. Relying on principles of self-management, autonomy and mutual aid, cooperatives provide an opportunity for all laborers to democratically control the nature of their work and wages. The importance of such control rests not only in its direct impact on the participating laborers, but also in the resulting social relations, which are then less obscured by the masks of hierarchical power and domination.

Some workplaces operate on a consensus model, where all cooperative members have the ability to block decisions to which they have strong objections and would thus endanger their ability to continue their involvement in the project. Others use more traditional models, such as open-voting, which requires super-majority approval for passage. Regardless of the decision-making model used, cooperatives rely on an understanding of democracy that goes to the heart of the word. Cooperative members are not seen simply as disembodied votes, but rather as fully realized contributors, whose investment in and relationship to their project is seen as integral to its success, both political and practical.

Today, with many of the most prominent labor unions becoming professionalized bureaucracies, cooperatives have become an even more important tool for the democratization of the workplace. Rather than becoming de facto tools for co-optation and manipulation by those who would

seek to stifle labor organizing—namely management—cooperatives completely wrest decision-making power from an authoritarian elite, and place it, equally, in the hands of each and every stakeholder.

One need look no further than our city of Baltimore to find a diverse array of projects implementing cooperative models as realistic alternatives to capital-driven labor relations. Baltimore Bicycle Works (BBW), a worker-owned and -operated bike shop, found in the Station North neighborhood, is just one example of laborers using their experience in order to reconceptualize the work they perform under new egalitarian modes. Though divisions of labor still exist due to levels of ability and expertise, the workers at BBW maintain commitments to equitable responsibility, decision-making, and compensation. As a cooperative, BBW understands that though certain elements of work may at times be out of balance—like productive work versus administrative work and bike maintenance versus book-keeping—production is multi-faceted and relies upon various types of labor that must be valued equally and understood horizontally. And while in practice, these intentions will sometimes breakdown and be lost in the ongoing struggle with capitalist relations, cooperatives like BBW endeavor to constantly re-evaluate the nature of their project, while seeking new ways to democratize and humanize their labor.

Declared the International Year of the Cooperative (IYC) by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, 2012 is a year which can and must bring more attention to the role and impact of worker cooperatives. With goals to increase awareness and promote growth of worker cooperatives, the IYC mandate tasks UN member states with creating structural opportunities for cooperatives to propagate their models and intensify their impact on socio-economic development. This international recognition of the importance of cooperatives, as tools for true democracy and empowerment, forces us to reexamine our existing cooperative projects and the theories that undergird them.

There are many important questions that we must continue to ask: For those of us who are critical of state-intervention and its potential to erode truly democratic institutions, how can we utilize expanding opportunities for movement building, while also recognizing the antagonism that naturally exists between our movement and the state which remains beholden to capital? Can we resist co-optation, and thereby prevent having our own models turned against us? Can the potential for long-lasting, wide-ranging change

present itself as a prefigurative step towards labor liberation and, more importantly, the destruction of capital? Does the ubiquity of work force us to confront the dominant labor systems from the inside, as well as the outside? Answering these questions must be of the highest priority. If through these state-centered political openings, our only possible endpoint is one where our cooperative projects are seen as fundamentally important, yet no longer maintain an explicit radical, anti-capitalist modality, then we must seek other, less problematic opportunities.

Cooperation Without Capital—a series of articles which will continue regularly on the Indypendent Reader website (www.indyreader.org)—is an attempt to reexamine and understand the role of labor organization, and specifically that of worker cooperatives, in the larger arena of social movements and radical activism. Too often we begin to understand our everyday lives—our social relationships, our leisure, our labor—as existing outside the spaces of our activism. Yet, under capital, the public and the private, the deliberate and the “everyday”, are rarely separable. To examine one sphere, we must fully engage with the other. By their very nature, cooperatives should force us to encounter this duality, but such an observation is neither universal nor widely debated. Let us start that debate here and now.

As true as ever, this is only the beginning. Future articles will search for answers to the questions enumerated above and attempt to critically interrogate the assumptions that we and others make in regard to labor, cooperatives, and activism in general. The wide array of coverage, found in this series, will include: ongoing reports from developments related to the International Year of the Cooperative, personal anecdotes from within the radical cooperative community, and theoretical ruminations on the politics that underlie all of our cooperative projects. Please follow along as we navigate a year already imbued with revolutionary hope, and one that is sure to be filled with change, for better or worse.★

Blake Underwood is a founding member of Just Walk, a Baltimore and DC-based collectively operated dog-walking and pet-sitting business. He is also a collective member at Baltimore's only radical infoshop, Red Emma's Bookstore Coffeehouse.

COOPERATIVE LINGO

BY: COREY REIDY

ACTIVIST SPEAK: a fascinating language used within activist communities that is tailored as a tool for successful organizing. In *Cooperation without Capital*, you will find some of these terms. Now, for your radical rabble-rousing pleasure, we define these terms here, as well as a few others that are handy to have up your sleeve.

COOPERATIVE/WORKER COOPERATIVE: a group of individuals who democratically control a business. This group either joins together to use or consume the business's services/goods (cooperative) and/or works there (worker cooperative). The two are not always mutually exclusive. While decision-making in cooperatives is organized democratically, there are usually levels of hierarchy. Different co-op members may have varying levels of power based on anything from the amount of capital they give, to the amount of work that they do for the project. Also, in some cooperatives, workers' decision-making power may be modest, as cooperatives regularly function under the advisement of a board of directors, who work as representatives of the co-op. The worker cooperative model is the most common form of worker-ownership today.

COLLECTIVE: a project owned exclusively by the workers/organizers. In a collective business, all workers are owners. Collective members perpetually work to organize in an entirely egalitarian and democratic manner. Project decision-making is conducted horizontally, as is project management, which is organized along the principles of collective- and self-management. Most politicized folks will argue that collectives are hands-down our most radical and visionary form of project organization.

SELF-MANAGEMENT: a form of decision-making in the workplace where workers collaboratively construct their projects and the choices that define it.

MUTUAL AID: voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit. Founded on the notion that communities are and should be inherently cooperative, rather than competitive.

AUTONOMY: the ability for individuals or individual communities to act on their own behalf and make decisions without undue influence or coercion from others.

CONSENSUS: a decision-making process that relies upon the formal consent/agreement of all parties. Consensus is often used as both verb and noun. As a noun, it describes the decision agreed upon by the group. As a verb, it describes the process used to reach the decision. Though unanimity is not always achieved or even desired, the intention behind consensus is that final decisions take into account all members' voices and aim to collectively reach the best possible decision to meet the group's diverse needs.

BLOCK: like consensus, "block/blocking" is used as both noun and verb in the consensus decision-making process to describe both the act and process of a block. When blocking, a project member states that they will leave the project if the presently discussed decision is agreed upon. In action, blocks serve as roadblocks to the decision-making process or to change the course of the process. To

preserve its potency, blocking should be used as a last resort.

QUORUM: a chosen number/percentage/group of members required in order to meet collective consensus. Quorum usually constitutes a majority.

OPEN-VOTING: a decision-making process where all aspects of voting are transparent to the public and/or decision-making members.

SUPER-MAJORITY: an agreed upon percentage of voting threshold, that is at least over half of the project's members, that must be met in order for a decision to be passed. In consensus-based projects, super-majority voting is seen as hopefully a rare fall-back decision-making process, in the event that consensus decision-making cannot be achieved. For democratically-based projects less wedded to consensus, they tend to rely more heavily on super-majority and even simple majority voting procedures.

CO-OPTATION: for our organizing purposes, co-optation is the process of our movements being assimilated into dominant systems of power, in order to neutralize the threats we pose to the systems we struggle against.

PRE-FIGURATIVE: an actualization of politics where activists create their lived realities and organize based upon the future societies they wish to see.

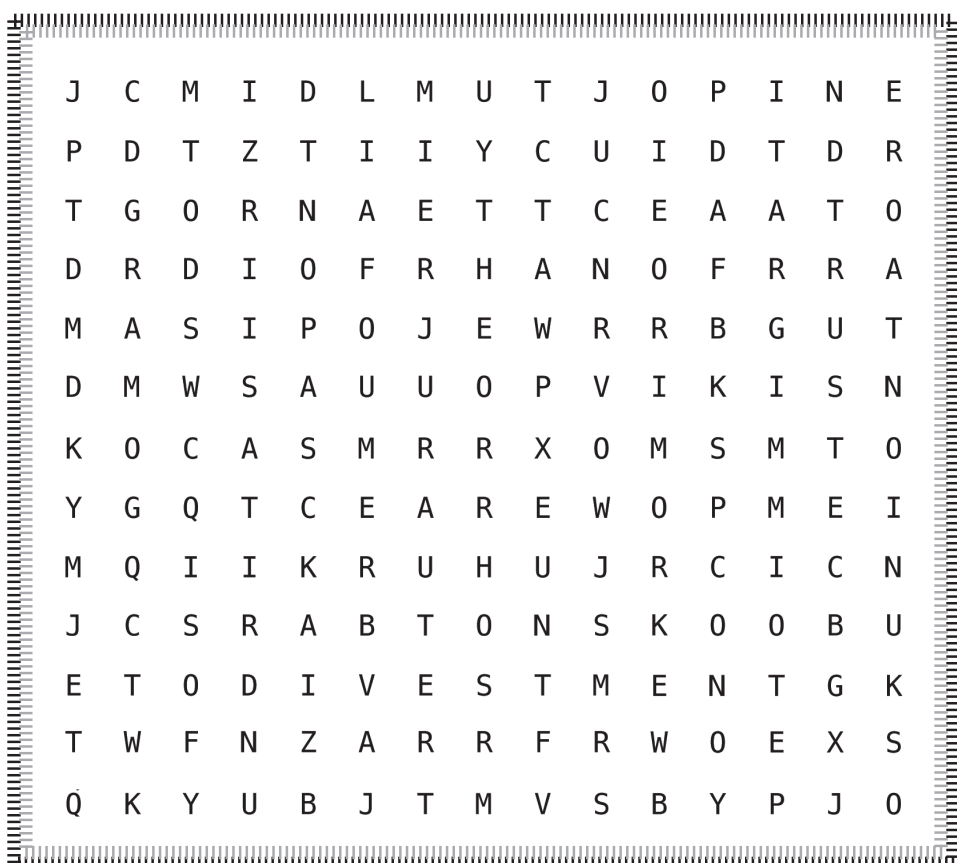
OCCUPY THE ECONOMY WORDSEARCH!

BY: HARRIET SMITH

INSTRUCTIONS: Hidden in this block of letters are words related to the articles in this issue of Independent Reader. Words can go in every direction: down, up, right, left, even diagonal. See if you can find them all!

WORDS:

BOOKS NOT BARS, COOPERATION
DIVESTMENT, EMPOWER, FEMINISM
IMMIGRATION, LAND TRUST
MILITARISM, OCCUPY, UNION
WORKER OWNED, YOUTH JUSTICE



traditional celtic music
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JOB'S WITHOUT GROWTH: WHY IT'S POSSIBLE AND NECESSARY

EVANS CHALLENGES TWO DOMINANT MYTHS: THAT IT'S NECESSARY TO GROW THE ECONOMY IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN HIGH EMPLOYMENT AND THAT IT'S POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY WITH AN ECONOMY IN PERPETUAL GROWTH.

BY: JOHN DAVID EVANS

In January, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) released a report disputing the idea that environmental regulations kill jobs. Efforts to clean up the Chesapeake Bay could in fact create more than 230,000 jobs, their research finds.¹ Revealing the foolishness of the popular 'wisdom' that the economy and the environment are inherently pitted against one another is an urgent task, and reports like this are vital. Shrewd policy requires accurate understanding of the likely effects of alternative stances to environmental protection—both action and inaction. Wherever win-win outcomes can be identified, they should of course be pursued.

But while investigations like the CBF's report are essential, they fail to reach the root from which both unemployment and environmental degradation grow. Our inability to truly address these issues springs in part from the fact that we are using

had enough to keep themselves nourished, healthy, and safe. More goods and services really did mean better quality of life. More was better.

In the last 200 years, technological development revolving around the burning of fossil fuels has changed the basic relationship between people and the physical world. We are able to interact with matter in ways previously only imagined, and the rise in productivity is staggering. The average person in the US now earns more than 40 times what her counterpart did in 1800. In the 20th century, average life expectancy in the US rose from under 50 to over 75 years. Increasingly rapid communication technology has fostered unbelievable creativity and innovation, and options for comfort and entertainment have grown exponentially. Much that economic growth has brought us is very good.

But sometime in the last 50 years, we crossed a threshold. What now improves life in the US is, on average, not more, but better. Our ability to perpetually produce more is no longer a pure blessing. Lack of food is now less of a problem in our country that is obesity due to too much unhealthy

from GDP; instead, deforestation counts as unqualified positive economic growth.³ It also leaves out good things that are not bought and sold. Homegrown food, care for your own children, and volunteer work do not register with GDP. Reading a library copy of *The Little Prince* to the kids before bed does nothing for GDP, but keeping them out till midnight to see *Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked* will boost GDP by a good \$50.

At some point, the negative components of growth outweigh the positive ones, and the evidence suggests we are well beyond that point. In other words, economic growth has become uneconomic. What we need is better, not more: better quality food, not larger servings of hyperprocessed food; better designed transportation, not bigger cars burning more fuel. Though on average people in the US have more than is good for them, many have too little. Inequality

between the economy and the Earth's ecosystem could reasonably be ignored, and so the ecological consequences of economic activities were ignored.

Energy and natural resources are assumed to come from nowhere, and waste and pollution return to that nowhere. If the environment is considered at all, it is as a separate realm, from which the economy takes resources and to which it exports pollution.

In reality, though, the economy is part of the ecosystem. All the stuff cycled through the economy comes from and goes to somewhere, and that 'somewhere' is the Earth's ecosystem. This relationship between the economy and the natural world is better represented as such.

While this may seem like a small distinction, its implications can hardly be overstated. As a part of the ecosystem, the economy is subject to the laws and constraints of physics. The ecosystem is finite, and so the economy cannot grow infinitely. And as it continues to grow, it is necessarily making use of a larger part of the global ecosystem. Though technological improvements allow us to use resources more efficiently,

growth?

long-outmoded models to understand the economy and its relationship to the material world. So long as we continue to think in ways so out of sync with the actual world as it exists, we will remain unable to conceive of the real problem. An economic regime with a central goal of infinite economic growth in a finite world will never guide us to stable and meaningful employment, and it will never help us understand what sustainability even means, let alone achieve it.

growth?

food. While important technological developments continue to be made, they no longer revolve around increasing the volume of our consumption. But the models we use to understand and guide interaction with the economy are unable to distinguish between beneficial and harmful developments.

MEASURING GROWTH

Economics emerged as a field back when more really was better, and so the field takes for granted the desirability of growth. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the standard gauge of an economy's size, is a hopelessly blunt measure. It indiscriminately adds together everything being cycled through the market. In the calculations of GDP, factors of well-being—nutritious food, sustainable transportation, improvements to school buildings—are added to manifestations of social dysfunction—auto accident lawsuits, unsuccessful attempts to cap an oil leak, and treatment of diseases that could have been easily prevented. All that matters is volume and activity. While an accurate measure of economic health would subtract the bad things from the good ones, GDP only adds. When a forest is cleared to provide raw materials for a paper mill, the loss of natural capital—the forest—is not deducted

growth?

in this country is among the highest of the developed world. So, we also need better distribution of employment and income, not rising average income irrespective of distribution. GDP does not distinguish between growth that comes from better and growth that comes from more, or between growth that benefits the poor and that which worsens inequity. To GDP, all growth is good.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF INFINITE GROWTH

Not only is infinite growth not desirable, but on reflection, it is logically impossible. For most of human history economic activity used such a small portion of the planet's resources that it couldn't really damage natural systems on a significant scale. A village might overfish the cod from a particular inlet, but there was no threat that the entire Atlantic cod population would collapse. Today such over-exploitation is not merely possible, but too common. The technological development and population growth of the past 200 years have fundamentally changed our relationship to the natural world. Human activity now affects most ecosystems on the planet, many quite drastically. Climate patterns, the nitrogen cycle, and the rate of biodiversity loss are only the best known of these.

The change in how humanity is affecting the natural world is obvious to researchers in most fields, and common sense to non-experts who stop to think about it. But economists have been slow to recognize this change. The foundations of modern economics were laid when the relationship

growth?

improved efficiency almost never outweighs the increased burden on the ecosystem. If we want to accurately project the effects of policies intended to improve the economy or the ecosystem, we have to start with an accurate understanding of the relationship between the two.

GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT

How does this basic misconception relate to jobs? Politicians, journalists, and economists alike often treat economic growth and employment as though the two were inextricably tied, at times using the terms interchangeably. "[T]he Nation faces an economy that is not growing and creating jobs as it should," warns the President's recent Plan for Economic Growth and Deficit Reduction. "Growth would need to double—consistently—to make a significant dent in the unemployment rate," projects Martin Crutinger of the Associated Press.⁴ That economic growth is necessary for adequate employment seems so obvious as to be unquestionable. But on closer inspection, this relationship does not appear so absolute.

Considering how they're always spoken of together, you might expect a direct relationship: that rising unemployment

Policy makers at all levels speak as though, when an economy is not growing, it's dying. In his recent State of the Union Address, President Obama promised that "With or without this Congress, I will keep taking actions that help the economy grow."² Articles about the recession point ominously to insufficient growth rates. Environmentalists too assume economic growth is compatible with protection of the natural world, speaking of 'green growth solutions.' In reality, economic growth is neither necessary nor sufficient for a healthy economy. It has little to do with the things that matter most to people, and inevitably pushes our economy ever further from our planet's ecological limits. So why does growth get so much attention?

WHEN GROWTH WAS GOOD

Taking a long view of human history, the focus on economic growth makes sense. By the standard economic definition, growth is the increase in the market value of goods and services produced in a year. For most of our time as a species, people have simply not

would be accompanied by a shrinking economy, and that unemployment would go down as the economy grows larger. But, while the economy has continued growing, apart from the Great Depression, unemployment has consistently hovered around five percent. A

Our tie to perpetual growth is a contingent aspect of how we have organized ourselves economically, not an eternal law to which we must submit to avoid misery.

smaller proportion was unemployed in the US in 1915 than in 2000, though per capita, the economy was less than one quarter its 2000 size. This is not to say growth and jobs are never related, but that growth only seems to alleviate unemployment in the short run. Beyond an initial spurt of new jobs, growing the economy is maintenance at best, a chasing of the dragon.

The idea that if the economy does not grow many will be forced into idleness is a relic of late capitalism. It does not correspond to an inherent quality of human economic activity.

Prior to the turn of the century, unemployment was negligible, despite a growth rate of close to 0%. Of course the dynamics of the economy are very different today than in 1750, and much is built around the idea that the future will perpetually be wealthier than the present. Government financing is currently based on the assumption that tomorrow will be rich enough to float today's swelling deficit. Moving away from an economy centered on growth will involve a lot of restructuring, and require us to (re)discover economic channels quite different from those we now travel.

Transitioning away from a growth-centered economy will be politically difficult, though it is ultimately a physical necessity. It is important for us to see that the things that matter to us most—employment, for example—do not necessarily depend on growth as we are so often told. Our tie to perpetual growth is a contingent aspect of how we have organized ourselves economically, not an eternal law to which we must submit to avoid misery.

THE NEED FOR NEW IDEAS

Growth-centered economic policy had its day in the sun, and arguably worked well. But it is not working well anymore. Despite increasing popular awareness of environmental problems, we don't seem to be getting any closer to environmental sustainability. It has been nearly 50 years since we declared war on poverty, yet economic injustice continues to grow worse. We need new ideas, more accurate ways of thinking about these urgent problems.

Understanding the inaccuracy of the ideas guiding economic policy is valuable in itself. We now hold our elected officials responsible for how quickly the economy has grown on their watch, when this is not what we really care about. A citizenry that accurately understands economic growth will instead

hold representatives accountable for things that do matter, such as employment, just distribution of income and wealth, and environmental health. Focus on GDP is at best a misdirected effort, and misdirected effort is wasted effort.

Using GDP as the primary gauge for economic policy is like using a speedometer to determine whether we are going the right direction, and whether we have fuel in the tank. We need GPS and a fuel gauge. An alternative that holds promise is the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI).

Unlike GDP, GPI is reduced by pollution, resource depletion, crime, and other clearly bad aspects of economic activity. GPI also takes into account the distribution of income, the amount of leisure time people have, and the value of household labor, such as growing and cooking one's own food. The State of Maryland is one of the first states to calculate GPI. We should consider this above GDP in steering the future of our state.

Many of the changes that will bring genuine progress come from a familiar list. Local orientation, cooperative management, and innovation away from non-renewable resources are steps in the right direction. Also, work schedules and employment arrangements need to be made more flexible. Though growth does not bring lasting employment, it can inject activity during economic downturns. Job sharing will become essential if we stop relying on growth to pick up such slack. Studies show that more leisure time would be a welcome relief of stress for most US workers, and would allow work to be spread more equitably.

Win-win findings like those of the CBF report are certainly important to an equitable and sustainable future—not because they grow the economy, but because they encourage work needed both by people and by the natural world.★

John David Evans studied ecological economics and public policy at the University of Maryland. He works on housing in Baltimore.

1 <http://www.cbf.org/page.aspx?pid=2794>

2 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union-2012>

3 For more discussion of the problems with GDP measurements, and especially how they under-count the labor of women, watch "Who's Counting? Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies and Global Economics" at http://www.nfb.ca/film/whos_counting/

4 <http://m.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/02/01/fed-survey-says-us-seeing-slow-moderate-growth>

A PREVIEW TO THE THREE-PART INDYREADER WEB-ESSAY:

FEMINISM & DEVELOPMENT ZONES

BY: COREY REIDY

Drawing from of her experience working at Baltimore's infamous development zone, the Inner Harbor, Corey Reidy analyzes the role of women under super capitalism's domination in development zones. This is a preview for some of what she will analyze in her forthcoming essay..

I sat on the edge of the bar. We had closed for the night. I counted my tips and laid them aside. Putting my hands in my pockets, I pulled out little strips of paper, napkins, and corners of children's menus. Scribbled across them were phone numbers, pick-up lines, "compliments", and detailed sexual proposals; all written by gentlemen that I served during my shift. I counted them. As a self-identified anarcha-feminist, I knew what I was doing. Yet, I did it anyway. I laid these exploitations side-by-side along with the day's cash take. Each little stack coldly stared up at me. They calculated my worth.

The capitalist exploitation of women¹ is fundamentally intertwined with our sexual exploitation. This overt sexualization is done in order to strip away personhood. Women are robbed of sexuality—making us into eunuchs; inscribing that we are sexual objects rather than agents.

Women are easily dehumanized via historical enabling structures under capitalism. Service work merely latches onto a female character and reinscribes the identity it wishes her to have. The consumer sees the woman as the product they are consuming. This female form is not a mere mascot for the product. They are the product.

Baltimore's predominant population is African American. Most of the staff at the Inner Harbor's restaurants were People of Color. Uno's was no different. A majority of the kitchen and serving staff were of color. Most of the managers were white men. There were five bartenders. The three female bartenders were all white. The two male bartenders were black. This dynamic played out as a particular horrific dance. I watched both: my white hands pour a whiskey sour and my active participation in the oppressive fetshization of gender and race.

Development Zones are centers of concentrated capitalist activity; they are meant to bring an extreme amount of wealth to an area of a city. This is done under the concept that this wealth would then spread throughout. It is a type of disfigured "trickle down" ideology. Baltimore's Inner Harbor is a Development Zone. In Baltimore, this "trickle down" concept has not worked, under any logic. The wealth is concentrated into national and international corporations. The majority of Baltimore remains impoverished.

We live in a world formed through collective oppression. Through history's invented rationale, and our active participation in sustaining these inventions, we divide one

another into categories of privilege. This is done so that we may determine who has more power than another. According to how you occupy or do not occupy space across the spectrum of these places of privilege, much of your existence is dictated by methodical, learned, and ongoing denials and assaults. So we learn to view the world in intersections. We analyze how the world sees via all our various societally given and self-created realities—so that we may comprehend our present and future navigations.

Since we live under this system of oppression, known as capitalism, our navigations are contextualized under that narrative. Capitalism (and all oppression) aims to be solely that which exists; erasing that which produces. For by doing this, the doer no longer exists; it merely generates.

Capitalism invisibilizes workers' humanities by superimposing its identity across them. Under this, workers have no need to fight for their rights, for they've ultimately been stripped of their personhood. They are merely that which secures what reigns.

This is a brief introduction to the three-part upcoming essay: Feminism and Development Zones. This essay will utilize the feminist approach, the "Personal is Political" in order to unravel how women are particularly exploited under super capitalism. Drawing on her experience as a bartender and server, within Baltimore's Inner Harbor, Reidy will analyze the specific role of development zones. Further, she will critique how this form of oppression works to exploit identities formed around different modes of oppression, and most particularly, the female experiences within these actualities.

I made my way down to a bar that stayed open later than we did. Along with my fellow employees, I watched us drink away a strong portion of the day's earnings; multiple forms of systemic oppression built upon layers. I never could drink very much and felt my lucidity drift in and out of focus as ever-on-repeat conversations made their way around the table. A guy who had been sitting at the Uno's bar earlier came over to reignite a one-way street "flirtation". Looking down at my glass, I didn't have the energy to acknowledge the harasser. One of my fellow bartenders, threw his arm over my shoulders. In one gesture, a kind undertaking was made in order to ward off the harasser and in another a separate form of sexual oppression.

We all endure similar subtle realities under oppression's domination.★

1 I want to recognize that the ways both: women and those whose bodies and/or identities intersect with femaleness, experience exploitation in similar and divergent ways. I will talk about this further in the upcoming essay series.

DIVIDE & CONQUER:

THE MYTH THAT IMMIGRANTS ARE “STEALING OUR JOBS” IS SIMPLY NOT SUPPORTED BY RESEARCH, ARGUES LYNCH, WHO URGES US TO LOOK AT THE FACTS INSTEAD OF LISTENING TO POLITICAL RHETORIC. BY DOING SO, SCAPEGOATING IMMIGRANTS FOR AMERICA’S ECONOMIC WOES IS REVEALED AS NOTHING MORE THAN A TACTIC TO DIVIDE AND CONQUER WORKING PEOPLE.

The constant barrage of anti-immigrant bashing from the current slate of Republican political candidates is not new. It’s not unique. It’s not even particularly imaginative. Whether on the national level among those aspiring to the presidency, or here at home from our conservative friends in the general assembly, Republicans and right-wingers have long used the immigrant community as one of their favorite groups for scapegoating America’s and Maryland’s problems. Unfortunately, in many cases white and black members of the working class have played right into their hands.

Principal among their complaints is the indefensible accusation that immigrants (particularly the undocumented) compete for jobs with Americans and adversely affect our native-born labor force. The logic makes sense. So it must be true, right? Evidence suggests that it’s not true, not in the least. Not only do immigrants not compete for the same jobs as native-born Americans, but their presence in the labor force has a positive effect for American workers, even those without a high school diploma. Consider the following:

In February 2010, economist Heidi Shierholz of the Economic Policy Institute published an in-depth analysis on the wage earnings of American workers and the impact of the recent influx of immigrant job seekers. In the paper, “Immigration and Wages,” she concludes that immigration actually has helped to boost the relative weekly wages for native-born workers at all levels of education, including those with less than a high school degree. She reviews wage data from the US Labor Department between 1994 and 2007 and finds that, during this period, the arrival of 9.6 million immigrant workers (including naturalized US citizens, permanent residents, temporary visa-holders, refugees, and undocumented workers) boosted the weekly wages of US-born workers by 0.4%, or \$3.68, relative to foreign-born workers. Further, in the four states with the largest increases in the number of immigrant workers—California, Florida, New York, and Texas—the overall effect of immigration on the relative wages of US-born workers was positive, mirroring the nation as a whole.

“Americans are right to worry about the declining quality of jobs over the last few decades, but this report shows that, for native workers at all levels of education, immigration had very little to do with it,”

Sherholz commented in a press release for the report. “Other factors, like employers’ aggressive anti-union tactics, the declining purchasing power of the minimum wage, and unbalanced foreign trade are the real culprits behind broad-based declines in wages and job quality.”

A report released by the American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy, in December 2011, reveals similar findings. Like Sherholz, economist Madeline Zavodny concludes in her report, “Immigration and American Jobs,” that immigration not only doesn’t cut into native-born employment, it actually helps to create jobs for native-born Americans. Zavodny analyzed census data in states with high numbers of immigrants and found no evidence that foreign-born workers have any adverse effect on the employment rates of American workers. In fact, she concludes that adding 100 H-2B workers (low-skilled immigrant worker visas) results in an additional 464 jobs for US natives, which constitutes a four factor increase in jobs for every new low-skilled visa granted to an immigrant.

In January 2010, the University of Southern California’s Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration released a report containing complementary findings regarding the financial benefits that a program of legalization for the state’s undocumented labor force would bring to California’s coffers. In this report, “The Economic Benefits of Immigrant Authorization in California,” economists Manuel Pastor, Justin Scoggins, Jennifer Tran, and Rhonda Ortiz provide estimates of the economic benefits that would accrue to California and the nation through authorization of the currently unauthorized workforce. They argue that granting legal status to the 1.8 million undocumented workers in California would result in a net gain of sixteen billion dollars annually to the state, accounting for higher earnings, higher taxes and higher overall spending.

The report states that the direct effects of wage improvements on income and sales taxes is substantial—including \$310 million in state income taxes, \$74.4 million in sales tax revenue, and \$1.4 billion in income taxes for the federal government. Further, the study articulates additional benefits from authorization, including sharp increases in new jobs through both an increase in self-employment among immigrants and increased consumption, and 44,000 fewer children in poverty.

Pastor concludes that rather than using the slumping economy as an excuse not to provide comprehensive immigration reform, we should instead look at these results as an indicator that the opposite is true: to grant legal status to millions of able-bodied workers and entrepreneurs will only help our economic condition.

Sounds pretty good to me. But I know what doubters may be thinking, “That’s California, those liberal hippies. We need local data on the problem of illegal immigrants to find an appropriate solution here in the Old Line State.” Fret no more, my friends. That data has already been given to us.

In August of 2008, the Urban Institute collaborated with Baltimore’s own Annie E. Casey Foundation to prepare a comprehensive, state-wide report on the impact of immigrants on the rates of participation in the labor force by native-born Maryland workers. In their report, “The Integration of Immigrants and Their Families in Maryland,” Randy Capps and Karina Fortuny describe that during the study period (a period of remarkable growth in Maryland’s immigrant population) the labor force participation rate increased for native-born workers, among all educational levels and demographic groups. Specifically, the percentage of African Americans in Maryland’s labor force rose from 73% to 78% during the six-year study period. Additionally, the labor force participation rate for native-born workers without high school degrees rose from 52% to 57%, a five percent increase, despite the influx of immigrant workers into Maryland’s workforce at this time. These findings lead the authors to conclude that the dramatic increase in immigrants in the workforce from 2000 to 2006 “does not appear to have

Not only do immigrants not compete for the same jobs as native born Americans, but their presence in the labor force has a positive effect for American workers.

displaced significant numbers of native-born workers regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.”

Taken together, these data and analyses coalesce around one theme: that immigration brings benefits for the majority of native-

THE REAL DEAL WITH IMMIGRANTS AND AMERICAN JOBS

BY: MICHAEL LYNCH

born workers, and that these benefits are strongest when the immigrant workers are granted access to citizenship. There is no dearth of information and additional research that supports the conclusions of the few mentioned above. In this age of vitriolic speech and political division, it is more important than ever for us to insist on having a reasonable, evidence-based discussion on this important and sensitive issue, taking all social, legal, and economic factors into account.

Scapegoating immigrants (or any subset of the population) for all the problems in our society is a well-rehearsed, age-old tactic done with the intention to divide lower income and working class communities. Blaming immigrant laborers for job loss or economic decline does nothing to advance the interests of working people. Rather, it plays right into the hands of conservative, capitalistic interests who would rather see working class communities divided and in conflict. Several organizations in Maryland have recognized this tactic and are serving as a model for a better way to approach the immigrant workforce.

Unions haven't always been pro-immigrant. Previously, many of the nation's largest unions believed in the myths discussed above and supported a policy of strict immigration enforcement and protectionism of American jobs. However, in the last decade many of the country's largest unions and their local affiliates have come to recognize the significance of the growth in the immigrant labor force and have begun adopting progressive positions on immigration reform, while working hard to recruit and organize immigrant workers throughout the country to strengthen the labor movement.

SEIU states that they are the largest union of immigrant workers in the country. These days, the SEIU is one of the more active

union groups involved in the immigration reform movement. The organization has described its position as such:

It is not only right, but also critical to our Nation's long-term interest that we treat immigrant workers in accordance with our nation's highest values. Doing so will tie all workers closer together—regardless of their backgrounds— and build the strength and unity of working people so we can better address the challenges that plague America's working families.¹

SEIU recognizes that by welcoming and integrating immigrant workers into our labor-force and community, all workers in America will be legal workers, thereby doing away with the system of workforce tiers based on immigration status.

Casa de Maryland (CASA) is another local organization that seeks to integrate, rather than divide, immigrants and the larger working class community. At each of their worker centers, CASA provides employment services, vocational training, financial literacy, job development, and other social services to anyone who walks into one of their worker centers, regardless of ethnicity or immigration status. Contrary to conservative claims, their programs are not just for immigrants, but serve hundreds of non-immigrant citizens as well. CASA has made a point to provide their services and expertise to people of all racial and economic backgrounds in need of assistance. They actively engage workers of all backgrounds in the struggle for economic equality and social justice in Maryland.

United Workers provides yet another example of a unifying approach for empowering the working class. United Workers formed in 2002, right here in Baltimore. It was founded on the principle that all people are

deserving of respect, basic human and labor rights, the right to work with dignity, living wages, and the right to organize for collective power. They celebrate the fact that low-wage

Immigration brings benefits for the majority of native-born workers, and [...] these benefits are strongest when the immigrant workers are granted access to citizenship.

workers hold leadership positions in their organization. They strive to unite workers “across color lines and language barriers,” and to work together for their collective good. They have had some significant victories in their brief ten-year history, including a successful campaign to establish living wage rules for workers at Camden Yards.

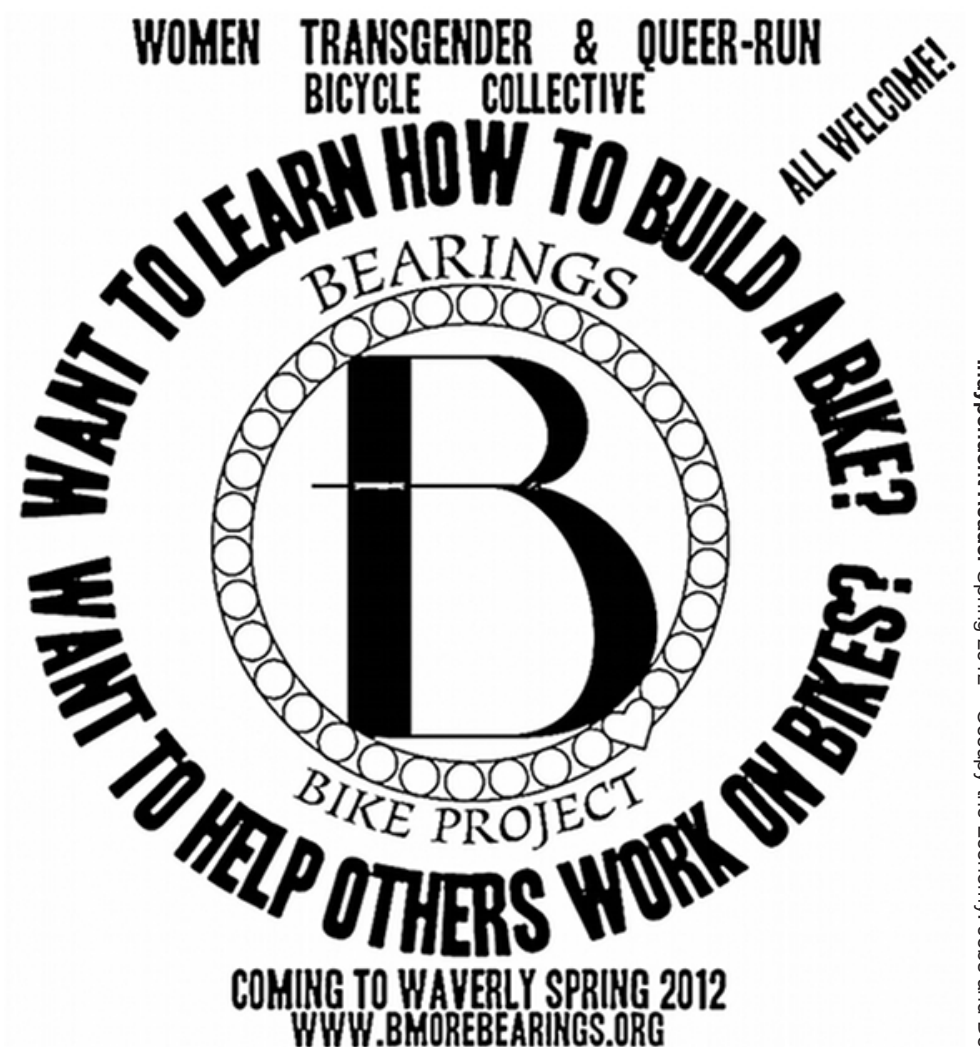
These are just a few examples of organizations that have rejected the “no-win” scenario where working people blame each other for their problems. Rather, they recognize that the best way to improve the condition of low-wage earners is for all workers to organize, find common purpose, consolidate their power, and fight for their collective interests. We can learn from their examples. Only together can immigrant laborers and the working class secure economic and social justice for each other by ensuring full labor and civil rights protections for all workers. In

the words of Cesar Chavez, “We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.”

So, maybe the next time you hear someone ranting and raving about how these “illegals” take our jobs and o u r will have knowledge, and, most importantly, the courage to stand up and challenge this assumption.★

Michael Lynch has been actively working with Maryland's immigrant community as an organizer, advocate, and social service provider for more than eight years. He is the former Vice President of the Board of Directors for the Latino Providers Network, Inc. He is a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Social Work, where he specialized in management and community organization. He spent several years abroad working with impoverished peoples in Mexico and Guatemala. He lives in Baltimore city with his wife and two year old son.

¹ <http://www.seiu.org/immigration/>



FROM PALESTINE TO BALTIMORE, VEOLIA TARGETED BY HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

VEOLIA, THE CORPORATION THAT MANAGES AND OPERATES BALTIMORE'S CHARM CITY CIRCULATOR, HAS BEEN TARGETED BY HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS FIGHTING AGAINST ISRAEL'S OCCUPATION OF PALESTINE. TWO LOCAL JEWISH VOICES AND ORGANIZERS FOR JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE, KAURMAN AND GUNNERY, DISCUSS VEOLIA'S ROLE IN THE ISRAELI/PALESTINE CONFLICT AND EXPLAIN WHY BALTIMORE IS A STRATEGIC LOCATION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL BOYCOTT, DIVESMENT, AND SANCTIONS (BDS) CAMPAIGN.

BY: ANNIE KAUFMAN AND MARK GUNNERY

On November 15th, 2011, six Palestinian activists in the Occupied West Bank boarded a bus for Jerusalem. The bus was designated only for Israeli settlers, not Palestinians. Israeli border police stopped the bus at a checkpoint leading into Jerusalem and arrested the six activists.

They modeled this action on the US Freedom Rides of the 1960s, when civil rights activists rode buses through the South to confront and challenge racial segregation. The Palestinian activists, however, did not demand legal equality with the Israeli bus riders, or the right to ride settler buses. "The presence of these colonizers and the infrastructure that serves them," they wrote in a press release, "is illegal and must be dismantled. As part of their struggle for freedom, justice and dignity, Palestinians demand the ability to be able to travel freely on their own roads, on their own land, including the right to travel to Jerusalem."¹

Israel maintains separate systems of law and infrastructure in the Occupied West Bank for Palestinian residents and Israeli settlers. Palestinians and Israelis drive on separate roads, attend separate schools, and go to separate courts. Access to resources is segregated too, favoring Israelis. For example, the Israeli government builds major settlement blocks on top of aquifers, guaranteeing Israeli settlers access to plentiful, affordable water. The majority of water from the West Bank is moved out of the area and used by Israelis. Palestinians living in areas under Israeli control are barred from tapping into the water system, often aren't allowed to dig wells, and rely on expensive private water sellers for this basic necessity.

The Israeli word for this system of control, *hafrada*, means "separation." Palestinians have another word for it: "apartheid." Like *hafrada*, apartheid literally means separation, but it is a term with implications under international law. In 2002, the International Criminal Court defined apartheid as human rights abuses "committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime."² Palestinians and their allies hold that Israel maintains such a system, both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and within Israel's 1948 borders.

The Palestinian freedom riders targeted two bus companies in their November action. One, Egged, is an Israeli government-subsidized company that provides most of the country's public transport. The other, Veolia, is a huge French corporation that runs transportation, energy, water, and waste management services throughout the world. Veolia runs a bus service on the 443 road, a highway that snakes in and out of the Occupied West Bank and serves Israeli settlements there. Since Palestinians can't enter settlements without security checks and the highway doesn't stop in Palestinian villages or cities, they can't use it. Palestinians call it the "Apartheid Road."

Both companies are the targets of an international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign led by Palestinian rights activists around the world. What

determination, freedom of movement, religious freedom, and access to resources, such as water, land, and airspace. Israelis have these things, while most Palestinians do not. There is a vast power differential; Israel has a tremendous advantage in military, political, and economic terms. Far from being the main victim of the conflict, Israel is more accurately understood as the player holding all the aces, the party whose continual commitment to expansion and settlement has shut the door on negotiation.

In 1967, Israel began a military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, asserting control over a population of about a million Palestinians. Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has devastated the Palestinians who live there, as well as refugees around the world. Israel has used its military to maintain control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in various ways throughout the past 45 years, crushing resistance movements and attacking civilians.

A key part of Israel's strategy, particularly in the West Bank, is to facilitate Israeli citizens moving into the Occupied Territories and establishing colonies. Called settlements, these projects are illegal under international law, which outlaws one country from sending its civilian population into another country that it is occupying militarily. Around 520,000 Israelis live in settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and over 20,000 live in settlements in the Golan Heights.

VEOLIA TARGETED BY BDS ACTIVISTS

The goal of the Palestinian freedom riders, who boarded the bus on November 15th, was to point out that Veolia and Egged are actively and knowingly complicit in the development and maintenance of Israel's settlement enterprise. Beyond running a bus service on Apartheid Road, Veolia has other projects in the Occupied West Bank. Its transportation division helped develop a light rail that connects downtown Jerusalem to settlements in East Jerusalem. It also operates a landfill that serves settlements, Israeli military bases, and Israeli customers from outside the West Bank. While Palestinians are technically allowed to use the landfill, the reality is that most cannot afford to, despite the fact that it is on their land. By facilitating the movement of Israelis into the West Bank, Veolia aids Israel in violating Article 49 of the

Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power from transferring part of its population into occupied territory.

For these reasons, Palestinians and Palestinian solidarity activists have targeted Veolia. In countries from Australia to Sweden, organizers have mobilized to demand that their communities not work with Veolia. Cities like Stockholm and Melbourne have shut Veolia out of huge rail projects, and others, including Dublin, have explicitly committed not to contract with Veolia because of its involvement with the Israeli occupation of Palestine. After South London activists mobilized a year-long campaign called "Bin Veolia," their city denied Veolia a waste treatment contract worth one billion pounds. Overall, since 2005, Veolia has lost contracts worth at least \$14 billion dollars, as a direct result of these actions.

Last December, Veolia responded to unprecedented losses with the announcement of a major restructuring scheme. It is planning to pull out of approximately half of the countries in which it currently operates, and might entirely exit the transportation sector. So far, Veolia has not announced whether it will leave Israel/Palestine, but there are indications it will. Veolia is selling its shares in the light rail, and selling its bus service to Egged.

These activist campaigns are part of a broader BDS strategy targeting companies and institutions that profit from the occupation of Palestine. In 2005, Palestinian civil society launched the BDS strategy to hold Israel accountable to international law. The movement makes three specific demands. First, Israel must end its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967, and dismantle the separation barrier, or "apartheid wall." Second, it must recognize the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full legal equality. Third, it must respect, protect, and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

BDS tactics provoke controversy. Its Zionist critics fear it as a strategy to delegitimize the state of Israel, challenging its existence. The Israeli government has outlawed BDS campaigns, making it illegal for Israelis to even state their support for them. These reactions suggest that BDS deeply threatens people and institutions intent on maintaining the status quo in Israel/Palestine.

The Israeli word for this system of control, *hafrada*, means "separation." Palestinians have another word for it: "apartheid."

most residents of Baltimore do not know is that Veolia is the company responsible for running the city's new Charm City Circulator. For this reason, it has attracted attention from local Palestinian rights activists, who seek to raise awareness inside the US about one of the most distorted and misunderstood international conflicts.

THE ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN CONFLICT, BEHIND THE LIES

Many people in the United States have misconceptions about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Israel is often portrayed as the primary, or sole, victim of the conflict, with the Palestinians as the main aggressor. Palestinians are portrayed as terrorists and anti-Semites, while Israelis are portrayed as people fighting for their very existence. The conflict is also understood by many as the modern manifestation of an ancient religious conflict between Muslims, Jews, and Christians for dominance of the "Holy Land."

The myths surrounding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict help to obscure what is actually happening on the ground. The conflict is about, among other things, self-

BDS is an effective nonviolent strategy for liberation in an often bloody conflict. This may be a reason it worries Israel. Ultimately, they can deal with a few rockets and mortars fired at them by crushing the resistance and civilian population with brutal force. But a peaceful international movement, which targets the institutions that profit from the suffering of Palestinians, might just be an unstoppable force that can lead to a just and lasting peace in Palestine/Israel.

Residents in Baltimore have an opportunity to join the BDS campaign and oppose a company profiting not only from the maintenance of Israeli's settlement enterprise, but also from servicing a small segment of Baltimore's population, while neglecting the needs of the majority.

VEOLIA IN BALTIMORE

Baltimore residents may be familiar with Veolia through the presence of the Charm City Circulator on the wealthier, more tourist- and business-oriented streets of the city. The Charm City Circulator is a Veolia-run free bus service that began operation in 2010. Although for many, the Circulator offers a convenient service and seems free since it charges no fare to board, it is actually a very expensive program for the city, benefiting only a small portion of the community. The system will cost Baltimore \$40 million over five years, including the purchase price for the 21 buses from Veolia. Because Veolia financed half of that bus purchase, the city is effectively in debt to Veolia. Despite all of these costs, the buses run very short routes, which are designed to serve tourists, wealthier and whiter neighborhoods, and the Johns Hopkins Medical Campus.

The Charm City Circulator is only one of the many projects Veolia operates in Baltimore. Veolia Water owns, operates, and directs all

marketing activities for the Baltimore City Composting Facility, which processes 45 dry-tons of biosolids each day and sells sludge to public and private users. Veolia Energy's District Energy owns and operates energy

By facilitating the movement of Israelis into the West Bank, Veolia aids Israel in violating Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power from transferring part of its population into occupied territory.

networks that provide heating and cooling services to many buildings in Baltimore, including state and city government facilities, public housing complexes, universities, healthcare facilities, Harbor Place, Harbor East, the Legg Mason building, downtown hotels, and many upscale office buildings. In addition to the Charm City Circulator, Veolia Transportation also runs the MTA's Paratransit service and the Super Shuttle, along with several other services and businesses.

Veolia Transport's first purchase in the US was Baltimore's Yellow Cab company in 2001. Yellow Cab's owner, Mark Joseph, immediately became the CEO and Vice Chair of Veolia Transportation in North America. He had prepared the state for this process by serving on the Maryland Governor's Advisory Council on Privatization, which planned out how to transform the state's services and infrastructure into profit sources for private businesses.

Since 2001, Veolia has grown into a major force in the operation of American cities. By winning contracts in smaller cities, Veolia has played a crucial role in the privatization of public services and projects throughout

the country. It is the leading water services provider in the US, managing over 600 communities, including the entire city of Indianapolis. It is also the largest private sector operator of transit in North America, with over 200 contracts in cities, transit authorities and airports. Although only serving ten US cities, including Baltimore, Veolia is the largest operator of district energy systems in the country.

From Baltimore, a crucial source of Veolia's power, activists can build a strong voice in the global BDS movement, and at the same time demand that our city reset its priorities. Municipal services should serve residents, not multinational corporations. We can object to the buses Veolia operates in the West Bank, linking Israel's illegal settlements, as we also object to the Charm City Circulator's neglect of Baltimore's poor neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color. We can publicize Veolia's abuse of Palestinian workers, as we struggle to reinstate Baltimore's outsourced Veolia jobs as municipal positions, with the living wages and benefits city workers earn. The BDS movement opens up opportunities for political economic analysis, direct challenges to local injustices, and global solidarity in support of human rights and self-determination.★

1 <http://electronicintifada.net/blog/linah-alsaafin/palestinians-clarify-goal-freedom-rides-challenge-segregated-israeli-buses>
2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_of_apartheid

WASHINGTON AND THE OCCUPATION

Crucially, Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands is only possible due to the bulwark support—military, diplomatic, economic, and ideological—of the United States. The US helps Israel through massive military aid. In 2009, Obama approved spending \$30 billion in military aid for Israel over ten years.¹ Seventy-five percent of that money must be used to buy weapons and technology from US military contractors. Israeli military aid, therefore, subsidizes the military-industrial complex of the US. Thus, Israel has vastly superior firepower than Palestinians, and the US has a guaranteed customer for helicopters, fighter jets, artillery, tear gas, and other weapons. For this reason and others, the US has a vested interest in seeing the violence in the Middle East continue.

The US helps Israel in other ways. One way is by giving it diplomatic cover in the UN. Whenever the UN Security Council moves to criticize Israel, the US exercises its veto power, blocking such resolutions. The US also aids Israel by encouraging divisions within Palestinian politics. For example, the US gives aid and training to Fatah, the party which lost the last Palestinian elections in 2006, while isolating and delegitimizing Hamas, the party which won.

While members of the Obama administration have criticized Israel's settlement policies, they've never gone so far as to threaten cutting off aid to Israel. If Israel's military, diplomatic, and political aid from the US were diminished, it is doubtful that it would be able to continue its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and its further expansion of settlements. Thus, activists in the US can have a role in bringing peace and justice to Palestine by challenging local institutions that profit from Israeli apartheid, such as Veolia.

1 <http://news.antiwar.com/2009/12/18/obama-approves-30-billion-in-military-aid-to-israel-over-next-decade/>



Local activists raise awareness about Veolia at a Charm City Circulator stop outside Penn Station. Photo by: Pastor Heber Brown, III.

Review: **AMERICA BEYOND CAPITALISM** **AFTER THE RISE OF OCCUPY**

BY: STEPHEN ROBLIN

WHY GAR ALPEROVITZ'S BOOK IS MORE RELEVANT IN 2012 THAN WHEN IT WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 2005.

The rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement and its national (and international) offshoots has made Gar Alperovitz's study, *America Beyond Capitalism*, more relevant today than when the first edition was released in 2005. The reasons stem from Alperovitz's deep understanding of the systemic crisis of the U.S. political-economic system. They also stem from his insights into the obstacles that prevent meaningful movement beyond this crisis (and others) and how to overcome them.

Alperovitz's insight into these crucial matters is a product of his approach, specifically a commitment to intellectual as well as political rigor. In other words, his study confronts the following truism head on: achieving meaningful system-wide change requires not only serious ideas about what makes for a more desirable society, but also ideas on how to concretely build towards it. In this way, he eschews "walking intellectual corpses"—ideas that . . . no longer have much structural relationship to the living realities of the modern political-economic world," like dominant theories of liberty, which disregard the liberty-depriving effects that real-world conditions create for ordinary people.

Alperovitz's thought stands apart from the "walking intellectual corpses," in large part, because of his empirical focus. It's through this focus that Alperovitz locates "practical precedents," or real-world institutional experiments and trends that both embody principles of a more decent society and have the potential for concrete growth and development. From this sturdy empirical foundation, Alperovitz launches into fruitful discussions on long-term progressive strategy and vision for a future society.

A CRISIS NO LONGER IGNORED

Progressive activists perform an indispensable role in history by tapping into underlying radical sentiment within the public and channeling it in constructive directions. To perform this role effectively a deep and context-specific understanding of systemic neglect, exploitation, and oppression is required. For those seeking to understand the U.S. context, *America Beyond Capitalism* is an essential study.

Writing several years before the fallout of the financial system in 2007-8 and the misery it has unleashed at home and abroad, Alperovitz made the case that the U.S. political-economic system is in a state of "systemic crisis." One of his major contentions is that the "historic values" of equality, democracy, and liberty have been under systemic attack. In advancing this contention, which Alperovitz does through painstaking research, a picture of a vicious cycle emerges, where the assaults on these values reinforce and reproduce each other, further fueling the cycle as it hurls the nation deeper into crisis. This picture captures well the domestic performance of the U.S. political-economic system during the neoliberal era. For progressive activists,

elevating Alperovitz's contention to the level of popular awareness is a task of crucial importance.

The Occupy movements have largely focused on how assaults on equality and democracy reinforce and reproduce each other. Take for example the connection between rising inequality and deteriorating political democracy. During the current neoliberal period (which is discussed in the introduction to this issue), income and wealth inequality has skyrocketed. According to Alperovitz, it has skyrocketed to such a great extent that in the US "ownership of wealth . . . is medieval in character." He cites a figure in the introduction to the second edition that illustrates well "America's near-feudal patterns of ownership": "the top one percent owns almost half of the nation's investment wealth, and has more net worth than the bottom 90 percent put together." As a result of money-dominated politics, the rise of medieval America has further strengthened the ability of the super-rich vis-a-vis the majority public to exert greater influence over state policy, elections, management of the economy, and more. The Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans illustrates how such influence manifests in policies that only exacerbate income and wealth inequality.

What has received less attention, however, is how individual liberty has deteriorated as a result of the systemic crisis. Alperovitz's discussion on liberty focuses appropriately on the liberty-depriving effects of real-world conditions. The neoliberal era has been marked by the stagnation of real wages and income for the majority of the population and the sharp increase of work hours, as well as debt. Alperovitz puts in perspective these trends:

[H]ourly wages of the bottom 60 percent did not rise as fast as inflation—with the result that the real income each person earned, hour by hour, was actually lower in 1995 than in 1973. For very large numbers of Americans, the only reason total family income rose—very modestly—was that people worked longer hours and/or spouses (mainly wives) went to work in increasing numbers.

He explains further,

Put another way: unless they worked more hours or someone else in the family went to work during these years, many would have been better off if the economy had simply stood still at the 1973 level. Economic growth not only did not increase the real pay that an

hour of work earned, it brought with it price increases that reduced real income.

Some of the areas where prices have increased dramatically are child care, housing, health care, and college tuition. It's crucial to underscore that minorities and women have been disproportionately impacted by these trends.

Alperovitz argues persuasively that without individual and community economic stability and adequate free time, liberty is severely limited under real-world conditions. The reasoning isn't difficult to grasp. "Individual liberty obviously can never be fully realized if men and women must work devastatingly long hours simply to feed and shelter their families," as has been increasingly the case

Alperovitz locates "practical precedents," or real-world institutional experiments and trends that both embody principles of a more decent society and have the potential for concrete growth and development.

for more and more Americans. "Only if individuals have time that they can dispose of freely as they see fit can liberty be truly meaningful," he adds. The same can be said for community involvement and democratic participation. Hence, the vicious cycle.

Alperovitz goes in to much more detail about the nature and various implications of the U.S. systemic crisis, including a discussion on the threat to real ecological sustainability as it relates to this crisis. After digesting his thoroughly researched and well-reasoned analysis, it is difficult to deny his conclusion that overcoming the state of crisis requires "radical systemic change."

Interestingly, at the time of the first edition's publication (2005)—the same year George W. Bush entered his second presidential term—he anticipated a growing popular recognition of the need for radical change. He made this assertion while admitting that the general public largely failed to recognize the severity of the systemic crisis at the time.

"[T]he idea that the American 'system' as a whole is in real trouble—that it is heading in a direction that spells the end of its historic values," he writes, "is difficult, indeed all but impossible, for most people to grasp." Despite this deficient "grasp," he anticipated that the increasing pain inflicted from the crisis would likely provoke a populist "backlash." Furthermore, he claims that the historical trajectory "points toward an ever more sharply focused challenge to corporations and elite concentrations of income and wealth," and that "there is

likely to be an intensified process of much deeper probing, much more serious political analysis, and much more fundamental institutional exploration and development" in the first decades of the 21st century.

In the introduction to the second edition (2011), he explains how this "message seemed distant to many readers" at the time. But in the winter of 2012—after the financial collapse and the Great Recession that ensued, as well as the rise of the Occupy movements and the earlier uprising in Wisconsin—the message should resonate.

In his more recent writing, Alperovitz points to evidence suggesting growing popular openness to radical, progressive change. In a May 2011 article in *The Nation*, he claims that "new economic" experiments, where principles other than profit-maximization are introduced into institutional design, have "proliferated and earned a surprising amount of support—and not only among the usual suspects on the left." He cites the financial crisis and climate crisis as reasons for the increased momentum. In another article, he refers to a 2009 Rasmussen poll that reported how Americans under thirty were "evenly divided" as to their preference for "capitalism" or "socialism." Alperovitz offers a plausible interpretation of the poll:

Even if many were unsure about what 'socialism' is, they were clearly open to something new, whatever it might be called. A non-statist, community-building, institution-changing, democratizing strategy might well capture their imagination and channel their desire to heal the world.

The ability of those involved in the evolving Occupy movements and their offshoots to stoke the "desire to heal the world" and channel it in constructive directions will determine, to a great extent, the potential for fundamental change of the US political-economic system. Doing so requires more than just a deep understanding of the US systemic crisis. It requires strategy, which brings me to the second reason why *America Beyond Capitalism* is more relevant in the winter of 2012 than in 2005.

OCCUPY WEALTH AND STRATEGY

Alperovitz's study offers critical strategic insights. These insights are a product of both his understanding of the current systemic crisis and awarenesses of "practical precedents." To be clear, *America Beyond Capitalism* does not provide a strategic blueprint. Rather, it establishes some of the key parameters that, in my view, should guide any process of developing a longterm progressive strategy.

The starting point for his discussion on the prospects of moving beyond the systemic crisis is his recognition of “not the total blockage of traditional progressive strategy but a substantial and continual fading away of its promise.” Bearing the record of the last thirty-plus years in mind, it is difficult to challenge his claim that traditional reform measures have been weakened. Chief among such reforms are “after-the-fact” taxing and spending measures intended to counter rising inequality and poverty, and antitrust efforts and regulations meant to contain corporate power. A primary structural reason for the decline in the effectiveness of such measures is the decline of union power. “[P]eacetime U.S. union membership peaked at 34.7 percent of the labor force in the mid-1950s; it was a mere 12.9 percent in 2003 (8.2 percent in the private sector),” and this trend, he claims, “is all but certain to continue.” The effect has been a decline in the power of labor unions to serve as a “countervailing force” to corporate hegemony.

Due to this decline and other structural factors, Alperovitz concluded at the time of writing that the systemic crisis and the pain it unleashes for the masses will get worse before it gets better. Events following the 2005 publication have confirmed the projection. Even with the heightened activism we’ve witnessed in the last year, there appears to be no progressive turn in sight in the short-term. As Alperovitz points out in the introduction to the second edition, the Wisconsin and Occupy uprisings have maintained a “resistance posture.” In other words, efforts are geared towards protecting what has been gained in the past, not fighting for more. For example, the struggle now is largely to stall the advance of austerity measures, attacks on collective bargaining, tide of foreclosures, rise of inequality, and so on. “Few have hoped positively and progressively,” writes Alperovitz, “to significantly increase taxation or public expenditures on social programs,” or pursue other measures that can reverse these devastating trends, not simply slow them down.

For these reasons, any prospects for serious progress will require a commitment to the “long haul.” Hence, the need for a long-term strategy. Given the current predicament, a question of paramount importance then is: How can the current “resistance posture” be transformed into one of advancement? Put differently, how can progressives rebuild a base from which to push forward?

In order to gain traction on these questions, Alperovitz calls readers attention to the “extraordinary explosion of practical real-world economic and political experimentation” that has been taking place in the US—under the mainstream media’s radar—over the last several decades. These experiments are united by their institutionalization, in one form or another, of the following principle: *ownership of wealth should be democratized and benefit the vast majority of the public directly.*

These wealth-democratizing experiments come in a variety of forms. He explores them in-depth in part II of the book. I’ll briefly touch on the trends and examples that stood out for me.

The idea of workers directly owning and managing their own affairs without bosses has been a mainspring of much leftist thought. A fact rarely (if at all) publicized in mainstream

discourse is that it’s institutionalization in the US has reached unprecedented levels. Alperovitz examines forms that range from a) partial employee ownership with maintaining the dominant corporate division of labor to b) complete employee ownership and worker (democratic) management.

Employee ownership has largely grown through employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs). ESOPs involve receiving and holding corporate stock on behalf of its employees. “The number of ESOP-style worker-owned firms,” Alperovitz writes, “increased from 1,600 in 1975 to 4,000 in 1980, to 8,080 in 1990, and . . . to roughly 11,000 in 2003. The number of worker-owners involved rose, correspondingly, from

they protect against the ravages of markets, including foreclosures.

He also explores initiatives implemented through Community Development Corporations (CDCs). CDCs are non-profit organizations that have helped to rebuild local economies through developing residential and commercial properties, which can be owned and controlled by the local community. One example that stands out is the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston. It won the right of eminent domain to acquire over 1,300 abandoned properties, “a unique development in modern urban policy,” according to Alperovitz. Since the time of writing, the initiative has brought together CDCs and a comprehensive CLT to

The examples cited here are a tiny sample from the “extraordinary explosion” of wealth democratizing initiatives. They also include alternatives to Wall Street financial giants, such as credit unions (member-owned financial institutions).

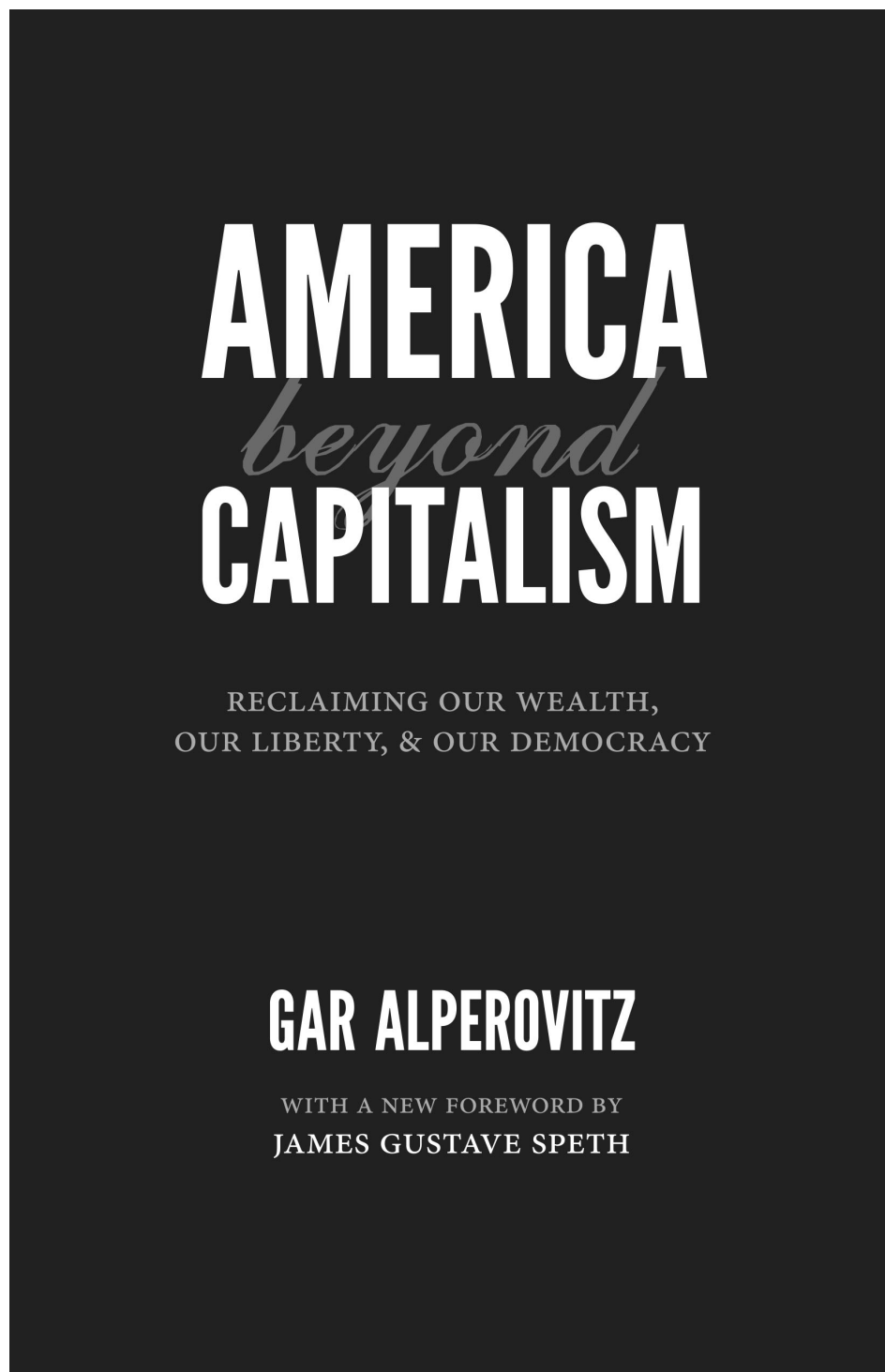
MOVING FORWARD

Last fall, Occupy movements around the country initiated an action that illustrates how progressive activists can reinforce these initiatives in important ways. On November 5, 2011 the Occupy movements organized “Bank Transfer Day.” According to Alperovitz in a December 2011 article published in TruthOut, “nearly two-thirds of a million Americans joined credit unions in the brief five weeks between the beginning of October and . . . November 5,” and “[t]he mass movement created \$4.5 billion in deposits.” The success of the action suggests, in his view, “that many Americans may be quietly beginning to get much more serious about wanting an economy owned and managed on a more democratic basis.”

The success also demonstrates the ability of large-scale progressive activism to do more than raise public awareness of the destructive impacts of elite concentrations of wealth and power, neoliberal economic policies and austerity measures, and so on. Both advancing the principle that wealth should be democratized and benefit the masses and articulating the principle’s moral and political implications, strengthens and sharpens the “elite-targeting strategy” that has been pursued by the Occupy movements. And as illustrated by the “Bank Transfer Day” action, integrating the principle into strategy and tactics resurrects an idea that elites work tirelessly to drive out of popular consciousness: that there are alternatives to the dominant (state)capitalist institutions.

To be clear, the message in America Beyond Capitalism is not to abandon traditional reform measures and unions. Rather, the challenge put forth is to develop a “coherent new strategic direction” through the creative integration of: (1) traditional liberal reforms to the extent feasible, with (2) growing populist anger and movement agitation aimed at corporate power, the extreme concentration of income [and wealth], failing public services, continuing ecological decay, and military adventurism, with (3) an explicit approach that aims self-consciously at slowly building the new institutional basis of a more expansive democratizing politics.

Perhaps the evolving Occupy movements and their offshoots present an opportunity to develop this new strategic direction, particularly its progressive movement component. If so, then the prospects for overcoming the systemic crisis and building a more equal, democratic, and free society may be improved, even profoundly.★



a mere 248,000 in 1975 to 8.8 million in 2003.” Strikingly, “more Americans now work in firms that are partly or wholly owned by the employees than are members of unions in the private sector!”

In addition to worker ownership, Alperovitz explores community ownership models. For example, Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are non-profit corporations that operate based on the principle that the “appreciation of land should be turned to public advantage.” CLTs have been established to develop and own housing, as well as land leased for housing, particularly in neighborhoods where development is driving housing and rent prices beyond what low-income residents can afford. In this way,

transform vacant properties into affordable housing, parks, playgrounds, community centers, and more.

Alperovitz explores larger wealth-democratizing innovations at the state level, such as public ownership of port authorities, public pension funds (like the Retirement Systems of Alabama), and the Alaska Permanent Fund, which gives Alaskan citizens direct stake in oil development in the state. Crucially, Alaska is the only state that recorded a decline in income inequality during the 1980s and 90s. Alperovitz cites research by Scott Goldmist, a University of Alaska economist, who credits the Permanent Fund as playing an important role in this achievement.



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