

Year II

tidal

Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy ■ **Sept 2012**



WORLD'S HIGHEST STANDARD OF LIVING



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- 3 **Communiqué #3**
- 5 **What is to be Done?**
GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK
- 9 **The Revolution Will Not Have a Bottom Line**
SUZAHN EBRAHIMIAN
- 10 **"Strike Debt!"**
FOLKS FROM STRIKE DEBT
- 12 **Stop and Frisk and Other Racist Capitalist Bullshit**
JOSÉ MARTÍN
- 14 **The Power of the Powerless**
JEREMY BRECHER
- 16 **S17: Occupy Wall Street Anniversary**
-
- Notes**
- 18 **The War on Dissent, the War on Communities**
JEN WALLER AND TOM HINTZE
- 18 **On Political Repression, Jail Support, and Radical Care**
MUTANT LEGAL WORKING GROUP
- 19 **On the Transformative Potential of Race and Difference in Post-Left Movements**
PAMELA BRIDGEWATER
- 20 **On Transparency, Leadership, and Participation**
- 21 **Where Are We? Who Are We? Occupy, Space, and Community**
NINA NEHTA
- 21 **Letter to the Well-Meaning 1%**
THE 99%
- 22 **Mutual Aid in the Face of the Storm**
CHRISTOPHER KEY
-
- 24 **Beyond Climate, Beyond Capitalism**
VANYA S, TALIB AGAPE FUEGOVERDE, V. C. VITALE
- 26 **After the Jubilee**
DAVID GRAEBER
- 29 **On Debt and Privilege**
WINTER
- 30 **On Living**
NAZIM HIKMET
- 31 **First Communiqué: Invisible Army**

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Communiqué #3

The world ultimately comes down to dreams and their realization. So many dreams compete for our attention. There's lottery-win dream, with its conjoined reveries of job-quitting and setting your office straight about what you think of everyone (or acquiring your company just to fire them), which gives you time to buy your own bar so that you can drink for free and throw people out. Most spend years working through the permutations of the big win they will never have.

Or there is the moment when your talent is finally revealed, after all these years, and the audience roars at the spectacular beauty of it as the cameras close in on your radiance.

Or consider the underdog miracle revenge shot as time expires, when you bring the championship home to your fans, who had forgotten that hope even existed.

Power, wealth, adoration: so many possibilities are available in our veritable dream marketplace!

When you unpack these fantasies objectively, one concludes that the core modern dream involves some variation of you standing atop of a heap of subjugated humanity, your middle finger raised above your bowed in defiant salute to the universe; a wizard's staff, sword or microphone rests in your free hand; your peace sign necklace lightly bumps against your chest; your theme song swells, righteous; the defeated hoards beneath your feet go wild. What true American does not want that?

It's a shame the place got labeled United States before someone named it the far more appropriate and inspiring "Fantasia." So too, our national flag should rightly display some of our predominant iconography, now reflected largely only in our tattoos. If we had a flag featuring iridescent unicorns and enraged flaming skulls, the rest of humanity would at least have some inkling about the passions that animate life here.

Sure, there's the awkward issue that grand dreams cannot possibly come true for the vast majority. This has even produced occasional unrest. But the astonishing development of dream technologies has ameliorated much potential turmoil. Today, our lives are mostly pure fabrication. People generally have a vague notion that they have some sort of relationship with favorite celebrities; that their product choices help them create a richer world while simultaneously expressing their individuality; that their favorite television and movie characters are actually alive; that things are great and getting better.

We have, in cutting-edge American fashion, taken magical realism from mere literary genre to complete lifestyle. To a large extent, we must credit marketers for this. Marketers divined that commerce could be developed beyond primitive acts of buying things simply to have them. They forged a rich imagistic language that welds shopping with destiny, and expresses purchases as deeper social acts rippling through the noosphere.

Marketing language elevates choice above all. It teaches that one literally creates oneself in the world through choices. The thing one chooses are products: not for themselves, but as icons of the moral and aesthetic properties they embody. Products and associated attributes may be understood only in their proper fantasy-interpretive context. Shoes become alloyed with self worth and metaphysical being. Automobiles do not simply transport, but actually transform you.

Marketers learned to employ this transcendental alchemy everywhere.

In politics, the outright sale of public office is reinterpreted as an exercise of free speech. Apparently pointless foreign wars make sense when we understand that much of the world secretly resents us, simply because we have discovered freedom. Slashing social services enriches the poor. Cutting taxes liberates the wealthy to realize their dearest wish of

helping everyone. The police administer beatings not to force submission, but to liberate us.

Ever more complex transformations become possible. We see this in motion pictures, which most outside the States misclassify as entertainment. Here, when a man dresses up like a bat on screen and takes over an entire city, this constitutes a real psychic event. People here celebrate the faux imaginary bat for making a stand against the insanity of the masses, for standing atop skyscrapers, vigilant, looking down on his inferiors. They believe the bat patrols the same psychic space that they inhabit, in which the appearance of ego-gratifying wish fulfillment cloaks a heart of enlightened self-sacrifice.

The ultimate trajectory of media engineering appears to be complete disembodiment, the total disassociation of your consciousness from the physical shell that people know as “you.” For such a person, the actual circumstances of their physical reality would be irrelevant. With their consciousness ensconced completely in a sponsored dreamscape, they would achieve a state of optimal marketability and become pure consumers, spending without limit or reason.

Last September, a group of us got together to oppose all of this. Maybe because we grew up with all of this psychic manipulation, we realize that the heart of culture lies in the imagination. We want to change the dream.

We have learned that our national fantasies, which play badly enough during a bubble, completely crumble when the bubble bursts. It is then that we realize how much of our environment and lives we have sacrificed to these visions, and comprehend how cheap they are. We see that they have been brought to us by and built on the misery of others. We understand that chasing these dreams impoverishes reality.

We notice that while we’ve been dreaming, life has become much more difficult to actually live.

We’ve concluded it is unwise to develop our escapist capacities to such a degree that we can stand in the middle of climatic meltdown, crippling debt, growing poverty, crumbling infrastructure and conclude that everything seems fine.

We reject the concept of human society as a winner-take-all competition. We believe in a world in which we treat each other with respect and compassion. We disavow the media’s right to induce schizophrenic voices in our minds. We hold as sacred our psyches. Our brains are not one more frontier to be polluted and conquered.

We reject societal dreams whose central premise is that we must buy something to exist. To indulge in them helps sustain a system that is shredding our planet, the real basis for our existence.

We do not count as progress the destruction of the planet, where those native species that have survived cower in shrinking ecosystems, emerging at night to pick through our trash. We do not support poisoning the water we drink and the air we breathe to generate another product.

The market offers the illusory possibility of personal reinvention through product selection, while ensuring status quo exploitation. We disavow the illusory power of picayune choices. We embrace the exercise of meaningful choice in deciding how to live, and reserve the right to make decisions to ourselves.

The current dreamscape will not self-correct. We’ve already seen the beginnings of transhumanist efforts, in which the wealthy seek to make themselves literally superhuman. When a normal person daydreams about standing triumphant at the apex of humanity, they realize on some level it is a fantasy. The 1% actually tries to live the dream. What will the inequality gap become when normal people seem like ants to them?

We have fought over the past year to end the nightmare. The institutions that perpetuate that dream have fought back in their usual ways.

Politicians thanked us for raising the issue of inequality and massive social fraud, and then asked us to turn it over to them to ignore. The police reaffirmed that respect for their authority has become the supreme civic value, to which minor concerns like free speech must be subordinated. The mainstream media initially glamorized the movement, and was even able to use it for ad campaigns, but they ultimately decided that the story of millions impoverished, crushed by debt, suffering for benefit of elites did not provide the appropriate redemptive arc.

We must rely on ourselves. The dreamscape was built over generations, constructed on deep prejudices, and will not yield easily. It rests on the bedrock foundation that the powerful have the right to run the world. We insist that the world can function differently, that human race is capable of more. We will continue to insist, working with each other, building new networks and vocabularies, rejecting cheap fantasies, embracing our collective strength.

In the struggle for our imaginations, we must not yield.

We must continue to reject a hollow life in which we wander through the false dreamland of the elite. Come join us to construct a world based on a shared dream of cooperative human potential.

Resist.
Insist.
Stand together.
Build.
Never surrender.

BY GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

You have asked me this hard question. You have also asked how Washington and Wall Street — politics and economics: political economy — are connected. That connection is through the international banking system, anchored by central banks of various nation-states, secretly protected by entities such as the Bank for International Settlements, the International Organization of Securities Commissions and the World Economic Forum, and supported by non-banking financial institutions. This network controls Washington.

Interest in international capital networks began in the middle of the 19th century. But for our purposes, we can begin after World War II, when organizations facilitating the internationalizing of political economy were established: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Rural Development or the World Bank and, through the operation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, fifty years down the line. Most of these organizations secure the connection between the nation-states of the world and the international banking system. The WTO regulates trade. Its goal is not people but business: to help producers of goods and services, exporters, and importers conduct their business. The United Nations, with its militarized Security Council, provides the ideological justifications for nation-state agreement and conflict within this international network.

Rather than the end of imperialism (postcolonial digital multitudes or social networks), globalization is a new stage of imperialism. When we celebrate social networking, we must not forget that the telecommunication companies — China

Mobile, Deutsches Telekom — were the first ones to break state control and privatize, cross borders to encourage investment in foreign currencies not necessarily located in their country of origin, thus changing the nature of the connection between the state and global capital, making the state serve capital rather than people located within its boundaries. Globalization, information-intensive and working at high electronic speed, has improved, not only the seeming political possibilities of social networking, but also the possibility of trade in foreign exchange—the differences among hard currencies and between hard and soft currencies—the currencies of the global North and the global South — minute, incessant (24/7 because of the world's time-zones), hard to track electronic maneuvers. This “finance capitalism,” has a much higher daily turnover or circulation, which makes capital grow exponentially over against world trade. Already 10 years ago U.S. Gross Domestic Product was less than 2% of the finance capital transaction volume. In addition to this, the so-called service industries have grown in volume over manufacturing as well. Electronic capitalism has also managed to “pulverize the factory floor,” and made it impossible for Labor-based general strikes to achieve more than limited and topical results. This is one of the reasons why the citizen-based (rather than labor-based) general strike (we won't move until our demands are met) that is the Occupy Wall Street movement fits the times.

Lenin's “What is to be Done?” recommends vanguardism in the face of consolidated opposition from world imperialism. Even without the depredations of Stalinism, vanguardism could not lay the basis of a just society. At best it built up a counter-imperialism (neither more nor less “evil” than any other) supported by state capitalism and a “nationalist” education. Although Lenin spoke of bringing the masses to full class consciousness, there was no time for this, and certainly, the building up of a will to social justice generation after generation within the speed required by the ceaseless strategizing demanded in turn by the incessant workings of the vanguardist control of political economy was not on the agenda. The emphasis was on explaining political information, not on an attempt to change habits of mind.

Without the general nurturing of the will to justice among the people, no just society can survive. The Occupy Wall Street movement must attend to education—primary through post-tertiary—at the same time as it attends to the uncoupling of the connection between specifically capitalist globalization and the nation-state. This is an almost impossible task to remember, especially when there are such complex and urgent immediate tasks lined up! But it must be repeated: without this attention, there is no chance of survival—as we have seen in the case of the Soviet Union, China, and other post-revolutionary societies.

Indeed, Mao Zedong tried to solve this problem by the once-and-for-all solution of the Cultural Revolution, whereby he simply reversed the hierarchy that inhabited Chinese society—only to prove that without the patient and continuous system of education, the mind of a people cannot be nourished, and without robust mental resources, we are at the mercy of brainwashing.

The dismantling of the connection between the citizen and the state that we are now witnessing in the US context is basically a dismantling of the New Deal established by Franklin Roosevelt between the two world wars, during the great depression brought about by a crisis of over-production. Roosevelt's Labor Secretary, Frances Perkins, was responsible for planning the New Deal in its detail. It was my great good fortune to live across the hallway from her as a graduate student at Cornell University in the sixties, in the honor society called Telluride House, where I was the first woman student to be given a lodging scholarship. Madame Perkins was the permanent faculty resident. We were the two women living in the house with thirty-two male undergraduates and three male graduate students (among them Paul Wolfowitz). I believe I can say that the idea of devising a welfare state in the United States could come so strongly and so effectively because it was in the hands of a supremely intelligent and feminist woman. I am not someone who believes that women as an essence possess some direct gift of nurture. But it is true that one of the unintended consequences of keeping women separate from gainful employment, keeping them forcibly responsible toward other human beings all their lives, and idealizing them in polite society, historically produced in superbly educated brilliant women a propensity towards other-directed behavior much more readily than in men of comparable class-production, whose ambition could take a self-directed path to success. (Post-feminism is quickly taking care of this, of course.)

It is certainly true that the working class enabled by the New Deal went to fight in World War II, which was inevitably

Without the general nurturing of the will to justice among the people, no just society can survive."

an imperialist war. To write off the welfare state as a result of this is like writing off Socialism because the German Social Democrats, at the time the most powerful socialist Party in Europe, voted in war credits in 1914.

The Reagan-Bush era in the United States, together with Thatcher's regime in the United Kingdom saw the beginnings of the dismantling of the welfare state that we are witnessing today.

In globalization the sovereignty of the state is compromised as a result of the removal of barriers between national and international capitals, commonly called economic restructuring or "neo-liberalism." In the best concept of the democratic nation-state, the state's chief function is the redistribution of revenue for social welfare according to the constitution. After restructuring, the state's role becomes managerial of capitalist globalization. Thus the state becomes accountable to business rather than to people, the predicament of the 99% versus the 1%. It goes without saying that this cannot be redressed simply from within the democratic electoral mechanism of a state. The law can forever be changed in favor of business rather than people, if the entire polity is not educated to desire justice for all.

To repeat, then: the largest sector of global capital is finance capital. Finance capital is basically traded in foreign exchanges. The more often (finance) capital turns over or circulates, the more its volume increases. For financial globalization to work, the world must remain unevenly divided between the global South and the global North, so that there can be constantly fluctuating differences in the value of hard currency and soft currency, so that financialization can operate. The banks in all nation-states are clued into this game and so must turn over money as often as possible—borrowing and lending fast and playing one sort of investment over against another. World trade turns over less often because it is connected to material goods and services. But world trade also has a very large "futures" trading sector that plays into finance

Occupy Town Square, Bushwick, Brooklyn, July 2012





Illustration by Sandra Nurse

capital. Since the Reagan-Bush era the barriers between national capital—in our case federal regulations—and this play of global capital have been slowly relaxed, until, the collapsing of investment banks and commercial banks in 1999 effectively removed conflict of interest prohibitions between investment bankers serving as officers of commercial banks, took control away from government controlled enterprise, and gave it over to global capital flows. It is because of the demand that capital flow in and out as fast as possible that, even when human beings were suffering and being beaten down into the 99%, as a result of the housing crisis, banks had to be “bailed out” so that

they had enough funds to continue in the inflow and outflow of capital that makes finance capital turn over. (The IMF regularly bailed out banks when nation-states were in debt-crises.) This is an insane, inhuman and seductive game, which needs to be controlled so that it can be medicine—in the interest of social productivity—rather than poison. As the U. S. General Accounting Office said in its generally ignored 2004 report on “predatory lending:” “The Secondary Market (where previously issued financial instruments such as stocks, bonds, financial futures, and loans are bought and sold) May Play a Role in Both Facilitating and Combating Predatory Lending.” The connection

with Washington comes clear if we look at the past few years when states fought bitterly to have some kind of regulation and the federal government fought back strongly to squelch these efforts. We must also take into account the so-called non-banking financial institutions—insurance firms, pawn shops, cashier’s check issuers, check cashing locations, currency exchanges, microloan organizations and the like,—which are free of any national and international regulatory efforts. In order to correct political economy, we cannot rely on politics alone.

It so happens that traditionally (Northern) Democrats are more into regulation and Republicans less—but it is not really a question of party politics. It is much rather a question of an educated electorate that understands what it is that is involved in the undoing of a bad connection between Washington and Wall Street and not simply be focused on self-interest.

What we must also understand is that real estate came to be the field in which this kind of insane global flow of capital would be encouraged because it happened to be the field which was the least protected. In other words the abstract areas which capital inhabits are not necessarily controlled by human decisions to do specific kinds of harm. In such a situation, unless the polity is educated to want social justice, it can be taken in by many different kinds of slogans. It is not a question of subject matter alone, nor of gathering information. It is a question of making minds that will read the information right. It is a question of educating in such a way that the intuitions of democracy and justice for everyone, rather than just self-interest, becomes habitual: working for standards not necessarily motored by competition; not being rewarded for leadership; not encouraging role models; one could go on. The pursuit of happiness must be somewhat curbed in the interest of justice for all. And liberty must not be confused with capital flow for a financialization that need create jobs only so people will borrow.

“The citizen cannot afford to be taken in by the old slogans: job creation, small is beautiful, freedom from state control, economic growth, heritage. The vanguard has sold out to unregulated capital in flow and out flow; putting all kinds of debts together and selling them at high risk. Student loans, like women’s micro-credit, are features of this.

Mitt Romney accuses Obama of “putting free enterprise on trial.” When the state is completely subservient to global capital, flowing in and flowing out at the highest possible rate, private enterprise is not “free.” An ill-educated society can be persuaded with the obvious lies of trickle-down economic advantage in jobs created by capitalists rather than if the state has a robust structure of redistribution. Small business is no longer an unquestioned good, when venture capital regularly promises global connections as quickly and as broadly as possible. Metaphors can then be negotiated as literal truth. Any attempt of the state to serve the citizen can be misrepresented as a design on the part of the state to control. Every attempt to save the nation-state economy so that there can be socially just redistribution can be described as state-control of private lives. All efforts by the state to serve business and not people, giving everything over to make capital flow in the interest of the financialization of the globe, can be called “free” enterprise. Therefore, in addition to the legal involvement on the national and international levels, we must continue to emphasize the need persistently to construct a mindset to desire justice for all, from the primary to the post-tertiary level, if a just society is to prevail. This is not an impractical or “individualistic” lesson. The electorate must learn to read well enough, generation by generation, so the play of metaphors is seen clearly. Social networking is useful only with a mindset willing social justice.

This is not a situation of either state control or small is beautiful. What we have to learn to do is demand and protect such laws as will see to it that the federal government will not work only in the interests of the play of finance capital, but also in the interest of good lives for the welfare of human beings.

Another slogan to watch out for is “giving back.” As the volume of turnover decreases, so called diasporic investment across borders, especially in the country of origin, can raise the amount greatly. This activity can take the form of foreign direct investment being ideologically justified through culturalism and heritagism. In the name of globalizing education, there is now also a trend toward foreign direct investment in for-profit education that can be justified by these unexamined slogans.



Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian writer and activist, in a teaching circle with children in the hills of Lebanon, early 1970s.

If one wants to bring about equal justice within the nation-state alone, through electoral politics alone—although this is extremely important—one ignores the fact that the banking system, with its global connections, now has far superior powers than a democratically structured state that must turn over its executive leadership at regular intervals. The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in general is more tied to the Constitution, which belongs to another era—today’s global politics being to a surprising extent released from constitutional obligations. It is very important to remember that Washington lobby politics is well organized by and for the apologists for seeking globalization as the only goal. To engage with them is not only a question of winning through verbal violence and managing votes. However idealistic it might seem, it is also and perhaps only winnable through a sustained argument advanced by people trained into an intelligent analysis of what political/economic moves are good for the general public. Lenin’s “What is to be Done” concentrated on the party. Our “What is to be Done” must concentrate on the mindset of the electorate. For times have changed. The citizen cannot afford to be taken in by the old slogans: job creation, small is beautiful, freedom from state control, economic growth, heritage. The vanguard has sold out to unregulated capital in flow and out flow; putting all kinds of debts together and selling them at high risk. Student loans, like women’s micro-credit, are features of this. When we think about education we must therefore keep in mind that if business administration is given into the hands of people who are untrained in the necessity for social justice, it cannot lead to the world for which we are striking. Most business ethics courses teach the maximum of business sustained by the minimum of ethics. If material gains within political economy are not supplemented by an other-directed and just culture that protects the fragility of the public use of reason, there is no hope for the future. We must ensure that the public sector become accountable for social welfare. The only way to ensure this is through bringing back regulatory laws. The trend now is to praise individual benevolence. Good rich people helping out the poor. The will to social justice, sustained by education, engaged in electoral activism, using regulated capital for social productivity and individual fulfillment, is not to be equated with this. ■

The Revolution Will Not Have a Bottom Line

BY SUZAHN EBRAHIMIAN

Fire is tricky. You can only create the potential for energy to happen, allow for the right conditions and make continuous sparks until ignition. Humans don't make fire—we only facilitate it and fuel it. What thousands of people created across the country in the fall of 2011 was a series of roaring fires—pure energy; love and rage and indignation. Instead of seeking to create space within which many more liberatory fires can be ignited, growth has been objectified and sought for over the past eight months, as if growth were a containable product rather than a human process.

Since our small focused occupation of Wall Street, a roaring multitude of direct actions have been labeled as the movement. Just like the CEOs of Wall Street, we created a bottom line: maintain “Occupy Wall Street” as a recognizable brand, get people on board with our brand, wash, rinse, repeat. Occupy Wall Street has sadly taken well to this model. The master's tools—quantification, progress, development—have been reached for without serious consideration as to their origins or effects.

The real difficulty of anarchism is that revolutionary growth is not *hierarchically* horizontal. Constant unfocused outreach and total inclusivity without acknowledging boundaries creates a behemoth of unsustainability, a roaring wave of burnout and frustration as well as alienation and disillusionment. On top of this unsustainability, we seek to fossilize developments into “wins” or “losses.”

But what is a successful action or movement? When we understand success as an event, it becomes a constructed permanence—a “win.” This action reinforces what I call the hierarchy of stability—where the thing that seems or that can be made to seem permanent, containable, and quantifiable is understood to be a legitimate (or more legitimate) authority. This mindset illuminates the common belief that “success” indicates a brush with the universal—a truth. But permanence is a social construction, and success is time/space/place specific. It is a confluence of layered dynamics and elemental movements, all aligning and intersecting. Success is relative.

CEOs consider themselves successful, and therefore expect that all should understand and accept the validity of the system they have created for themselves. A large part of this is their ability to point to a truth (capitalism) and a permanence (the economy) for justification, from which they can measure their success. A normalized business person will tell us to get jobs because they can't conceive of what else one might do that is valid. They have found a way, by defining

their own standards of success as a universal to justify the dehumanization of anyone who exists outside of their system.

OWS is literally using the master's tools when we measure ourselves based on quantitative success. The number of people that came to the mobilization matters little if lives remain unchanged—if everyone goes back to their offices. Concepts such as “real wins” and “victories” are useful but dangerous. Liberation isn't hidden within “the Answer”, the tactics that work best, or the propaganda that reached the most people. Liberation is facilitated by a fundamental shift in priorities on all levels, towards collective support and dismantling control and oppression over each other. Eventually, we will forfeit liberation for the sake of being able to define exactly what a win looked like. In other words, the dictator is not always a

King—it can be the idea of kings. And, in being blind to this, we have fundamentally underestimated our ability to recreate our own oppression.

The distinguishing factor between an action and a revolutionary action is its intention. So, more important than the structure of growth we strive for, it is growth itself that must be re-imagined. We must not expand for expansion's sake. That is what the great vampire squids of industry do. We must not forget that growth isn't just about numbers. The most beautiful kind of growth is priceless, uncontainable, and unquantifiable:

it is a growth that does blindly expand nor is it fit for replication. The nature of our growth must be re-prioritized in order to reach the paradigm shift we will need to survive as a collective. ■

“ Just like the CEOs of Wall Street, we created a bottom line: maintain “Occupy Wall Street” as a recognizable brand, get people on board with our brand, wash, rinse, repeat. ”

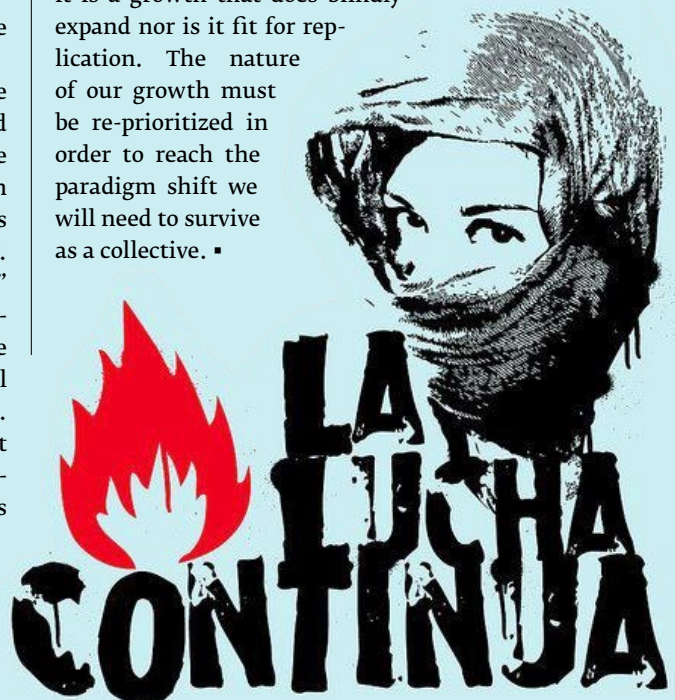




Photo by Andrew Burton

“Strike Debt!”

BY FOLKS FROM STRIKE DEBT

When you strike debt,
know that:

1

You are not a loan.

Debt is not personal, it is political. The debt system aims to isolate us, silence us, and scare us into submission with the all-powerful credit rating. Now is the time for us to step out of the shadows together in public. Debt is immoral. It is indentured servitude, a type of bondage. We are forced onto a path of endless repayment and are supposed to be ashamed when we can't climb our way out of debt. We have to sell our time, our souls, working jobs we don't care about simply so we can pay interest to the bank. Now that debt is so rampant, many of us are ashamed for putting others in debt. Our professions from teacher to lawyer and physician have become means to direct more victims to the loan sharks. So perhaps above all, we strike the fear, refuse the shame, end the isolation. When we strike debt, we are giving ourselves permission to be more than a set of numbers. In a sense, we create the possibility of an imagination. We are not abdicating our responsibility, we are exercising our innate right to refuse the unjust.

2

We live in a debt society, buttressed and secured by the debt-prison system.

\$1 trillion of student debt. 64% of all bankruptcies caused by medical debt. 5 million homes foreclosed already, another 5 million in default or foreclosure. Credit card debt is \$800 billion, generating an average 16.24% interest on money banks borrow at 3.25%. Permanent indebtedness is the pre-eminent characteristic of modern American life. Keeping all this in check is the peculiarly U.S.-specific apparatus, in which mass incarceration, racialized segregation and debt servitude are mutually reinforcing. The choice is stark: debt or jail. With 2 million in prison, seven million involved in the “correctional” system in various ways and sub-prime loans and other predatory credit schemes targeted at people of color, this is a system designed to disenfranchise and exclude.



Eviction defence, Occupy Minneapolis, 2012

DEBT IS THE TIE THAT BINDS THE 99%. We must transform our failed economic system that impoverishes millions while destroying the ecosystem. Using a diversity of tactics that includes a Rolling Jubilee, a People's Bailout, and vigorous organizing towards a debt strike, Strike Debt seeks to abolish debt as it currently exists and reconstruct a just society where our debts and bonds are to one another and not the 1%. The 99% are forced into debt to pay for basic social needs like education, housing, and healthcare while the 1% profits. We can no longer afford our own oppression. We are citizens, homeowners, renters, teachers, students, parents, children, debtors, and defaulters who don't owe the banks anything. We owe each other everything.

3

There's A Debt Strike Going On.

There is something happening in our debt society right now. 27% of student loans are in default. 10% of credit card debt has been written off as irrecoverable. Foreclosures and mortgage default are rampant. People are walking away from debt. These actions take place driven by necessity, by desperation but also by something else. What do we call this? We could call it refusal. We could also call it a debt strike. In this time of high unemployment, battered trade unions, and job insecurity, we may not be able to signal our discontent by not going to work, but we can refuse to pay. Alongside the labor movement, a debtors movement. For those who can't strike, we propose a Rolling Jubilee in which we buy debt in default, widely resold online for pennies on the dollar: and then abolish it. It will be funded by the People's Bailout, and other forms of mutual aid that will prefigure alternatives to the debt society.

4

When we strike debt, we live a life rather than repay a loan.

We refuse to mortgage our lives. We reject the math that debt forces on us; math that says we cannot "afford" to care for our communities because we must "pay back" the banks forever, above and beyond what was borrowed. We question the dominance of the market in every aspect of social and cultural life. We abolish the trajectory of a life that begins with the assumption of debt before birth, and ends with a post-mortem settlement of accounts. This is financial terrorism. We intend to reconstruct a social world in which we see each other as people, recognize our differences, and acknowledge that the chimera of permanent economic growth cannot outstrip actual ecological resources.

5

We claim the necessity of debt abolition and reconstruction.

Abolishing debt is held to be an impossible demand. "Debt must be repaid!" Unless you are a corporation, bank, financial services company, or sovereign nation. We understand that debt is at the heart of financial capitalism and that the system is rigged to benefit those at the top. The question is not whether debt will be abolished but what debt will be abolished. The banks, the nation-states and the multinationals have seen their debts "restructured," meaning paid off by the people, who now have to keep paying more. The debts of the people in whose name these actions were undertaken should also be abolished. Then we can begin reconstruction, transforming the circumstances that create the destructive spiral of permanent personal debt. Right now we must borrow to secure basic goods that should be provided for all: housing, education, health care, and security in old age. Meanwhile, around the world, debt is used to justify the cutting of these very services. We understand that government debt is nothing like personal debt. The problem is not that our cities and countries are broke but that public wealth is being hoarded. We need a new social contract that puts public wealth to equitable use and enshrines the right to live based around mutual aid, not structured around lifelong personal debt. ■

Stop and Frisk

and Other Racist, Capitalist Bullshit

BY JOSÉ MARTÍN

1. A white police officer stops a young man of African descent in the young man's own neighborhood. He claims there's probable cause; the young man fits a vague description. Violation number one: the fourteenth amendment says we get equal protection under the law, regardless of race.
2. The cop detains his prey without charges, and threatens force against the young man if he doesn't answer the officer's questions. Violation number two: the fifth amendment protects our life and liberty and right to due process.
3. The officer frisks the young man. Then, he decides to reach his hands in the man's pockets, claiming something felt like a weapon or drugs. Violation number three: the fourth amendment secures our person and property against unreasonable search or seizure without probable cause. The officer isn't a rogue cop. He's one of tens of thousands of police told to keep up his stops, frisks, and detentions, as part of a policy of so-called preventative policing. For Black and Latino men, this increasingly makes the modern city inhospitable, to say the least.
4. Statistically speaking, the officer is unlikely to find anything. He sends the young man on his way with a taste of police force. Keep the people scared, and they won't do anything. Law and order.
5. Suppose the officer does find something--a dimebag, for instance. Or maybe even a pistol. Yes--you may like it or not, but a lot of your neighborhood drug dealers are business people seeking to hustle their way out of debt or poverty. If we didn't live under an economic regime--Wall Street--that rewarded hustling and penalized people who don't hustle, we wouldn't have drug dealing.

The young man ends up moving through a penal system with hundreds of thousands of other people of color. Men and women imprisoned for alleged fare evasion on the subway, a public transit system with rapidly increasing fares because the city owes the banks money and won't raise taxes on the rich. Brown people targeted for engaging in recreational drug use, which the law somehow finds more threatening than when white college kids do it. People sitting in prisons because they did something out of the pain and desperation of poverty, joblessness, service cuts. Families forced into more debt than usual because their main income earner has been taken away from them; other family members in turn locked up because they're forced to hustle for themselves and their families. Men in cages for not paying child support and other court-appointed fines.

It paints a bleak picture. People, human beings, don't belong in cages. Maybe cages make sense to keep some people from hurting others--that's a debate. But we've lost all of our humanity if we don't revile the idea that our society is placing people in cages because they couldn't afford the train fare, couldn't make the court-appointed fines, couldn't pay their debt, couldn't figure out a lawful hustle.

* * *

Talk to most white folks about the Bill of Rights: the first amendment, the fourth amendment, the fifth amendment, the fourteenth amendment, and so on. They will become obstinate and indignant about any possible infringement on their rights. Talk about the Bill of Rights with many of young people of



Top: Long Beach, CA, 1965
Right: Brooklyn, NY, 2012

color, and they are likely to look at you cockeyed when you suggest that they even have any rights a police officer or the prison system would ever respect.

Rights are not inalienable. They are not delivered from on high. We are not entitled to them. Rights are demanded by those who have abdicated their power to a representational authority. We respect someone else's claims to power over us, and then we suggest that there are things they can't do to us. Those are rights.

But that isn't the world we need to live in. We can take power for ourselves and our own communities. In a world where we shared power and accepted no permanent structures of authority over us or the land, we wouldn't need rights.

Respect for rights is not our ultimate goal. Rights are our tools in the present age, tools that we have to defend ourselves against an otherwise even more brutal system. To place rights onto a pedestal is to legitimate that system. To think of rights tactically is to leave open the door that we can concoct something better. ■



The Power of the Powerless

BY JEREMY BRECHER

The 1% possesses the lion's share of the world's wealth; they dominate the world's political systems; they command armies of heavily armed cops and soldiers; their views are propagated by another army of media and academic flacks. Yet we know that social movements and popular upheavals ranging from abolitionism to the American civil rights movement, from the Women's Liberation Movement to Polish Solidarity, from the Latin American democratization movements to Occupy Wall Street have changed societies. How can they have such powerful effects when they are made up of people who appear — and feel — so powerless within existing institutions and when they are opposed by such massive concentrations of power?

There's a big hint in Bertolt Brecht's *From A German War Primer*:

General, your tank is a strong vehicle.
It breaks down a forest and crushes a hundred people.
But it has one fault: it needs a driver.

The power of the general, however great it may appear, depends on that driver. More generally, those who dominate can do so only because others support or acquiesce in their domination. It is the activity of people — going to work, paying taxes, buying products, obeying government officials, staying off private property — that continually re-creates the power of the powerful.

This dependence is captured in the labor movement anthem *Solidarity Forever*:

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn.
But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn.

That dependence of the 1% on the 99% can be parlayed into power through the formation of a collective subject or actor, most often in the case of labor struggles a union:

We can break their haughty power, gain our freedom when we learn
That the union makes us strong.

After closely following the massive strikes, general strikes, street battles, peasant revolts, and military mutinies of the Russian Revolution of 1905 that forced the Czar to grant a constitution, Mohandas (not yet dubbed "Mahatma") Gandhi concluded, "Even the most powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled." Shortly thereafter he launched his first civil disobedience campaign, proclaiming "We too can resort to the Russian remedy against tyranny."

In 1905 Rosa Luxemburg was also watching the Russian Revolution. In her great book *The Mass Strike* she emphasized how wrongheaded it was to think of such a period of upheaval as a simple sequence of events following a single pattern or as a progression from small, local, "economic" struggles to large, national, "political" ones:

"Its use, its effects, its reasons for coming about are in a constant state of flux. ... political and economic strikes, united and partial strikes, defensive strikes and combat strikes, general strikes of individual sections of industry and general strikes of entire cities, peaceful wage strikes and street battles, uprisings with barricades -- all run together and run along side each other, get in each other's way, overlap each other; a perpetually moving and changing sea of phenomena."

We should learn from Rosa Luxemburg that the self-organization of the 99% takes diverse forms and often combines different forms and/or shifts rapidly among them.

Occupy Wall Street has been lectured ad nauseam by self-proclaimed experts on social movements that it needs a specific list of demands "like the civil rights movement." This is a travesty of civil rights history. While civil rights campaigns made plenty of specific demands ("serve black patrons at the Woolworth's lunch counter"), it actually contested the whole edifice of American civilization. Its core objective (hardly a "demand" that could be fulfilled by anybody) was to abolish white supremacy in the United States — an institution that preceded the birth of the nation and was embedded in the warp and woof of every institution and locality. To achieve racial equality, the civil rights movement "demanded" a transformation of the American class structure that would abolish poverty, end imperialist adventures like Vietnam, and redirect social resources from military to human needs. Like the mass strike as analyzed by Rosa Luxemburg, the civil rights movement was driven by the dialectic between transformational aspirations and concrete, realizable objectives that began to realize them in the here and now.

OWS has similarly managed to combine highly specific demands (renegotiate a homeowner's mortgage; end stop-and-frisk), broad social reforms (free higher education for all), and visionary objectives like a world no longer dominated by the 1%. While such a range of objectives can from time to time "get in each other's way," in the long run they support each other. The specific objectives are partial embodiments of the wider goals; the wider aspirations help inspire and justify the sacrifices participants must make day to day.

How the potential "power of the powerless" can actually be utilized depends on the specific character of what Gene Sharp calls the "pillars of support" for domination. For example, in the civil rights era many Southern businessmen swung from "massive resistance" to encouraging acquiescence in desegregation because they feared the reactions of Northern business investment to racist violence. The Kennedy Administration moved to support civil rights, albeit tepidly, in part from its fear of foreign disapproval of US racism, especially in newly independent African countries courted by the Soviet Union. Democratic Party politicians were highly dependent on large

black voting blocs in Northern cities like Detroit and Chicago, but their support was jeopardized when Democrats in the South perpetrated and Democrats in the White House and Congress tolerated highly visible racial oppression. While the civil rights movement was a direct confrontation with the evil of segregation, it actually drew much of its power from the “indirect strategy” of putting pressure on the forces whose acquiescence made it possible for segregation to persist.

The threat to power holders may be a specific and targeted withdrawal of cooperation. For example, in the anti-sweatshop movement, student protestors made clear that their campuses would be subject to sit-ins and other forms of disruption until their universities agreed to ban the use of their schools’ logos on products made in sweatshops. A campaign to define refusal to pay debts as a form of civil disobedience against an immoral and oppressive system could well pose a serious threat to financial institutions — and thereby force major changes in private and public debt policy.

In addition to such targeted threats, the withdrawal of cooperation may generate fear of a more general social breakdown, what is often characterized as “social unrest.” For example, in the late 1990s, under heavy pressure from the World Bank, the Bolivian government sold off the public water system of its third largest city, Cochabamba, to a subsidiary of the San Francisco-based Bechtel Corporation, which promptly



Tunisian Revolution, 2011

doubled the price of water for people’s homes. Early in 2000, the people of Cochabamba rebelled, shutting down the city with general strikes and blockades. The government declared a state of siege and a young protester was shot and killed. Word spread worldwide from the remote Bolivian highlands via the Internet. Hundreds of e-mail messages poured into Bechtel from all over the world demanding that it leave Cochabamba. In the midst of local and global protests, the Bolivian government, which had said that Bechtel must not leave, suddenly reversed itself and signed an accord that included every demand of the protestors. There is little doubt that it did so out of fears of social unrest.

The result was the self-organization of a previously powerless population of indigenous people and the poor. That was manifest in the subsequent election of one of the world’s most radical governments. But it also reflected in the fact that Bolivians have to a considerable extent continued to be self-organized. Rather than disbanding the movement and turning their collective power over to the new regime, they appear to have retained the ability to contest the practices and decisions of “their” leaders, to consent or to again withdraw their cooperation. Retaining the capacity of a popular movement to act even when its representatives hold state authority may provide a way to challenge the cooptation and corruption that so often follows what at first appears to be empowerment through the political process.

So our self-liberation is contingent on our utilizing the dependence of domination on the cooperation of the 99%. That means challenging specific forms and cases of domination in ways that also embody a challenge to domination as a whole. It means finding effective ways to undermine the pillars of support for domination in those specific instances. It means disobeying power holders in ways that inspire growing solidarity among the 99% all over the world. It means retaining our power to act collectively and to withdraw our cooperation even from those who purport to represent our interests. And it means constantly transforming our own praxis -- to learn from our experience, to adapt to changing circumstances, and to push forward the dialectic between concrete actions we can take today and the radical transformation that is necessary to establish a just and sustainable world. ■

ACT-UP die-in at New York Stock Exchange, 1989



On September 17th, 2011 Occupy Wall Street was born. A hundred people occupied Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan and opened a space for imagination. We began to share food, clothing, and shelter. We sought refuge in the shell of a concrete jungle and found community. Inspired by our actions, occupations began throughout the globe. In a matter of months nearly all of them were crushed by the weight of repression and co-optation, but occupy cannot be stopped. It is a collective unleashing of anger and frustration at a dying capitalist system and points toward a new world. Let us create this world together. Year 2. See you in the streets.





Community protest against police violence, Anaheim, CA, July 2012

Notes

The War on Dissent, the War on Communities

BY JEN WALLER AND TOM HINTZE

Over the summer, we travelled around the country, holding community dialogues and legal trainings for activists involved with Occupy and related movements. In these conversations, we noticed a recurring desire to separate issues of state violence from the other work of Occupy—especially from activists with certain levels of privilege. Everyone is eager to talk about the crimes of the banks; but when it comes to police and the penal system, many continue to believe these issues are merely a distraction from our real enemies on Wall Street.

But who guards Wall Street and its interests across the nation and the world? Who destroyed Occupy encampments across the country last Fall? Who oversees the eviction of families when they can't pay their mortgages or their rents? Who breaks up picket-lines when they start to get militant? Who carries out Stop and Frisk—and worse—on communities stricken by unemployment, predatory debt, and austerity measures? Who struggles to enforce the current system as it collapses under its own contradictions before our eyes?

To separate policing and the legal system from the other injustices we are fighting is a dangerous and counterproductive line of thought. First, it weakens the often-delicate relationships developed between Occupy and communities of color. Second, it neglects the plight of comrades from Occupy and other dissenting groups routinely subjected to brutality, surveillance, imprisonment, and even entrapment by the

state apparatus.

To be clear, the repression of Occupy is not identical to that imposed on an everyday basis on communities of color. To cite just two figures: First, 40 percent of the incarcerated population of the United States are black, while black people make just 13 percent of the overall US population. Second: a recent study by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement shows that from January 1 to June 30, 2012, there have been 120 extra-judicial killings of black men and women in this country. That's one police murder every 36 hours, not counting police killings of people of other races.

We recognize this difference in experience between the Occupy movement and communities of color confronting issues such as mass incarceration and police brutality; yet it remains urgent to connect the dots between various forms of state violence against resistant populations and the overall economic crisis. Studying history can teach us the tools and patterns of state repression in order to develop strategies for fighting back. We must all know our rights and how to assert them.

These intersecting issues came to a head in Anaheim, California in late July. Against the surreal backdrop of the Disney Land tourist economy, the Anaheim police unleashed dogs and rubber bullets against local residents when they rose up in nonviolent protest against the police execution of Manuel Diaz on July 21. Diaz, a young, unarmed Latino man, was shot in the back of the head as he fled from police in his neighborhood. After protests by friends, family, and community members intensified against the Anaheim Police Department, riot cops in paramilitary gear were mobilized to end the unrest. The militarization of Anaheim—and the resistance thereto by community members—is a significant flashpoint in the overall history of struggles against both police violence and political repression.

With protests intensifying and more police departments under public scrutiny, there is a real opportunity for Occupy to foster critical solidarity with communities of color and poor people's movements that have long drawn the connection between economic dispossession and state violence. Our job as Occupy is not to monopolize the struggle, but to come to the realization that our collective freedom is bound together in opposition to predatory economics and the punitive police system. The 1% fears such a realization, and will do its best to keep us apart. ■

On Political Repression, Jail Support, and Radical Care

BY MUTANT LEGAL

As we have chanted for nearly a year, "We get confused... When the law... Changes everyday!" In the jail cell, the rules of the state apply. And the rules of the state are irregular by design. Withheld information, misinformation, selective enforcement of arbitrary regulations—this is frustrating, if



not traumatic, for those inside and those outside supporting their comrades. This is one reason Jail Support is crucial to action planning when arrests seem likely—which is constantly given the state’s systemic attempts to repress the movement.

Political repression is not a last-ditch effort by the state to destroy protest movements that have become pesky. The state constantly needs to guarantee equilibrium for the privileged, a stability that rests on the violent oppression of others and the political repression of those who fight back.

Similarly, anti-repression work is not an after thought; it is a core component of activist strategy. It begins the moment you say “ya basta!” and touches every interaction you have until you are done—but are we ever done? Anti-repression is not something you do; it is a way of doing things. Anti-repression work recognizes that internal oppression and external repression are mutually reinforcing, and that therefore we must take radically good care of each other.

We aim to address repression and its effects at all levels—even those that go overlooked. For instance, arrests are certainly traumatic for the person being taken away, but they can also be traumatic for those that witness the arrest. One or more members of the group are taken away, often with sadistic brutality on the part of the police. The rest of group remains. That moment is a traumatic rupture, stopping the flow of events and puncturing time with violence and separation.

Anti-repression work includes a recognition that not all individuals associate with organized groups, that many people are or may feel marginalized from such groups. In many cases, these are the people who end up without support after an arrest, in court and in jail or prison.

Like the arrest and the subsequent penal process, jail support is not a limited action, but rather one that needs to be in place until someone’s case is completely closed. We work to coordinate this kind of legal support and radical care for

anyone who associates with Occupy, but we also recognize the connections between one all repression, especially because there are no definable boundaries for OWS. Good anti-repression work recognizes that political repression has no boundaries and takes many forms. Entire communities of low-income people and people of color have been criminalized for years—repressed by violent police occupation, routine surveillance, invasions of privacy, unjust laws, bias courts and a brutal prison system. That ongoing repression is equally as political as that visited upon Occupy, and our work must make these connections and build upon them to end all oppression, not just “our own.”

The intersecting systems of political repression that we oppose are founded on the dehumanization of people. The jail support carried out by Mutant Legal aspires to a reestablishment of humanity through radical care in the face of authoritarian and uncaring systems. Jail Support is an object-lesson in social imagination and dual power, one that demonstrates to the police, the DA, the Judge and all observers in and out of court that the brutality of the current system is neither necessary, natural, nor legitimate. For this reason, jail support is one of the best tools we have for challenging the state and the interests it represents. Even as we engage with the unjust system we simultaneously show that another world is possible. ■

On the Transformative Potential of Race and Difference in Post-Left Movements

BY PAMELA BRIDGEWATER

We’ve all been there—in that room, around that table, on that direct action—when some aspect of our differences threatens our ability to work (indeed our very presence) in the movement. The issue of how our processes, strategies and theories impact or are impacted by our differences sets the stage for fear, anger, guilt, confusion and hurt. All too often the work stops. Despite our many commonalities and what’s at stake, activists run into the destructive potential of difference early and often. But, difference should be anticipated, even welcomed. Moments of difference and potential conflict offer possibility to create deeper, more meaningful bonds. The key is to develop and implement strategies of engagement for ourselves and each other to prepare for when such moments of difference arise.

Few would argue that race is not one of the most complex issues that we deal with—constantly and with varying levels of success. When it comes up varies, but the answer to the question, “Will it come up?” remains the same: “Yes”. Our experience now teaches us to expect it. Our experience should also teach us that it is what we make of that moment that will determine whether the gathered bedfellows will become estranged or made stronger. The latter is possible only if the

commitment to each other is strong enough to bear the heavy history of race in America. Whether we are bound by gender, sexual expression, disability, income inequality, language, homelessness or injustice, our work falls victim to our inability to deal effectively with the inevitable race moment. Here are a few suggestions on how we can begin to transform potentially destructive race moments into opportunities to move toward our political objectives: (1) Recognize that the race moment is inevitable and it is important to do as much work to prepare for the race moment before it arises. The success of the movement depends on all of us working on our individual gaps and blinders. (2) Develop a strategy for engaging the trauma of slavery, racism and difference discrimination before the race moment arises. (3) When the race moment arises remember to have compassion for errors and missteps of those who you trust in other contexts. (4) The notion that one should be free from error, discomfort or confusion when their approach to difference is at issue is oftentimes a manifestation of privilege. (5) Recognize that all your work will probably not make the issue of race less uncomfortable. Remember that comfort is rarely, if ever, useful in progressive social change movements. (6) The race issue cannot be understood, much less transformed/transformational, without meaningful engagement with the history of slavery in America. (7) Commit to learning more about the relationship between slavery and the modern manifestations of race and difference than you do today. Make the same commitment tomorrow. (8) Our various identities are an integral part of the movement, but identity politics can be distracting. For example, a common cause of the disutility of identity politics is that ways in which structures of oppression, like capitalism, can exploit and distort identity. (9) The perception of scarcity of resources available to improve inequities along with our inability to deal successfully with difference has contributed to a sense that there is a pyramid of oppression. (10) Develop a race moment reading list. A few highlights from my list are: John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*; Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*; James Baldwin, *Price of the Ticket*; Angela Y. Davis, *Race, Women and Class*; Edward Said, *Orientalism*; Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*; Elizabeth Spellman, *Inessential Woman*; Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, *Our Word is Our Weapon*; Derrick Jensen, *The Culture of Make Believe*.

Additionally, beware of the following myths which frequently underlie and surface during a race moment: (1) Anti-racism work is the work of people of color. (2) Imposing, evoking or experiencing white guilt is a necessary component of anti-racism work. (3) People of color, LGBTQA, feminists etc., have sufficiently addressed issues of intra-group difference and oppression such as colorism, class, disability, gender inequities and homophobia. (4) Regardless of the work at hand or the urgency of the work, processing our difference always takes priority. (5) Race is at the top of the pyramid of oppression because slavery was only about race and racism.

On a final note, when the race moment arises expect the fear because of the unattended trauma that remains, but also have compassion for yourself and others who—despite the potential race-based angst in those moments—continue to come to the table, the rooms, the front line, the direct action in solidarity, commonality and difference to fight for transformative justice. Our commitment to thriving in those moments help us to move closer to realizing the potential of a diverse movement. ▀

On Transparency, Leadership, and Participation

One of the most common objections to horizontal organization is that some sort of informal leadership will inevitably emerge. Some people have more time, energy, experience, resources, charisma, or, just care more about a project and will thus end up becoming more central to the group; they will inevitably begin coordinating with other more active members and a de facto leadership role. As Jo Freeman pointed out in her famous essay “The Tyranny of Structurelessness”, this is precisely what happened with the consciousness raising circles of early feminism as soon as they grew to more than a dozen people: they became dominated by small cliques, de facto leadership structures.

Freeman thought the solution was to create formal procedures to ensure such cliques do not emerge, or at least to limit their power—and in fact much of contemporary consensus process emerges from her suggestions. Nowadays, it’s more common to just say “since an informal leadership structure is inevitable, isn’t it better to simply formalize things, so as to make the de facto leaders more accountable to the group?”

But why do we assume that taking a small clique and relabeling it a “steering committee” is going to make it more accountable, not less? True, if they’re elected, you have a chance to vote them out every now and then. But an informal clique can be unseated any time, the moment any significant number of participants are sufficiently annoyed by something they do that they aggressively point out that no one elected them to begin with. Creating formal leadership destroys the flexibility of such arrangements, and above all, makes it impossible to address the real problem, which is unequal access to information. When egalitarian groups develop hierarchies that really do exclude some people from decision-making, it’s almost invariably because some people know everything that’s going on, and others don’t. Formalizing this by declaring those with better access to information a “leadership” will only make the problem worse. Probably much worse.

There are two fallacies here. One is that equality means everyone has to participate equally. What if they don’t want to? After all, compelling someone to go to constant meetings is just as oppressive as not allowing them. What’s critical is

to ensure everyone always knows about when meetings are and what's been decided, so that if a small group does end up making key decisions, they do so in the knowledge that the moment they do anything any substantial number of participants really dislikes, those participants are likely to show up at the next meeting to point out that they have no right to tell anyone what to do.

Ultimately, though, the objection to informal structures isn't political. It's aesthetic. It seems distasteful somehow for anyone to have influence that is not officially recognized by the group. This is the other fallacy: the utopian notion that it would be possible to have a form of politics which operates almost like a game of backgammon, where the rules are explicit, everyone knows them, and absolutely everything that happens proceeds exactly according to the rules. One reason we enjoy games is because it's the only experience we have, in life, which is actually like that. But politics can never be reduced to a board game, and history shows if you try, disaster tends to ensue. ■

Where Are We? Who Are We? Occupy, Space, and Community

BY NINA MEHTA

“Occupy Wall Street still exists? But where are you?” Since the eviction last November, we hear this question over and over again. People took our insistence on outdoor space to heart, and with good reason. Zuccotti brought us together in new ways, forming intimacies, alliances, interdependencies, agendas, dreams. In that shared space, there were endless possibilities for engagement, interaction, conversation; it was a community in constant state of becoming.

In the absence of the park, our relationships are still threaded through physical space. But now we are mobile, dispersed, decentralized, and this is not a bad thing. This has required us to move outside the comfort of our familiar social and geographical spaces.

Travelling from borough to borough, Occupy Town Square (OTS) brings the infrastructure of the occupation for temporary assembly points, developing new relationships with others who are fighting the powers of Wall Street. This has required us to broaden our scope, open ourselves, and engage others from different communities, organizations, and struggles.

In our mobility, we can help to amplify campaigns happening throughout the city like the Sunset Park Rent Strike or neighborhood Cop Watch projects. Developing relationships and connecting struggles requires learning and listening on the ground. OTS has facilitated a network of interconnected spaces and conversations where this can take place across the city. There is always more work to be done in building critical solidarity, but our assemblies are a hopeful starting point.

We are still together, we are still growing, and we still

share space. But in moving, networking, and translating, we are creating a new sense of Occupy community—one that constantly puts the identity “we” into question even while cultivating new bonds and affinities. ■

Letter to the Well-Meaning 1%

What do you mean when you say that you say you support us? Please understand if we remain skeptical of your intentions. Do you really want to devolve your amassed wealth and power? Are you ready to have your voice to be just one of many, to get on stack and get bumped down on account of your privilege? Do you agree that it is necessary that we transition to a different kind of society, economy, and politics?

Gifts for media-friendly cultural projects are nice. But they are not justice. They do not clarify your intentions. You may have guilt; you may know things are wrong. You may even want to make things change. All that is good, but we are talking about justice, not philanthropy. We are talking about systemic change, not cosmetic improvements. Are you open to this?

Money in movements is like money in politics: always a problem. It threatens growth, longevity, independence, possibility, imagination, hope, relationships, values, principles. So while we are respectful, we are cautious about reproducing the oppressive structures of the world we are criticizing. We ask that you be responsible and accountable to our process so that you do not end up simply buying your own agenda, your own people, your own consensus.

Please do not misunderstand us. We do not wish to dictate the terms of your involvement. We simply want to create space where all are equally empowered, where influence based on wealth and privilege is suspended. In such a space, we wish to explore forging a strategic alliance with you to usher in another world.

We strive for sustainability, and we trust in process and dialogue. It's time that we get some critical pieces in place. You can help. As a way to initiate the conversation, we propose the following quid pro quo: our bodies, our time; your resources, your access.

This conversation could be grounded in specific needs: (1) physical spaces to gather and house our critical infrastructures; (2) seed-resources to jumpstart cooperative enterprises and solidarity economies organized to support ourselves over time; (3) bail funds and free legal counsel for those of us caught up in the juridical and penal systems due to our participation in the struggle.

Resources should be channeled to concrete projects where issues of liability, transparency, and accountability are sufficiently addressed. Such dialogues should happen all over the United States; they would help to spread and deepen the cracks in capitalism that became visible last Fall.

We challenge you to stand in solidarity with us. This



Black Panthers free breakfast program, Oakland, CA, 1969

would mean opening your heart and your imagination; but it would also require committing treason against your own class. It will not be easy or comfortable, but it does promise a better world for our children. ■

Sincerely,
The 99%

Mutual Aid in the Face of the Storm

BY CHRISTOPHER KEY

People are not helpless against the storm. While the winds howl, the thunder rages, and the waters rise, people can find shelter when they act together in the face of collapsing economies and ecological crises. Shelter can take the form of robust mutual aid networks and solidarity economies by which people empower and support one another to sustain themselves outside the constraints of the capitalist system.

Those within the community can share their knowledge and talents, letting people know what they are willing and able to do, and what sorts of non-market goods and services they are willing to accept in exchange. Plumbing and repairs in a home reclaimed from a bank or a building liberated from a landlord; gleaning and sharing unsellable goods cast off stores and markets. Learning to grow and distribute our own food as we traffic between the urban and the rural through

community gardens, neighborhood potlucks, Occupy Farms. Legal and tactical skill-shares among those being hunted down by the debt-collectors and Repo Men. Forming industrial co-ops in which managerial decisions are made by workers in their own collective interest rather than for the profit of a Boss. Medical care provided to those who have put their body on the line in a protest or encampment. Self-generated energy-systems for those who want to opt out of the fossil-fuel economy that is destroying the very basis of life on earth.

The specifics of a solidarity economy vary based upon those participating and the resource-landscapes of particular areas. But the focus should always be on creating communities of sharing and mutuality. Such communities are not based in charity, or simply giving things away for free.

They present, rather, a way for people to use their talents and skills—regardless of economic worth—to build social bonds that subvert the way capitalism has warped and colonized our human relationships.

In constructing a solidarity economy, it is always prudent to reach out to local organizations and see what sort of meaningful work can be done for them in exchange for what they, in turn, can provide for you. Even people who have never heard of mutual aid will understand it on a fundamental level. Against private accumulation and self-interested gain, we advocate the communal support of life, the reciprocal donation of resources, and the passing-along of good will across space and time. Starting a conversation about mutual aid with friends and partners can create a space in which to challenge the relation of their work to the constraints of paternalistic State and well-meaning 1% donors.

The powers that be are counting on our efforts to construct alternative economies to founder, especially since the current system has made us feel isolated and alone in the face of crises. Debtors are encouraged to think that they failed, individually, to fulfill their promises, even though going into unpayable debt is a structural condition of life under capitalism. Tenants feel they must acquiesce to the negligence of the landlord. Consumers think they must buy into an endlessly developing energy economy based on the burning of fossil fuels. Workers imagine themselves in a perpetual competition to work harder and for less against their fellows at home and abroad in the name of economic growth.

As long as the system isolates and pits us against each other, successful strikes against capitalism are impossible. Thinking and acting alone, we suffer alone. But creating a unified front disrupts this ongoing pattern. We are forming debtors' unions, energy coops, food networks, strike committees, and more. When we develop sustainable networks based on mutual aid and solidarity, we will realize that, as terrifying as the storm of the current system makes itself out to be, the power it wields is miniscule compared to the torrential deluge that we, the 99%, are capable of unleashing against capitalism itself. ■

* Shit's *still* fucked up and bullshit!



Top: In Mexico, student movement #YoSoy132 reading poetry to policemen in the 24-hours occupation of Mexican broadcaster Televisa.

Left: May Day, Seattle, 2012

Right (from top): Anti-nuke rally, Tokyo, 2012; May Day, Oakland, 2012; Occupy Central Hong Kong's HSBC tent city, 2012



An aerial photograph of a vast, light blue glacier flowing through a rugged, brown mountain range. A large, dark blue lake is nestled within the mountains, filled with numerous icebergs of various sizes. The word "BEYOND" is superimposed in large, bold, orange capital letters in the upper right quadrant of the image.

BEYOND

CLIMATE, BEYOND CAPITALISM

Politics of the Living

BY VANYA S, TALIB AGAPE FUEGOVERDE, V. C. VITALE

Capitalism is killing us, killing the planet, and killing itself. We, the living, must work to facilitate the self-induced death of capitalism while surviving and thriving together. A new commonwealth of life and care is on the horizon; it was glimpsed in Zuccotti park, and in peoples' movements across the globe.

Our first step is to ask: how do you live? What do you do when the basis of your life is taken away? The water you drink, the soil you farm, the air you breathe, the rivers you fish, the atmosphere you inhabit—imagine it plundered and destroyed by an imperial tyrant operating with impunity. For most people in the world—especially in the Global South—this colonization and decimation of life is not so difficult to imagine. It has been happening in real time for centuries and the death-dealing tyrant has a name: Wall Street.

OWS has been privileged to launch our attacks directly at the doorstep of capitalism, at the heart of the empire. Storming the financial district, confronting its troops in the NYPD, we map sites of injustice with our bodies, voices, our affirmation of the commons. We connect the dots between the crime scene of Wall Street and the melting of glaciers, the rising of seas, the spreading of deserts, the clearing of forests, the poisoning of water, the failing of crops, the displacement of people.

A politics of the living is emerging that aims to put capitalism out of out of its misery. We have found “climate” to be a blunt weapon, despite the deadly catastrophe it evokes.

Climate-talk restricts our imaginations—even when used by our friends on the Old Left. In the United States, it typically leads to policy discussions of carbon emissions standards, green jobs, investment in alternative energy infrastructures by the state. We hear appeals to international norms and frameworks. We hear demands that governments and corporations adhere to principles of sustainability, mitigation, and adaptation. This is all fine, but it misses some fundamental questions about life and capitalism.

Consider the Keystone XL protests at the White House last Fall. 1000 climate activists were arrested in a civil disobedience action. The action announced the danger of releasing billions of

tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from the Alberta Tar Sands, and called upon President Obama to withhold a permit from the corporation developing the pipeline. The action was part of a long-term, concerted activist campaign. But was the intention of the action revolutionary? Did it aim to facilitate the death of capitalism? Did it aim to open space for a new form of living?

What will it take for revolutionary intentions to be developed? When will we recognize that organic food, hybrid cars, even green jobs programs miss the point when it comes to saving life from its destruction by capitalism? Mainstream sustainability discourse imagines a win-win for life and capitalism. We see these two terms as mortal enemies.

Capitalism has always been hostile to human and non-human life. People have suffered in factories, mines, plantations and sweatshops to generate the profit that is capital's life-blood. Plantations rendered the soil infertile, mines ruin rivers and mountain tops, logging devastates forests, factory smoke makes the air harmful, fracking destroys water supplies and puts communities at risk of industrial disaster. For a long time, we've been able to think of this as an accidental by-product of capitalism that you could either fix through regulation or just ignore because you didn't live where it was happening.

The death-machine of Wall Street amplifies other forms of oppression embedded in the ongoing histories of colonialism, sexism, and racism. Climate-related crises, from droughts to floods, affect the lives of most disempowered people first. Any struggle for climate justice must be a struggle for economic and political justice at large. It should follow the lead of movements from below, as when the Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth made at the People's Conference on Climate Change in Cochabamba, Bolivia (2008) calls for “the decolonization of the atmosphere.”

Decolonize life, Occupy Wall Street. This pair of terms can reopen our imagination when it comes to the often narrow discourse of climate politics with which are often confronted in the United States. It can open space for militant direct action in our cities, our farms, our landscape, our infrastructures; It can facilitate a different relationship to land, work, energy, credit, food, water, and more; a form of living based on cultivating the commonwealth rather than the systems of endless growth and private profit that are leading to our common demise. We are the living. We are the 99% ■



AFTER THE JUBILEE

DAVID GRAEBER

If you look just at how things look on paper, the entire world is awash in debt. All governments are in debt. Corporate debt is at historic highs. And so is what economists like to call “household debt”—both in the sense of how many people are in the red, and the sheer quantity of what they owe. There’s a consensus among economists that this is a terrible problem, even if, as usual, economists can’t agree as to why. The mainstream, conventional view is that the “debt overhang” from all three is so vast it is stifling other economic activity. We have to reduce all of them they say, largely by either raising taxes on ordinary people, or cutting their services. (Only on ordinary people, mind you—mainstream economists are of course paid to come up with reasons why one should never do either of these things to the rich.) More level heads point out that national debt, especially for countries like the US, is nothing like personal debt, since the US government could eliminate its entire debt overnight if it simply instructed the Federal Reserve to print the money and hand it over to the government.

No doubt, readers will object: “but if you just print trillions of dollars, wouldn’t that cause severe inflation?” Well, yes, in theory, it should. But it seems the theory here is flawed, since that’s exactly what the government is doing: they’ve been printing trillions of dollars, and so far, it hasn’t had any notable inflationary effect.

The US government’s policy, both under Bush and under Obama (on such matters there’s been almost zero difference in policy between the two) has been to print money and give it to the banks. Actually, this is the way the US financial system has always worked, but since 2008, it has been intensified

with reckless abandon. The Federal Reserve has whisked trillions of dollars into existence by waving its magic wand, then lent it at almost negligible interest rates to large financial institutions like Bank of America or Goldman Sachs. The supposed purpose was first to save them from bankruptcy, then, to get them lending and jump-start the economy. But there seems good reason to believe there’s another purpose, as well: to flood the economy with so much money that it would, in fact, create inflation, as a way of reducing debts. (After all, if you owe \$1000.00 and the value of the dollar falls by half, the value of your debt has just been reduced by half as well).

The problem is it didn’t work. Either to get the economy moving, or to increase inflation. First of all, banks did not invest the money. Mainly, they either lent it back to the government again, or deposited it in the Federal Reserve, which paid them a higher interest rate for just keeping it there than they were charging those same banks to borrow it. So in effect, the government has been printing money and giving it to the banks and the banks have just sat on it. This is perhaps not too surprising, since the Federal Reserve itself is governed by the very bankers that it is giving money too. Still, while a policy of allowing bankers to print money and give it to themselves can work quite well if your aim is restoring the fortunes of the 1%—and it has done quite nicely at this—and though it has also allowed the rich to pay off their own debts and sent a good deal of new money sloshing around in the political system to reward politicians for allowing them to do so, even the Fed itself now admits its done very little to get employers hiring, or even to create any significant inflation.

* * *

The conclusion is so obvious even the people on the top are increasingly beginning to recognize it—at least, that minority of them who actually do care about the long-term viability of the system (rather than simply being concerned their own personal short-term enrichment). There will have to be some kind of mass debt cancellation. And not just the debts of the rich, which can always be erased in one way or another if they become inconvenient, but the debts of ordinary citizens as well. In Europe, even professional economists are beginning to talk of “jubilees,” and the Fed itself recently issued a white paper recommending mass cancellation of mortgage debt.

The very fact that such people are contemplating this shows they know the system is in trouble. Up till now, the very idea of debt cancellation was the ultimate taboo. Again: not for those on top themselves. Donald Trump, for instance, has walked away from billions of debt and none of his friends find this at all a problem, but all of them absolutely insist that for the little people, the rules must be different.

One might well question why. Why should the rich care so much that the debt of the poor should never be forgiven? Is it simple sadists? Do rich people somehow get a kick out of knowing that at any moment there are at least a few hardworking mothers being kicked out of their homes and having to pawn their children’s toys to pay for the costs of some catastrophic illness? This seems implausible. If you know anything about rich people you know they almost never think about poor people at all—except perhaps as occasional objects of charity.

No, the real answer seems to be ideological. To put the matter crudely, a ruling class whose main claim to wealth is no longer the ability to make anything, or even really sell anything, but increasingly on a series of credit-scams propped up by government support, has to rely very heavily on every mechanism that might make tend to legitimize the system. This is why the last 30 years of “financialization” have been accompanied by an ideological offensive unparalleled in human history, arguing that current economic arrangements—which they have rather whimsically dubbed “the free market” even though it functions almost entirely through the government giving money to the rich, is not just the best economic system, but the only economic system that could possibly exist, except possibly for Soviet-style communism. Much more energy has been put into creating mechanisms to convince people that the system is morally justified, and the only viable economic system, than has been put into actually creating a viable economic system (as its near collapse in 2008 clearly showed.) The last thing the 1% wants, as the world economy continues to teeter from crisis to crisis, is to give up on one of their most powerful moral weapons: the idea that decent people always pay their debts.

* * *

So: some kind of mass debt cancellation is on the way. Almost everyone is willing to admit this now. It’s the only

way to resolve the sovereign debt crisis in Europe. It’s the only way to resolve the ongoing mortgage crisis in America. The real battle is over the form that it will take. Even apart from obvious questions, like how much debt will be cancelled (just certain mortgage debt? Or a grand jubilee for all personal debt up to say, \$100,000?) and of course, for whom, there are two absolutely critical factors to look at here:

Will they admit they are doing it? That is, will the debt cancellation be presented as a debt cancellation, as an honest

The last thing the 1% wants, as the world economy continues to teeter from crisis to crisis, is to give up on one of their most powerful moral weapons: the idea that decent people always pay their debts.

acknowledgement that money is really just a political arrangement now, and, therefore, the beginning of a process of finally beginning to bring such arrangements under democratic control, or will it be dressed up as something else?

What will come afterwards? That is, will the cancellation just be a way of preserving the system and its extreme inequalities, perhaps in an even

more savage form, or will it be a way of beginning to move past them.

The two are obviously linked. To get a sense of what the most conservative option would be like, one might consult a recent report of the Boston Consulting Group, a mainstream economic think tank. They begin by agreeing that since there’s no way to grow or inflate our way out of debt, cancellation is inevitable. Why postpone it? However, their solution is to frame the whole thing as a one-time tax on wealth to pay off, say, 60% of all outstanding debt, and then declare that the price for such sacrifices by the rich will be even more austerity for everybody else. Others suggest having the government print money, buying mortgages, and giving them to homeowners.

People in Iceland reject debt servitude, 2011



No one dares to suggest that the government could just as easily declare those same debts unenforceable (if you want to pay back your loan you're free to do so but the government will no longer recognize its legal standing in court if you decide not to.) That would open windows those running the system are desperate to keep opaque.

So what would a radical alternative really look like? There have been some intriguing suggestions: democratization of the Fed, a full employment program to pull wages upwards, some sort of basic income scheme. Some are quite radical but almost all involve both expanding government, and increasing the overall number of jobs and hours worked.

This is a real problem because feeding the global work machine, increasing production, productivity, employment levels, is really the last thing we need to be doing right now if we want to save the planet from ecological catastrophe.

But this, I think, points us towards a solution. Because in fact, the ecological crisis and the debt crisis have everything to do with another.

Here it might help to understand that debts are, basically, promises of future productivity. Think of it this way. Imagine everyone on earth produces a trillion dollars worth of goods and services a year. And imagine they consume about the same—since of course that's what generally happens, we consume most of what we produce, minus a little wastage. Yet 1% of them somehow contrive to convince 99% of them that they still, collectively, owe them a trillion dollars. Well, aside from the fact that someone is obviously being seriously overcharged here, there's clearly no way these debts can be repaid at their current value unless everyone produces even more the next year. In fact, if the interest payments are set at, say, 5% a year, they'll have to produce 5% more just to break even.

This is the real burden of debt we're passing on to future generations: the burden of having to work ever harder, while at the same time, consuming more energy, eroding the earth's ecosystems, and ultimately accelerating catastrophic climate change at just the moment we desperately need some way to reverse it. Seen in this light, a debt cancellation might be the last chance we have to save the planet. The problem is that conservatives don't care, and liberals are still caught up in impossible dreams of returning to the Keynesian economic policies of the '50s and '60s, which based broad prosperity on continual economic expansion. We're going to have to come up with an entirely different kind of economic policy.

But if a post-jubilee society can't promise the workers of the world an endless expansion of new consumer goods, what can it? I think the answer is obvious. It could offer security in basic needs—guarantees of food, housing, and health care that can ensure our children don't have to face the fear, shame, and anxiety that defines most of our lives today. And above all, it can offer them less work. Remember that in the 1870s, the idea of an 8-hour day seemed just as unrealistic and utopian as, say, demanding a 4-hour day would seem today. Yet the labor movement managed to achieve it. So why not demand



Top: "What They Have"
Bottom: "What They Own"
Life Magazine, 1953

a 4-hour day? Or a guaranteed four months of paid vacation? It is very clear that Americans—those who do have jobs—are absurdly overworked. It's also clear that a very large proportion of that work is completely unnecessary. And every hour saved from work is an hour that we can give to our friends, families, communities.

This is not the place to come up with a detailed economic program of how it could be done or how such a system could work—these are matters to be worked out democratically (myself, I'd like to see wage labor eliminated entirely. But maybe that's just me). Anyway, social change doesn't begin by someone mapping out a program. It begins with visions and principles. Our rulers have made it clear they no longer know what it would be like to even have either. But in a way even that doesn't matter. Real, lasting change always comes from below. In 2001, the world saw the first stirrings of a global uprising against the current empire of debt. It has already begun to alter the global terms of debate. The prospect of mass debt cancellation provides us with a unique opportunity to turn that democratic impulse towards a fundamental transformation of values, and towards a genuinely viable accommodation with the earth.

It's not clear if there's ever been a political moment with so much at stake. ■

On Debt and Privilege

BY WINTER

Why focus on debt? Many of us don't have debt, and don't even have the privilege to have debt. But it's more complicated than that. The whole damn thing runs on debt, and has for centuries, in all sorts of ways that we don't see at first glance. Global capitalism uses debt to funnel wealth from the 99% to the 1%. This happens on every level of society.

The IMF and its structural adjustment programs are a great example. Sovereign debt is basically an imperial tax that keeps most countries in the world poor, servile and dependent on richer countries and financial institutions. It only works because of militaristic bullying and the threat of violence, exclusion and exile. Just look at Greece:

it's being held hostage as its civil society is completely dismantled. "Pay your debts and make cuts or we'll kick you out of Europe, your currency will lose value, you'll lose access to global credit." But it's a big bluff. Argentina and Iceland know this — there are other ways. The idea of constant growth and production in order to pay debts is destroying the planet, and taking us all down with it.

It's only recently that this same structure has been forced upon the 99% within the rich countries. Austerity affects everyone, in all sorts of ways. Municipalities are broke and have to cut public services in every sector. Schools get closed, hospitals lose services, welfare structures get axed, because somehow every town and city in the world is

in deep debt. Non-debtors are screwed and manipulated by debt too; it's just not as obvious. Countries and cities owe money to financial institutions, but instead of taxing them they make us pay for basic social goods, which often means many of us go into debt to the very same institutions.

Even when it comes to debtors in the rich countries, it's not as privileged or middle class as it seems. Just look at the numbers in predatory lending: subprime mortgages, insane interest rates and outrageous default rates at for-profit colleges are all rampant in low-income communities. Payday loans across the country charging 400% interest is just the beginning of the story.

Debt offers us a powerful framework; it is practical, offers sharp global analysis and connects many dots. The whole system needs to change. Whole societies have been run on fair, accessible credit and networks of trust instead of violence. We need to figure out ways to offer each other types of credit that don't disenfranchise and disempower. It's a huge task, but it's a great first step to a more just, humane and equitable world.

Strike Debt is not just a debtor's movement; it's a movement to resist and transform the debt-system. Debt is personal for many people, but above all it is deeply structural. Debt resistance is crucial in our struggle, and it comes in many forms: fighting for free services (education, healthcare, etc), defending a foreclosed home, refusing payments to the banks, keeping others out of debt through fighting for higher wages or providing mutual aid.

It's time to take action. Join the resistance. ■



Rent Strike, Sunset Park, Brooklyn 2012.
Photo by Leina Bocar

ON LIVING

Dedicated to militants of life throughout history

BY NAZIM HIKMET, FEBRUARY, 1948

I
Living is no laughing matter:
you must live with great seriousness
like a squirrel, for example—
I mean without looking for something beyond and above living,
I mean living must be your whole occupation.
Living is no laughing matter:
you must take it seriously,
so much so and to such a degree
that, for example, your hands tied behind your back,
your back to the wall,
or else in a laboratory
in your white coat and safety glasses,
you can die for people—
even for people whose faces you've never seen,
even though you know living
is the most real, the most beautiful thing.
I mean, you must take living so seriously
that even at seventy, for example, you'll plant olive trees—
and not for your children, either,
but because although you fear death you don't believe it,
because living, I mean, weighs heavier.

II
Let's say you're seriously ill, need surgery -
which is to say we might not get
from the white table.
Even though it's impossible not to feel sad
about going a little too soon,
we'll still laugh at the jokes being told,
we'll look out the window to see it's raining,
or still wait anxiously
for the latest newscast ...
Let's say we're at the front-
for something worth fighting for, say.

There, in the first offensive, on that very day,
we might fall on our face, dead.
We'll know this with a curious anger,
but we'll still worry ourselves to death
about the outcome of the war, which could last years.
Let's say we're in prison
and close to fifty,
and we have eighteen more years, say,
before the iron doors will open.
We'll still live with the outside,
with its people and animals, struggle and wind-
I mean with the outside beyond the walls.
I mean, however and wherever we are,
we must live as if we will never die.

III
This earth will grow cold,
a star among stars
and one of the smallest,
a gilded mote on blue velvet—
I mean this, our great earth.
This earth will grow cold one day,
not like a block of ice
or a dead cloud even
but like an empty walnut it will roll along
in pitch-black space . . .
You must grieve for this right now
-you have to feel this sorrow now-
for the world must be loved this much
if you're going to say "I lived" . . .



First Communiqué

INVISIBLE ARMY

We are the Invisible Army of Defaulters.

We are millions. We are everywhere.

We are your neighbors. We are your family. Your friends.

We are the 99%

We are going to bring this system to its knees.

We can, because we wield the one power that all the armies of the world can never defeat: the power of refusal.

This power has destroyed the mightiest empires the world has ever seen. All crumble and dissolve the moment enough people simply withdraw their consent. Not loudly. But quietly, covertly. The Roman Empire was destroyed not by barbarians, but by draft evasion, tax evasion, and desertion. Alexander and Napoleon's armies were stopped only when their own soldiers refused to continue, or simply went home. It wasn't the Abolitionists who put an end to slavery in America: it was the dogged and ingenious resistance of millions of slaves, from foot-dragging and flight to endless acts of sabotage, that made the entire economic system based on slavery untenable. It was millions of acts of quiet refusal that rendered all the Soviet Union's tanks and missiles and secret police powerless.

The same fate awaits the current system of mafia capitalism in America, an economic system driven by Wall Street CEOs who produce nothing, contribute nothing, who have bought our government and reduced it into a criminal enterprise whose main purpose is to support loan-sharking, gambling, extortion, and the slow reduction of every one of us into debt peons. We cannot stop them through elections when both parties are bought and paid for. One thing we can do is to quietly withdraw our consent.

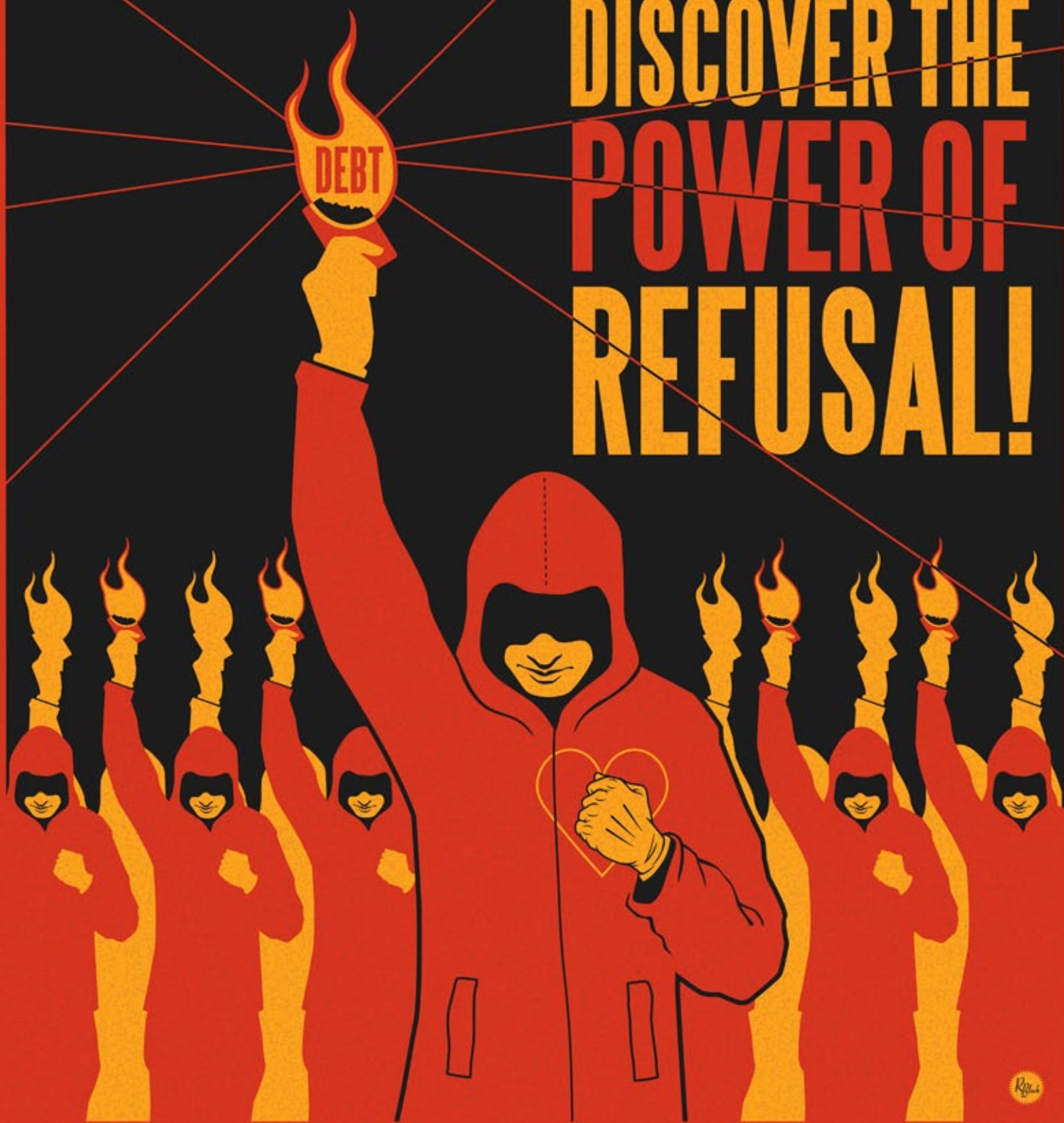
And so we have done. By refusing to pay the money they claim we owe them.

We may be doing so covertly, we may not yet dare to reveal our names and show our faces, but do not doubt for a moment that these millions of acts of refusal are, each and every one of them, acts of profound moral courage. All our lives we've been told to pay our debts. That it doesn't matter that the game is rigged and that it was set up by liars and criminals. We are well aware of the shame, the harassment, the legal threats, humiliation, the sheer physical violence they will unleash on us. We are willing to defy these threats, because in the end, we know there's something more powerful than fear: and that is the love we have for others. To be able to take care of our children, our friends, our families, the people that matter most to us, to learn, to teach, to foster, to give to our communities, is a value that no accountant can ever measure, that no government loan administrator or hedge fund manager can ever have the right to take away from us. Every dollar we take from a fraudulent subprime mortgage speculator, every dollar we save from the collection agency, is a tiny piece of our own lives and freedom that we can give back to our communities, to those we love and we respect.

We are an army of lovers who cannot be defeated.

We are laying the groundwork for another world. ■

DISCOVER THE POWER OF REFUSAL!



WE ARE YOUR NEIGHBORS | WE ARE YOUR FAMILY | WE ARE YOUR FRIENDS

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