



THE

NEW PEOPLE

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REFLECTIONS FROM TMC DIRECTOR: CONFRONTING SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE IN 2018

By Gabriel McMorland



Krystle Knight, community organizer for the Thomas Merton Center, at left, gathers with others on November 8th in front of the Pittsburgh City Council meeting room. The group was there to advocate for a publicly-owned water system in Pittsburgh and to monitor the report of consultants from Infrastructure Management Group to a mayor-appointed 'Blue Ribbon Panel' seeking to reform the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority.

At the Thomas Merton Center, we're taking time to reflect on this past year and plan for 2018. I'm grateful to everyone we worked with in 2017 and proud of what we accomplished together. In looking ahead, I am struck by the need to discern the root causes of issues we work on. Economic, environmental, human rights, and peace issues remain tightly intertwined as symptoms of deep, systemic injustice.

TMC worked on three major campaigns in 2017; Bring Martin Home, Don't Criminalize Transit Riders (DCTR), and Our Water. In this work, we joined with Casa San Jose, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, and many others. Bring Martin Home supported the Esquivel family as they resisted the attempts of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and the US Attorney to deport their father and husband. DCTR continues to oppose using armed police and criminal charges to collect fares on public transit, and the Our Water campaign still fights for safe, affordable, public water in Pittsburgh.

We partnered with Casa San Jose to confront various state representatives supporting anti-immigrant legislation and forced Rep. Dom Costa to publicly change his position on a bill requiring local police to assist with detentions and deportations. We joined workers confronting multiple employers about wage theft. We pushed through a pounding

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MERTON AWARDEE OF 2017 LIFTS UP THE TMC

By Neil Cosgrove and Bette McDevitt

Vince Warren, Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), called the Thomas Merton Center "an extraordinary beacon for peace and justice" at a press conference prior to his organization's receiving the 2017 Thomas Merton Award. As for CCR itself, Warren said the group had two basic aims, to "use laws creatively to fight government and corporate abusers" and to enlarge public awareness of inequality because "social justice happens when people raise their voices."

When he spoke at the Award Dinner, he reviewed the challenges that we have faced in our shared struggle to maintain our civil rights over the years, and when he spoke of the present time,...he broke away from his historical narrative with these words "You've got to be kidding me!" He brought the house down; we knew well what he meant. Warren had made himself familiar with the history of the Merton Center, and commended the

audience for the wide range and depth of activity and projects that TMC has taken on over the years, and reminded us that the Merton Center had been one of the most heavily surveilled peace groups in the country during the the 1980's.

On the same day as the Award Dinner the Trump administration announced it would remove Temporary Protected Status for nearly 60,000 Haitian immigrants as of mid-2019, even though, according to *National Public Radio*, 20% of those immigrants own homes, and 27,000 of their children have been born in the U.S. Warren observed that "black immigrants, particularly black immigrants from Haiti, have the least amount of political capital." Consequently, CCR will continue to support efforts to prevent the deportation of those immigrants.

Mr. Warren also deplored the current situation in Puerto Rico, noting that CCR was "challenging the

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Vince Warren speaking at the Thomas Merton Award Dinner (Photo: Steve Capri)

The Thomas Merton Center works to build a consciousness of values and to raise the moral questions involved in the issues of war, poverty, racism, classism, economic justice, oppression and environmental justice.

TMC engages people of diverse philosophies and faiths who find common ground in the nonviolent struggle to bring about a more peaceful and just world.

STOCKING STUFFERS

By Bette McDevitt

If you're as old as some of us are.... you may remember the veiled threat of coal in your Christmas stocking if you didn't behave well before the holidays. We'd like to deliver on that threat to some of our politicians and institutions, and then, we'd like to give a sweet to those who do well by their constituency. You may have ideas of your own. If so let us know, and we'll carry it in the next issue.

So here we go, bad guys first....

Our State Legislature deserves coal in their stockings, for their sloth-like behavior in preparing a budget four months late, that depends on borrowing from the future and further proliferation of gambling, rather than fair taxes levied on those who can afford to pay them.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette deserves coal for their decades-long recurring editorial obsession with

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THE NEW PEOPLE

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The East End Community Thrift (Thrifty) is an all volunteer-run thrift shop which provides quality, low-cost, used clothing and household goods to the surrounding community. Thrifty needs volunteers and shoppers! Please contact us at (412) 361-6010 and ask for Shirley or Shawna, or stop in at 5123 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15224.

Email shawnapgh@aol.com.

We are mission driven volunteers who look to build love and community by serving others in times of need.

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The New People is distributed each month to 2,500 people who belong to diverse organizations, businesses and groups.

To Submit Articles, Photos, or Poems: Visit www.thomasmertoncenter.org/submit

To Submit an Event to the TMC Calendar: Visit www.thomasmertoncenter.org/calendar

Advertising prices range from \$15 for a business card size to \$250 for a full page. There is a 10% discount when purchasing 6 months of ad space at a time, and a 20% discount when purchasing a year of ad space at a time. An additional 10% discount is available for non-profit organizations and faith-based groups.

For more information: Call 412-361-3022 or email newpeople@thomasmertoncenter.org.

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- Articles may not necessarily represent the views of Partners)

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TMC supports these organizations' missions.

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REFLECTIONS FROM TMC DIRECTOR: CONFRONTING SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE IN 2018 (Cont'd)

By Gabriel McMorland

rainstorm during the May Day march for immigrant and worker rights, and the July heat for the largest anti-war march Pittsburgh has seen in years. We approached all this work in a spirit of solidarity. With hope and honesty, let's recognize that we have never lived in a just and peaceful world. The strongest forces shaping the last 500 years of history are explicitly racist colonialism and the subsequent concentration of global wealth during the rise of capitalism. Our own constitution was written by men who supported violent expansion into native American lands, imagined no place for women in public life, and either owned slaves or profited from commerce closely related to the slave economy. Today's billionaires and big corporations transcend the power of individual nations, while the longstanding hierarchies of white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism remain firmly in place. Our work must build towards something better.

Inequality fuels injustice. People of color and other marginalized groups are the most intensely impacted by every issue, from nuclear weapons and climate change, to healthcare and living wages. At the same time, overlapping systems of oppression help concentrate power among the small number of people who consistently make decisions that harm the rest of society. Imagine what climate policy might look like if the global south had not endured centuries of violent exploitation, or if US companies had not spent decades polluting native lands and communities of color with little consequence.

Support for endless wars abroad relies on a longstanding culture of racist xenophobia, myths that center white Christians as "real Americans," and the same law and order ideology that justifies militarized policing and mass incarceration. The issues we work on are driven by the marginalization of people by our most powerful institutions and in our everyday personal interactions.

Visions of peace and justice cannot fully separate issues. Do we want solar-powered tanks and battleships with a low-carbon footprint? We want to cut military spending, but would we accept the US government reinvesting that money in expanded policing and for-profit prisons at home? Will we allow the silencing of marginalized voices in the name of "unity for the movement"?

At this year's 45th annual Thomas Merton Award dinner honoring the Center for Constitutional Rights, many of us drew inspiration from the words of its executive director Vincent Warren. After discussing the shared history of TMC and CCR, he reminded us to work in a spirit of solidarity, to connect our long legacy with the foresight of young leaders, and to take bold risks for justice. As always, I invite responses to this column and inquiries of any kind at gabriel@thomasmertoncenter.org.

FROM THE NEWPEOPLE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

Joyous Holidays and Hope-filled New Year!

As our Editorial Collective looks forward to 2018, we are filled with enthusiasm and hope because of you, our readers, TMC members and all who stand with voice, body and spirit in solidarity with all who seek justice and long for peace here in southwestern Pennsylvania and around the world.

We invite your participation in the content of *The NewPeople* throughout 2018. We plan to focus on the following issues and ask you to reflect and consider writing about any of them or reach out to others who would like to publish on them through *The NewPeople*:

- 2018 Primary and General Elections
- Abolition of Nuclear Weapons/Efforts to End War
- Environmental Justice
- Economic Justice
- Human Rights

Articles are typically due on the 13th of the month for the following month's publication. To submit articles, go to www.thomasmertoncenter.org, click on The NewPeople, and then click on submit article. Guidelines can be found there. Articles, poems, and cartoons are all welcome. For more information, call Kim Dinh, NewPeople coordinator at the 412-361-3022.

THANK YOU FROM TMC!

Thanks to all who participated in this year's BigGivePittsburgh and on e-giving day on November 28th by donating on line to support the mission of the Thomas Merton Center. Donations of \$3500 from over 40 supporters were matched by a very generous TMC member.

This holiday season, consider making an end of the year gift to the Merton Center. When you do, you can also give in honor of or memory of a loved one. This is a very meaningful way to gift someone who, like you, seeks a more just and peaceful world.

Another reminder, if you are 70.5 years of age or older, and have an Individual Retirement Account (not a Roth IRA) that requires a minimum distribution before the end of 2017, you may direct all or part of it to charitable organizations before the end of the calendar year. By doing so, you will not have to pay taxes on that portion of your RMD. Congress made this provision permanent in 2015. Whatever funds you direct to the charitable organizations, however, cannot be later claimed as a charitable tax deduction when submitting your annual federal tax return. For more information, please call TMC at 412-361-3022.

CONGRATULATIONS TO TMC'S NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

The results of the TMC Board Election are in! Congratulations to our new Board members Fatema Juma, Emily Neff, and Bob Wilson!

THOMAS MERTON QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for Him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because He is out of place in it, His place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, who are tortured, bombed, and exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst....It is in these that He hides Himself, for whom there is no room"

BORDER WATCH

2017 SOA WATCH AT THE BORDER- NOGALES, AZ

By Christina Castillo

Top: people gathering outside of Eloy Detention Center to show solidarity with detained immigrants

Bottom: activists from Pittsburgh holding up a banner designed by Christina Castillo

(Photos: Kim Dinh)



From November 9-13th, Casa San Jose sent a delegation of 32 people from Pittsburgh to the US-Mexican border to participate in the national convergence held by the School of the Americas. The group was made up of immigrant people, DACA youth, and allies.

Staff and volunteers of Casa San Jose worked tirelessly, day and night, to fundraise enough money to cover hotel expenses, car rentals, flights, gas money, and food expenses for all participants. This involved selling food made by the Latino community, selling t-shirts, community outreach, and other fundraising events hosted by Casa San Jose.

A very important component for the group was centering the voices and experiences of those who are most directly impacted by US policy to police, exploit, and abuse people of color. This meant lifting up and centering only Casa San Jose and making sure that when it comes to immigrant rights, we follow the Latina women who are leading Pittsburgh's immigrant rights movement, and support them in any way that is helpful.

We want to thank NewPeople Newspaper for allowing us to write our own piece, and for passing us the mic in this edition. Now more than ever is the time for solidarity. And we hope to move forward in movement work, in social work, and all other important work with trusting and listening to our women of color.

MERTON AWARDEE OF 2017 LIFTS UP THE TMC (CONT'D)

By Neil Cosgrove and Bette McDevitt

CCR has been in the forefront of legal efforts to protect the human rights of Guantanamo detainees since the prison began operating in 2002. Warren said his organization's approach to assisting the original detainees, now 41 in number, has been necessarily "improvisational," balancing legal strategies with "political realities." He said CCR has been "thinking about a range of approaches" that cannot be revealed just yet, while suggesting one challenge might be that the "justification for keeping them there 15 years later has to be different."

Warren gave credit to his colleague and TMC member, Jules Lobel, attorney, professor at University of Pittsburgh Law School, and past president of CCR. He praised Lobel, lead attorney in the landmark case *Ashker v. Governor of California*, a successful challenge to long term, indefinite solitary confinement that has changed the lives of thousands of prisoners.

When asked what he saw during the past year as the most egregious violation of constitutional rights, Warren stated that "all violations are terrible." Then he added that when a president under investigation "claims the power to fire the person investigating him" and seeks to further protect himself by attacking the media and organizers, "that's what we have to keep our eye on."

Neil Cosgrove and Bette McDevitt are members of the Editorial Collective.

Top: Vince Warren (middle) with TMC board members M. Shernell Smith and Rob Conroy

Bottom Left: Thomas Merton Award Dinner at the Sheraton Hotel

Bottom Right: Mark Dixon, Laura Wiens, and Ginny Hildebrand singing a welcome song

(Photos: Steve Capri)



DAMAGING MYTHS

CONGRESSIONAL TAX OVERHAUL RELIES ON MYTHOLOGY

By Neil Cosgrove

Regardless of what shape the Republicans' tax overhaul finally takes, the House members and Senators pushing it through Congress have clearly established that they are passionately committed to large, permanent cuts in the taxes paid by corporations and the wealthy, while they are largely indifferent to the benefits low-income and middle-class Americans might gain from their efforts.

The process by which members of both chambers have sought to keep the bills within the rules of "budget reconciliation," thus allowing passage by a one-vote majority in the Senate, have established this clarity. In the House, the proposed legislation must not contribute more than \$1.5 trillion to the deficit, while in the Senate the "Byrd rule" applies, stipulating that a budget bill cannot add to the deficit 10 years after its passage.

Not once has a Republican leader suggested that maybe they could keep within the reconciliation limits by dropping plans to repeal or cut the estate tax, which now only applies to family estates of \$11.2 million and above, or to possibly lower the corporate tax rate by, let's say, 10% instead of 15%. Rather, those leaders have laser-focused on provisions that would limit their plans benefits any cuts for those who are less than wealthy. (See the accompanying chart.)

The House and Senate bills propose to reduce the deficit amounts by eliminating, after a period of time, various cuts benefiting lower-income and middle-class taxpayers. In addition, they prefer eliminating the deduction of paid state and local taxes, or deductions for medical expenses and student loan interest, or taxing graduate student scholarships, or eliminating the individual mandate in the Affordable Care Act. Just about any such provision that puts the touch on middle- or lower-income citizens

has been considered, but not retention of the current Alternative Minimum Tax, which insures that wealthy individuals pay at least some tax each year, regardless of their various accountants' creativity.

Is it a free-market ideology that is motivating the congressional majority? Or is it, as David Pepper of the Ohio Democratic Party claims, "CEOs in rooms saying, 'This is important to us' and donors saying, 'If you don't do this again, we'll never support you'?"

Hard to say, but what we do know is that Republicans have been consistently justifying their tax project by resorting to myth-making—that is, to uttering demonstrably false explanations of how the worlds of finance and economics actually work.

President Trump claims, for instance, that the United States is the most highly-taxed nation in the world, which is just not true. According to International Monetary Fund data, the share of US gross domestic product (GDP) raised in taxes is 30.9%, making our country the 71st most taxed. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found the US ranked 26th out of 36 "mainly developed countries" in the amount of taxes contributed to total labor costs. That same data showed the US ranked last in the percentage of GDP that went to consumption taxes.

As for corporate taxes, the US rate of 35% is the highest among OECD-analyzed countries, as our politicians keep reminding us. However, after various allowances and deductions are factored in, the Congressional Budget Office has found the effective rate to be 18.6%, considerably lower than in the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, US corporate income tax as a percentage of GDP is less than that for the United Kingdom, Japan, and even that alleged tax haven Ireland.

A more plausible argument for lowering corporate taxes is that companies will then reinvest their additional capital, expand operations, hire more workers, and raise wages. Unfortunately, according to John W. Schoen of CNBC, the available evidence doesn't support this claim either. He points to research by the Institute for Policy Studies that examined "92 publicly held US corporations that posted profits every year from 2008 through 2015 and paid less than 20% of those earnings in federal income tax."

It turns out that more than half of those corporations actually reduced the number of their employees over that eight-year span, with "a median change in payrolls of minus one percent." Where did the excess capital go instead? To buying back shares, in order to increase investors' share prices, and to CEO pay, which went up 18%.

In 2014 two New York University economists found that "differences in state corporate tax rates, had little impact on job creation." What did make a difference were reductions in individual income tax rates, if "they don't increase federal borrowing to make up the difference." (That federal borrowing will skyrocket under the Republican tax plan is a sure thing.)

In short, what would create jobs are tax cuts for people other than the wealthy, and higher wages, but neither step is a priority in the Republican tax plan. Despite being woefully unpopular, party leaders have convinced themselves that turning this plan into law will ensure they keep their congressional majorities in the 2018 election. Could it be that this surmise will also turn out to be a myth?

Neil Cosgrove is member of the Editorial Collective and the Merton Center Board.

Allocation of Changes in Net Federal Revenues and Spending Under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

Millions of Dollars

Income Category	2019	2021	2023	2025	2027
Less than \$10,000	1,540	5,870	7,440	8,680	10,070
\$10,000 to \$20,000	960	9,050	11,400	12,180	16,060
\$20,000 to \$30,000	80	9,000	10,200	12,210	16,720
\$30,000 to \$40,000	-3,920	770	2,440	2,560	7,610
\$40,000 to \$50,000	-6,040	-2,660	-1,800	-1,530	5,270
\$50,000 to \$75,000	-22,270	-19,470	-16,940	-17,380	3,980
\$75,000 to \$100,000	-21,520	-21,260	-18,470	-19,540	-1,390
\$100,000 to \$200,000	-64,240	-63,990	-52,900	-55,470	-5,340
\$200,000 to \$500,000	-59,570	-60,110	-50,010	-54,530	-5,190
\$500,000 to \$1,000,000	-24,880	-24,080	-18,690	-20,000	-1,940
\$1,000,000 and over	-34,100	-28,690	-13,100	-15,810	-5,780
Total, All Taxpayers	-233,950	-195,570	-140,400	-148,620	40,110

Source: Staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation and the Congressional Budget Office.

Amounts are for calendar years and exclude effects of several provisions, including doubling the exemption allowed under estate and gift taxes.

Components do not add to totals due to rounding.

A decrease in federal deficits, such as an increase in taxes or a decrease in spending, is shown as a positive value. An increase in federal deficits is shown as a negative value.

FUNDING DESTRUCTION

STOP BANKING THE BOMB

By Rev Paul Dordal

On Friday, November 17, 2017 more than two dozen Pittsburgh area anti-war activists gathered in front of the headquarters building of PNC Financial Services Group in downtown Pittsburgh to protest the nation's seventh largest bank's loans and investments in corporations that manufacture U.S. nuclear weapons.

Our loud and raucous yet peaceful and non-violent picket was the first action of the Stop Banking The Bomb campaign, which was started in September by a handful of volunteer activists from the Pittsburgh chapters of Veterans For Peace, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the Thomas Merton Center's Anti-War Committee, and members of the Pittsburgh Peace Roundtable. Our Stop Banking The Bomb coalition of local and regional organizations now stands at ten strong just a few weeks after beginning, and we are growing.

According to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), PNC Bank has loaned \$1.186 billion dollars to eight nuclear arms manufacturers since 2013. The eight companies include some of the most notorious corporations representing the U.S. Military Industrial Complex: General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, Bechtel, Moog, Orbital, Textron, BWX, and Huntington Ingalls.

Our Stop Banking The Bomb coalition was born from the realization that the U.S. government refuses to acknowledge its complicity in starting and fueling the global nuclear arms race. On July 7, 2017, 122 nations of the world voted at the U.N. in overwhelming solidarity against the presence of nuclear arms on our planet. Only one nation voted against the ban (the Netherlands) and one abstained (Singapore). The U.S. government did not even

participate in the negotiations and refused to cast a vote. The U.S. government and its politicians are not listening to the people of the U.S. who also want to ban the bomb. That's why we decided to target the financiers of U.S. nuclear weapons.

On November 3, 2017 a team from the Stop Banking The Bomb steering committee met with senior executives from PNC Bank and presented our demands: Sell off the loans and create a formal binding corporate policy never to finance, loan, or invest in any corporation involved in the manufacture or sale of nuclear weapons. The meeting ended without a commitment from PNC Bank, so our growing coalition decided to make our demands known to the people of Pittsburgh.

The day before our picket one of the Vice-Presidents of PNC called to accuse our coalition of acting in bad faith for going public and threatened to call off our negotiations if we continued with our picket. In response, our coalition told the PNC VP that the public needs to know about these immoral loans and investments, and the only way to do that is to take our message to the streets. We assured the PNC VP that we were a non-violent, peaceful coalition and that we simply wanted to inform the public about our campaign.

Even though we had been civil and respectful in our meetings and communication with PNC Bank representatives, when we showed up at the front of PNC Tower Building we were met with a significant contingent of Pittsburgh Police, private security, and several PNC executives who immediately began berating us for our protest. The police were both inside the PNC building and outside the building, protecting the finance-capitalists and demanding that we move off their so-called private property. Our group included not a few women and men in their

seventies—peaceful protesters who would not harm anyone. The police and security kept pushing us around, telling us where we could and could not be. Several of us noted that the police, instead of protecting corporations, should be protecting the people from the capitalist bankers who finance death and destruction all around the world.

Nevertheless, we continued to persist and protest, meet with and talk to the people on the streets, and hand out our flyers, despite being harassed by the police and private security. At one point one of the PNC executives cursed at me in full view of the police; I had to de-escalate the situation due to the intimidating behavior of the banker. That same bank executive then began to take pictures of all of the non-violent, peaceful picketers.

As we began to wrap-up our picket, we spontaneously began to chant "We'll be back! We'll be back! We'll be back!" A PNC worker who was reading one of our information flyers around the corner from the PNC Tower, remarked quietly to me as we were leaving, "I agree with what you are doing. Keep it up!"

On December 9, 2017 the Stop Banking The Bomb campaign coalition hosted a strategy meeting at the Thomas Merton Center. We know we need to be in this for the long haul and that our initial protest was just the first salvo across the bow of the finance-capitalist's flagship.

But there's another thing we know.

We will win!

Rev. Dordal is member of the Thomas Merton Center's Anti-War Committee and a volunteer organizer for Veterans For Peace, Chapter 47.

KOREAN WAR AND THE TRUMP FULMINATIONS

By Michael Drohan

Understanding the global geopolitical situation at the time of the Korean War provides us with a necessary context to make sense of the war. At the end of World War II in 1945, the major imperial powers of the world such as Great Britain, France and Japan were wounded giants. The lesser imperial powers, such as Belgium, Holland and Portugal, were also greatly weakened. The US, with its veiled imperial ambitions, was the only country to come through the war strengthened, if anything, since the war did not reach its shores.

This was the moment of opportunity for the countries of Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, groaning under colonial oppression. Country after country struck at this opportune moment. The first to strike was India in 1947, but tens of others followed in the decade of the 50s.

The gig was up, but the imperial powers had a not-so-secret plan. This plan was to have a changing of the guard in the form of handing over political control, while maintaining economic control and access to cheap resources. This "neo-colonial plan" was implemented widely in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The US had yet another plan; that is, to edge out the former colonial rulers and take control of the natural resources by putting in place client regimes subservient to US interests. This plan took different shapes in different arenas. In Vietnam, the US buttressed financially the bankrupt French colonial endeavor to hold onto that country, while later taking over the entire project through the Vietnam War. In Korea, the US hoped to keep out the Soviets and replace the Japanese empire.

The colonies themselves, aspiring for independence, were often divided into two groups: one was the nationalist group, which often fell for the neocolonial solution. The other grouping tended to be more radical, demanding a clean cut with colonialism and its economic structures

Continues on page 7....



Activists gather in front of the PNC building downtown on November 17th (Photos: John Harvey)

KOREAN WAR AND THE TRUMP FULMINATIONS (CONT'D)

By Michael Drohan

of inequality and foreign domination. The latter were, generally, socialist or communist in affiliation and got the support of the then Soviet Union.

In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh wanted radical restructuring. In Korea, Kim Il Sung had a similar vision. The supposed reason for US intervention was the "Communist threat," but when decoded the real threat to the US was reform to empower peasants and poor people at the expense of the wealthy and international capitalists. A similar dynamic played out in the Belgian Congo, with Patrice Lumumba representing the radical egalitarian position and the US client Mobutu Sese Seko representing the neo-colonial façade of independence.

The Korean War

Officially the war is said to have begun on June 25, 1950, when the Korean

People's Army (KPA) crossed the 38th Parallel and attacked the South. In reality, the war began on Aug 9, 1945, when the Soviets declared war on Japan, while entering and liberating Korea. The US was having none of it and declared war on August 10, 1945, creating a dividing line between two occupation zones, the 38th parallel.

The US was to occupy south of the line and the Soviets the north. The US appointed Lt. General John Hodge as military governor. He arrived in Korea on September 8, 1945. Hodge appointed Japanese colonial administrators to govern this part of the peninsula. Uproar ensued but it gives us a flavor of the US project. In December martial law was declared in face of opposition from the Koreans.

Many Koreans had helped the Chinese in their civil war, especially in Manchuria, to secure their victory.

Consequently, many Koreans were seasoned guerillas and well organized, and the Chinese were anxious to help them in their struggle for independence. In the south, the US carried out a general election and a reactionary dictator, Syngman Rhee was elected leader.

On June 28, 1950 the KPA took over Seoul and Syngman Rhee was evacuated. South Korean forces were reduced from 98,000 to 22,000. The war was pretty much over but the US was not in accord. It engineered a UN resolution condemning the KPA and secured an international force to fight for the south. In August, Congress appropriated \$12 billion.

Once the US entered the war the massacre of the people of Korea began. None other than a US General described it as follows: Maj. Gen. Emmett O'Donnell, who led the Far

East Bomber Command of B-29s that participated in the bombings said their goal was "to work burning five major cities in North Korea to the ground, and to destroy completely everyone of about 18 major strategic targets." Curtis Lemay boasted that Strategic Air Command "burned down just about every city in North and South Korea both." He also estimated that "over a period of three years or so, we killed off 20 percent of the population."

This is why North Korea is so exercised about the fulminations of Donald Trump. Would that he knew a modicum of history but, alas, we are afflicted with a political head of state who knows not of the crimes of the 1950s and seems compelled to repeat the same.

Michael Drohan is a member of the Editorial Collective and the Board of the Thomas Merton Center

AN AMERICAN IN NORTH KOREA

By Derek Ford

Returning to Pyongyang from a few long days travelling around Panmunjom, Sinchon, Sariwon, and Kaesong, I asked my friend Ryong-II if we could stop at a pharmacy for something for my stomach. "What's wrong?" he asked. I told him another traveler and I were just having some minor digestive problems, which are fairly common for distant travels. Kim insisted on taking me to the hospital.

When we got to the Friendship Hospital, two doctors and four nurses tended to us. We insisted we just needed some rest and Imodium, but to no avail. "We have a moral obligation to help you feel as good as possible," they told us. We left the hospital a few hours later, fully recovered and none the poorer.

This one experience encapsulates so much of the time I spent with the people of the DPRK. It was in mid-August of 2017, and I was there as an organizer with the ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War & End Racism) Coalition, having organized a group of five people traveling on U.S. passports. I was there while Trump threatened the country with "fire and fury like the world has never seen," yet the people there treated me with a hospitality and warmth I'd never before seen.

There's a reason why the U.S. is preventing its citizens from travelling to the DPRK, and it isn't to protect us. Rather, it's to further tighten and restrict the narrative about the country we have access to, a narrative that falls apart as soon as you interact with the

North Korean people.

Defeated in the Korean War, the U.S. refused to sign a peace treaty with the DPRK in July 1953. Since that time, there has been an ironclad consensus in Washington that the socialist revolution there, as in Cuba, has to be overthrown. In addition to hostile policies, military encirclement, and trade embargos, a virulent propaganda campaign of demonization has been crucial to maintaining this consensus, and spreading it to most people in the U.S. Unfortunately, the left hasn't spoken truth to these lies, and in many cases has parroted, line by line, the imperialists' smug, racist caricatures of the country, its leadership, and its people.

During my time there I was able to meet with a range of people. I had lunch with co-operative farmers, discussions with researchers, scientists, soldiers, war survivors, teachers, and students, and spontaneous chats with people while walking on the street or in the park, eating in restaurants, waiting in line at amusement parks, and hiking one of the country's many beautiful mountains. Everyone was highly informed and keen to know about life in the U.S. They knew about racist police murders, the epidemic of gender-based violence and harassment, and the homeless crisis. "Is it true? Is it really that bad?" they would ask. They could understand in the abstract, but not in a grounded way.

As a collective society, there is little

to no crime in the DPRK. Women and children walk alone at any hour of the night. There are very few police, even in Pyongyang. You do see soldiers, but they are picking up trash, building houses, or tending to the crops. When people pass by soldiers on the street, they don't cower or cross to the other side. People hitchhike everywhere, and you can count on someone to stop and pick you up when you need to get to work or to a friend's home.

This collective was forged in the most difficult of circumstances. Everyone lost family members in the U.S. war. People still die picking up mines left by U.S. troops. Another friend I met there, Hyung-Chul lost his 3 year-old daughter during the "Arduous March" of the 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union (a primary trading partner), the country endured severe draughts and floods. The U.S. blocked aid and tightened sanctions. Recalling his daughter, he looked at me, and said, "What have we ever done to anyone?"

A tiny country with no air force up against the world's largest superpower, North Koreans beat the U.S. in the 1950-1953 war, and since then no foreign army has occupied their country. They survived the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the implosion of the socialist bloc, and China's right-wing turn.

Despite the harshest sanctions, the country is thriving, sending their own satellites into space and becoming 100 percent food self-sufficient. The



Derek Ford speaks to a gathering at the University of Pittsburgh Law School on November 18th. The event was organized by the Pittsburgh anti-imperialist league. (Photo: Neil Cosgrove)

World Health Organization called their health care system "the envy of the developing world" in 2010.

They are still defeating the U.S.

The Korean struggle has been a lonely one, and it's time for peace and justice-loving people in the U.S. to stand with them as they seek to develop on their own terms.



Ginny Hildebrand and her sister (Photo: Rosemary Trump)



Crystal Jennings from the Don't Criminalizing Riders Campaign speaking at the action outside of Dom Costa's office in Morningside. (Photo: Kim Dinh)



Photo: Neil Cosgrove



Photo: Neil Cosgrove



Photo: Samey Jay (February 2017)

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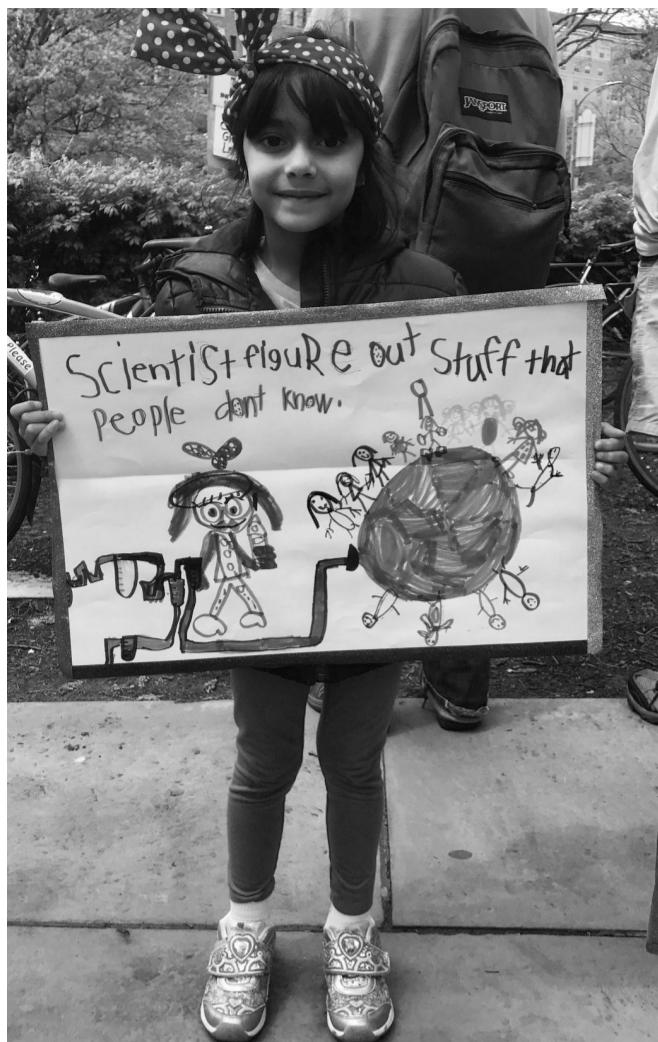


Photo: Mike Schneider

Make Hypotheses Not War. There Is No Planet B. Without Science It's Just Fiction. These are a few of the slogans on display at the March for Science, Pittsburgh, Saturday, April 22, Earth Day.

Photo: Samey Jay (October 2017)



Photo: Maren Cooke (February 2017)



From the People's Inauguration (Citizens Oath)

We come from all corners of the world, and from all corners of our country.

We are fierce. We are strong. We are bold. We are powerful, and we are united. We believe that diversity makes us stronger. We believe in justice and equality for all, and the transformative power of love.

We vow to stand against hatred in any form. We vow to defend each other and fight for freedom, dignity and opportunity for all people

Oath of solidarity (Call and Response) I,

_____, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Duties of a Citi-zen of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, pre-serve, protect and defend the People of the United States.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISM

VOICE OF WESTMORELAND ADDRESSES SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES IN GREENSBURG

By Tom Severin

I am a founding member of a new grassroots movement in Westmoreland County called the Voice of Westmoreland (VOW). We came together somewhat by accident while demonstrating against President Trump's original immigration ban directed at Muslims, in front of the courthouse in Greensburg.

During the course of our demonstrations, which occurred two or three times a week for over a month, we discovered that many of those demonstrating were associated with other activist groups within Westmoreland County. Eventually, we came up with the idea of pooling our resources to address issues of common interest. After a few organizational meetings, we came up with a name for our group and decided upon our goals for the group.

We decided to remain independent of political parties and to be solely driven

by issues of importance to people living in Westmoreland County. We have a core group of six co-founders of the group who act as the primary planners of events.

In the six months of our existence, we have had two sessions for members on how to effectively organize to reach desired goals. We sponsored a trip to Harrisburg to lobby in the rotunda of the capital building for just healthcare policies followed by a march demonstrating for responsible health care.

We collaborated with the Sierra Club to air a documentary, for over 50 people, regarding the history of coal mining in our region and the exploration of where to go from here for coal mining jobs. The documentary was called "From the Ashes" and was later aired on PBS stations.

We met with then Congressman Tim

Murphy at a listening session to hear local residents concerns.

We held an evening candlelight vigil in front of the Greensburg courthouse following the events in Charlottesville, attended by over 100 people. Speakers for the event were the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) representative, a local rabbi, a representative of the local Young Women Christian's Association (YWCA) and a member of our VOW group.

Our latest event was a presentation on gerrymandering in Pennsylvania and how we can go about trying to change the practice in our state.

Our core governing group meets approximately once a week and we have monthly meetings for our collective members which usually draws between 20 to 30 members. At

these meetings we have identified five main areas of concern, which we wish to address. They are: The Environment, Racism, Healthcare, Gerrymandering and the Opioid crisis. We have formed five working groups to address each issue. Each group will formulate plans on how to effectively address each issue and share them at our monthly meetings with the larger group. We will then determine how best to work together to achieve our ends.

Our group is a work in progress, and we hope to grow and expand our numbers and our effectiveness in addressing social justice issues. If anyone would be interested in joining our group or being made aware of our activities, please e-mail me at tomseverin528@gmail.com.

Tom Severin is a member of the Association of Pittsburgh Priests.

SOCIAL JUSTICE SEEKERS EMERGE IN PITTSBURGH'S SOUTH HILLS

By Joyce Rothermel

Many of us might look back over the past year with deep discouragement, but there is a silver lining to the presidential election results. New groups have mobilized in response. Among them are the Social Justice Seekers (SJS).

The group grew out of two gatherings of social-minded people in January and April following the November elections. Kevin Hayes, the convener of the meetings, says, "It was a 'wake-up' call for many who are committed to a more just society. Coming together was affirming, encouraging, and energizing to the over 130 people who attended."

In April, participants self-selected into groups from the north, city/east, south, and west areas. The south group decided to meet monthly after that. Most of the members come from a worship community of some type.

The mission statement adopted by SJS states, "Social Justice Seekers are people of faith who share common goals for positive change. We are committed activists who work for justice, peace, and reconciliation in our community and world. Rooted in prayer, we act with hope that our resolute efforts yield fruitful outcomes."

Kevin explains, "Our mission statement purposefully states, 'Rooted in prayer.' We believe that a contemplative disposition is needed by anyone seeking to do justice, and that the balance of contemplation and action

is the best way of yielding fruitful results. There is so much injustice in the world today; it is difficult to know how to respond. Prayer is a path to discern where one is called to serve and expend energy for justice.

Leaders of the SJS are Kevin Hayes, Miriam Manion, Marlene Milik, John Pillar, and Pat Quolke. The structure is loose and egalitarian, with decisions put before the group for input, discussion, and consensus. While predominantly white, middle-aged, and Christian because of the personal relationships that have drawn people to the group thus far, they are actively seeking to be more diverse. This includes diversity of age, gender (LGBTQ members are welcome), race, and background. They aspire to be an ecumenical and interfaith group as well.

SJS has sub-committees to channel people's energies into specific areas of interest. The politically-oriented focus group created a postcard and letter writing campaign to end gerrymandering of districts within our state and to pressure state representatives and senators to co-sponsor the Fair Districts referendum on gerrymandering. The Issue-oriented group will work to educate people about health care, including promoting the keeping of the Affordable Care Act and making a priority of affordable and accessible health care for all Americans, with an immediate focus on re-funding the CHIP program for

underserved children both federally and in PA. This focus group will also educate people about environmental health, including maintaining water quality in our region. The prayer/faith community focus group will build a network with area churches, faith and community groups to promote social justice. This activity will include identifying a person(s) in different South Hills churches, faith and community groups to distribute information in their group from SJS; and helping other churches and faith groups promote their respective activities.

After Tim Murphy vacated his congressional seat SJS decided to focus some of its energy on the special election to be held on March 13, 2018 to fill the remainder of the term. To that end, a "Meet and Greet" with Conor Lamb, the Democratic candidate has been scheduled for Tuesday, January 23, at the Bethel Park Community Center, 5151 Park Ave, Bethel Park, PA 15102 at 7 PM.

SJS will align itself with anyone who shares its values and resonates with its mission statement of promoting social justice in Pittsburgh, the U.S., and the world. This includes the Thomas Merton Center, the Association of Pittsburgh Priests, South Hills Interfaith Ministries, Pittsburgh Area Pax Christi, and Casa San Jose. Kevin explains, "We do not seek to replace any of the groups mentioned, or others; rather, we will seek to complement

them wherever possible, and will share information about other organizations with our members to help raise consciousness.

SJS hopes to "fan the flames of interest" among other members in the north, west, and city/east to organize or join already established regional groups like the North Hills People for Peace in their geographic areas of Pittsburgh, and to help organize in the same way as the South group has done over the last six months.

SJS also hopes to organize another "all-city" gathering like those held in 2017 in the early part of 2018. This gathering will be another opportunity for social justice minded people to meet and be affirmed and encouraged.

SJS meets in Benedict Hall, the social hall of St. Winifred Parish in the lower level of the former school, at 550 Sleepy Hollow Rd, Mt. Lebanon, PA 15228, on the third Monday of the month at 7:00 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for January 15.

Anyone interested in joining Social Justice Seekers and being on their email list can email Kevin Hayes at khayes@hayesdesign.com.

Joyce Rothermel chairs the Membership Committee of the Thomas Merton Center.

JUSTICE OR INJUSTICE?

PANEL ON PROBLEMS IN US JUSTICE SYSTEM

By Marianne Novy

On November 13, an evening panel at the Church of the Redeemer in Squirrel Hill analyzed some of the current problems with the American justice system before an attentive audience of over 100 people.

Dean Larry Davis of the Pitt School of Social Work, Director of the Center for Race and Social Problems, chaired the panel and began with the statistics that the US now incarcerates 716 people for every hundred thousand, with a rate more than five times as high as any other country. He also noted that prosecutors are now encouraged to seek maximum sentences.

Professor Alfred Blumstein, of the Heinz College of Public Policy at CMU, explained the relation between the history of drug laws and the growing racial disproportionality of those incarcerated. African-Americans are now 12.6% of the population and 40% of those incarcerated, and 25% of all serving life sentences in US prisons are there because of drug-related offenses. The push for mandatory minimum sentences for drug buying began in the mid-seventies; the desire of families of the addicted for toughness was used for political benefit.

Mandatory minimums didn't help reduce drug use because the market continued. However, in early 1986 a five-year mandatory minimum was established for buying 500 grams of cocaine or 5 grams of crack, a version of cocaine more often used by some African-Americans. This drastically increased the racial disparity of those in prison. Under Attorney General Holder's Justice Department, in the Obama administration, many states began to move away from mandatory minimums, but Attorney General Jeff Sessions has tried to stop this. However, the PA Supreme Court has declared mandatory minimums unconstitutional.

Professor David Harris of the Pitt

Law School set out several differences between Holder's policies and Sessions'. First, Trump, by contrast to Obama, appointed his Attorney General to defend him. Second, Sessions has overseen a move away from evidence-based practice; for example, he maintains mandatory minimums although there is no evidence that they work. He ended the Science Task Force and cut federal funding for research on police practices. The report on Ferguson police shows that they needed a consent decree, but Sessions ignored this. Sessions' Justice Department is all about removing restrictions on police practice.

Third, in spite of this preference, Sessions' department doesn't listen to what police say about policies. Sessions wants police to enforce immigration law, but police know that they shouldn't try to do this because immigrants will then be afraid to cooperate with the police on other issues. Furthermore, contrary to Sessions' claims, undocumented immigrants are not driving violence. Fourth, Sessions' department does not use tools of police reform, such as consent decrees, to help end unfair behavior, which inflicts injustice more heavily on people of color. Holder's Justice Department investigated unconstitutional police behavior in over 20 cities, the first of them being Pittsburgh. Sessions isn't doing this. He also ended the voluntary audits of police department behavior that had been done by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Substituting for Celeste Taylor, who was ill, Tim Stevens, founder and CEO of the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP), gave history and discussed current issues in Pittsburgh and the 21st Summit on Racism, upcoming on January 20, 2018. After the beating of Jordan Miles, B-PEP went with CAPA students to the City Council and produced legislation and the booklet "You and the Police,"

recently updated. He pointed out that Trump is appointing federal judges who are younger and younger and may serve for 40 years. He advocated for the removal of questions about previous incarceration on job applications ("ban the box") and for the extension of the Rooney rule (black candidates for coach had to be among those interviewed) to other jobs, noting in particular the low representation of blacks in construction jobs.

In the question period, members of the panel touched on many topics. Harris said that an appeal by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the League of Women Voters, and B-PEP stopped the demand for ID for voting. B-PEP is hoping to get a law passed so that the local district attorney isn't the one ruling on a death caused by a police officer.

Harris said that Police Chief Schubert is continuing the training in procedural justice and implicit bias developed by the National Institute for Building Community Trust and Justice (NIBCTJ) and begun by former Chief McLay; some of this training is also

being given to the public. However, the third goal of the NIBCTJ, racial reconciliation, is lagging behind what has been done in other cities. In response to a question about juvenile offenders, Harris referred to research from the Urban Institute, arguing that there should not be life sentences without parole for crimes committed by a juvenile. PA was the top state in imposing these sentences. He said that many others in prison were also juveniles in their brain development when they were sentenced and should have their sentences reduced because of this ruling.

This event was the fourth in Redeemer's Great Issues Forums, all so far dealing with race in Pittsburgh. The fifth will be a panel on intersections of race and LGBTQ issues in our community, to be held at Redeemer at 7 pm on March 15, 2018.

Marianne Novy is recently retired as a professor of English. She is a member of Church of the Redeemer and chairs the Social Justice and Outreach Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.



Larry Davis, David Harris, Tim Stevens, and Alfred Blumstein speak at the Church of the Redeemer on November 13th. (Photo: Neil Cosgrove)

VOTE Information provided by VoteAllegheny

2018 Elections Calendar

February: Tuesday 2/13/18—1st day to circulate nomination petitions for candidates in major parties (D&R)

March: Tuesday 3/6/18—Last day to circulate petitions

Wednesday 3/7/18—1st day to circulate nomination papers for political bodies (including independents)

Wednesday 3/28/18—Verify your voter registration for primary
<https://www.paVoterServices.state.pa.us/Pages/VoterRegistrationStatus.aspx>

April: Monday 4/16/18—Last day to postmark voter registration before primary, or register online <http://register.votespa.com>

May: Tuesday 5/1/18—Board of Elections meeting before primary

Wednesday 5/2/18—LWVGP publishes Voters Guide in the New Pittsburgh Courier <http://www.NewPittsburghCourierOnline.com/>

Tuesday 5/8/18—Deadline to deliver civilian absentee ballot application

Friday 5/11/18—County must receive absentee ballots by 5:00pm

Monday 5/14/18—deadline to postmark military and overseas absentee ballots

Tuesday 5/15/18—PRIMARY ELECTION for US Senator (Casey's seat), US Representatives in Congress, Governor, Lt. Governor, State Senators (even # districts), State Representatives in Legislature, Democratic and Republican State Committee Persons.
Polls open 7am–8pm. www.VotesPA.com for your polling place

June: Monday 6/4/18—Board of Elections certifies election results

August: Wednesday 8/1/18—Last day to circulate and file nomination papers nominating independent candidates or Minor Political Party candidates

VoteAllegheny is a group of volunteers committed to ensuring that citizens of Allegheny County have safe, reliable, accessible, recountable, voter-verifiable elections. Join us at our weekly meetings on Sundays at the Smallman Street Deli on Murray Ave at 4pm, or visit us online at VoteAllegheny.org

IMPERIALISM MARCHES ON

CRISES IN YEMEN

By Joyce Rothermel

The conflict in Yemen is now into its third year. It has rendered 17 million Yemenis food insecure and over a third of the country's districts in severe danger of famine. Destruction of infrastructure and breakdown of public services, especially water and sanitation systems, have resulted in a devastating cholera outbreak, which has already killed more than 2,100 individuals and continues to infect thousands each week.

"Parties to the conflict in Yemen are eroding the path to peace while the country's people suffer amid a man-made humanitarian catastrophe," said a senior United Nations official, urging Security Council member countries to use their political and economic powers to pressure warring sides to commit to a path of peace.

When briefing the UN Security Council, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General in Yemen said, "In Yemen, there are no winners on the battlefield. The losers are the Yemeni people who suffer by this war. The people [of Yemen] are getting poorer while influential leaders get richer. They are not interested in finding solutions, as they will lose their power and control in a settlement,"

While it is vital to get an agreement on securing humanitarian access, such an agreement cannot replace a solution which is a part of a larger comprehensive peace deal. A UN supported proposal is being discussed that includes humanitarian initiatives to rebuild trust as well as bring the parties back to the negotiations table.

The hope is that such a commitment will translate into action and deepen the engagement of the parties in conflict on the basis of these initiatives in order to reach a peaceful political solution. The UN will continue to utilize all its political, logistical, administrative, and advisory facilities to support the country, but only the warring parties can bring peace.

According to a report given to the UN Security Council last month by John Ging, the Director of Operations at the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the relief plan for the country continues but is still short of funds. The \$2.3 billion Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan to reach 12 million people in need of humanitarian support and protection this year has received only 55% of the resources needed. UN Member States are encouraged

to directly support these efforts in order to do more through the response plan. Despite the complexity of the response, humanitarians have already reached seven million people with direct assistance this year.

The bigger picture of the war in Yemen is that it is a proxy war of the US with its proxy being Saudi Arabia. The Saudis are trying to destroy the Houthi rebels who are a Shiite affiliated tribe. It is supposed, but not proven, that the Houthis are being helped militarily by the Iranians. The antipathy of the Saudis is because of their hatred for Shias, Iranians and Hezbollah. The Trump administration is up to its neck in this conflict and it would end in a day if the US were to refuse to weaponize the Saudi genocide in the Yemen.

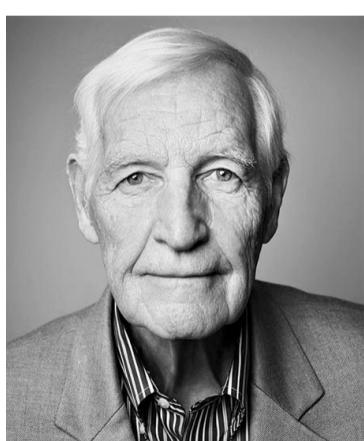
NewPeople readers are urged to contact their members of Congress regarding the human tragedy now happening in Yemen.

Joyce Rothermel is a member of the Editorial Collective of *The NewPeople*.

IN MEMORY

We remember in gratitude the life of Bill Neel, who passed from us on October 23, 2017. Bill was a vocal anti-war, anti-imperialist, and free speech resident of Butler County. He was arrested on Labor Day when then President George W. Bush was on Neville Island, for challenging the police who moved the protesters back several blocks from the rally with the President. He was fearless. His voice will be missed.

John Raines, a former Methodist minister from Philadelphia, died at age 84. He and his wife were anti-war protestors in the Vietnam War era. He is most famously remembered for raiding an FBI office, taking documents and getting them to public outlets showing proof of the FBI's systematic and illegal infiltrating, intimidating and disrupting of protest groups during the Vietnam War. His bold witness for truth will be gratefully remembered.



John Raines (Photo: PhillyMag.com)

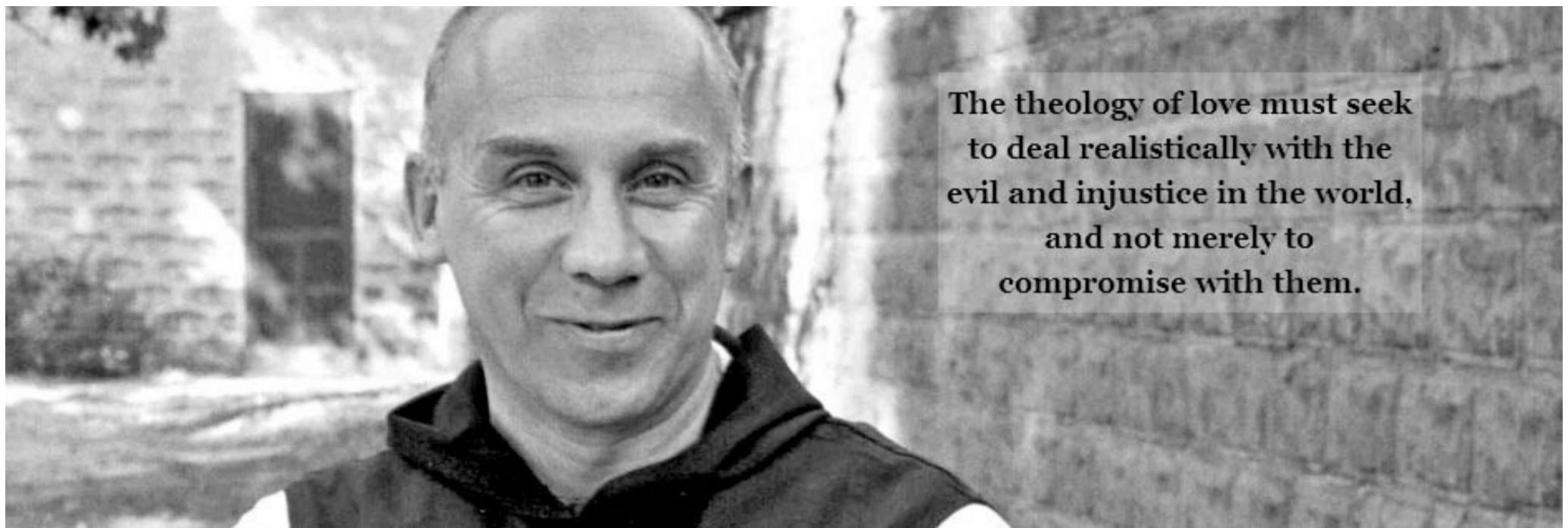


Bill Neel (Photo: Legacy.com)

Cartoon by Russ Fedorka



EMULATING MERTON



The theology of love must seek to deal realistically with the evil and injustice in the world, and not merely to compromise with them.

Photo: thomasmerton.org

LONGING FOR PEACE; WORKING FOR JUSTICE: THOMAS MERTON'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

By Joyce Rothermel

Thomas Merton, the Catholic monk of the 20th century for whom the Thomas Merton Center is named, has been called one of the great peacemakers of our time. He discovered the spiritual freedom of peace through loving, prayerful nonviolence. Because of his curious intellect, passionate caring for the world and deepening faith and conscience, Merton lived his life to the full, a life that did not cooperate with the forces of death, a life that longed for and sought the spiritual depths of peace.

John Dear, who has written on Merton's life and whose writings I have drawn from in this article, wrote: "Merton's quiet life of peace shows us that we need not give in to violence, that we can create a life of nonviolence for ourselves, that we can reclaim our humanity, that we can be at peace with ourselves through daily prayer, silent meditation, scripture study and solitude. We can live at peace, he (Merton) insists. We can make peace with the God of peace, with creation, with humanity.... This is our best hope. We don't have to become monks or hermits, he (Merton) writes, but each one of us is invited to be a person of peace and nonviolence."

Merton's life of prayer led him to become a prophet of peace, a powerful voice directed towards the world of war. He writes, "It is my intention to make my entire life a rejection of, a protest against the crimes and injustices of war and political tyranny which threaten to destroy the whole human race and the world. By my monastic life and vows, I am saying no to all the concentration camps, the aerial bombardments, the staged political trials, the judicial murders, the racial injustices, the economic tyrannies, and the whole socio-economic apparatus which seems geared for nothing but global destruction in spite of all its fair words in favor of peace. I make monastic silence a protest against the lies of politicians, propagandists and agitators, and when I speak it is to deny that my faith and my Church can ever seriously be aligned with these forces of injustice and destruction. My life, then, must be a protest against those who invoke their faith in support of war, racial injustice and tyranny also, and perhaps against these most of all.... I also say yes to all that is good in the world and in humanity. I say yes to all that is beautiful in nature... I say yes to all the men and women who are my brothers and sisters in the world."

If we, those who seek the wisdom of Thomas Merton, want to attain some spiritual integrity, we too must reject the horrors of our age, such as drones, systemic racism, permanent warfare, nuclear weapons, corporate greed, and environmental destruction—and

work actively to end them. We too need to pursue and help contribute to a culture of justice, peace and nonviolence.

Merton wrote in an essay published in *The Catholic Worker* in the early 1960s: "The duty of the Christian (and indeed all of us) in this time of crisis is to strive with all our power and intelligence, with our faith and hope in Christ, and love for God and humanity, to do the one task which God has imposed upon us in the world today... to work for the total abolition of war. There can be no question that unless war is abolished, the world will remain constantly in a state of madness and desperation in which, because of the immense destructive power of modern weapons, the danger of catastrophe will be imminent and probable at every moment everywhere. The church must lead the way on the road to the nonviolent settlement of difficulties and toward the gradual abolition of war as the way of settling international or civil disputes. Christians must become active in every possible way, mobilizing all their resources for the fight against war."

Will we walk away from the culture of war and weapons? Will we renounce violence, embrace everyone as sister and brother, live at one with creation, enter the communion of peace, enjoy the fullness of life in nonviolence, let love and compassion be our way of living? This is our challenge with the shared vision we have as members of the Thomas Merton Center of Pittsburgh.

As we celebrate the season of sharing throughout December and January, let us commit ourselves anew. Consider learning more about the campaigns the Merton Center is supporting: Stop Banking the Bomb (see article in this issue) and the campaign to rid Carnegie Mellon University of its involvement in growing militarism. Investigate the on-going work of the Center's projects listed on page two. If time and resources are available to you, become active with one of them.

To continue the TMC's work, consider including the Merton Center in your holiday and end of the year giving. Gifts can be made in honor of or in memory of those you want to remember in a special way now and throughout 2018. Visit www.thomasmertoncenter.org to find out how.

Joyce Rothermel teaches a class with Carol Gonzales on Thomas Merton for the Osher Program at Carnegie Mellon University.



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CHALLENGING BELIEFS

IS RELIGION KILLING US? A CHALLENGING TALK

By Jim McCarville

"People usually kill for non-religious reasons, but they find support in religion far too easily. Why would that be?" asked Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer at the Association of Pittsburgh Priests (APP) November Speaker event.

Nelson-Pallmeyer was the most challenging of APP speakers that I can recall. An Associate Professor of Peace and Justice at St. Thomas University, Nelson-Pallmeyer is anything but orthodox in his views.

He challenges us to consider some of the contents of the Old and New Testament, to realize how many of the writers of those times, just like pundits of our own time, were caught up in cultural wars and self-justifications of violence. "Militarism was a belief system then," he says, "and it still governs us today".

Nelson-Pallmeyer grew up in what sounds like a Lake Wobegon town of northern Minnesota where all the world was well. Then, "college saved me," he said when he got the chance to study with some great theologians and to hear Martin Luther King. After college, he traveled and saw slavery in Ethiopia and incredible poverty in India. "After that, I couldn't make sense of the god that I had been earlier taught about," he said. He reevaluated his life, and everything he had thought was right, starting with

the Bible.

Nelson-Pallmeyer describes three storylines of violence in the Old Testament, which gave him pause, starting with the Book of Exodus and the "vengeful god." While this story is commonly discussed as a "liberation of the poor" story, there is also undeniable genocide against the Canaanites. The message is simple "prove your god is right through conquering with violence".

With a "so what does this mean in a nuclear age?" he paused to let that question sink in.

The second storyline was associated with the Babylonian exile and the "punishing god." In this story, because the Jews had been captured, they thought that they must have done something very wrong. The lesson they drew was "God punishes those who have lost the way."

The third storyline, that of the "saving god", was developed during the time of the Maccabees, a century before Jesus. It was the apocalyptic story. Military martyrdom was to be rewarded with salvation.

"Christians tend to ignore the first story, sanitize the second and do lectionary gymnastics with the third," he said. Several in the audience agreed.

"Those old storylines continued to saturate the environment of the New Testament writers. They would soon describe Jesus' death as a blood sacrifice, not so much to 'save us from our sins' as we often hear, but to save us from the punishment of the 'vengeful god' who punishes sin."

After Christianity became the official religion of Rome and, by the way, believing the end was near, the early fathers of the Church had to explain how Rome, which ruled with ideology, military power and client kings, could triumph over Jerusalem. This led the fathers to a "don't mess with Rome" theme.

To further explain the alliance with Rome, those early fathers scrounged around for things Jesus rejected. Jesus had seen militarization as fantasy. He blessed peacemakers and asked us to love our enemies. He saw salvation as "healing" and likened us to "mustard seeds" with great power.

Fortunately, violence is not the only storyline in the Bible, but we have to look hard to find the other stories.

Bringing us up to date, he bluntly stated that "the United States understands itself as the 'new chosen

people' or maybe 'the new Rome.' Our being the most militarized people in the world can only be explained by our 'supposed belief' that we are doing the will of God. We believe this despite the fact that we find no evidence that violence makes us safer.

"War is a lie," he says, "it drives an arms race we can't afford...and that race continues to get worse."

"By trusting the violence narratives," he said, "we foreclose the opportunity for authentic hope."

Nelson-Pallmeyer puts less confidence in scripture than he does in the "mindfulness sayings" like those of Meister Eckhart and his phrases such as - "every day is a miracle" ... "dare to face today's problems" ... and "don't walk mindless among miracles".

He does place the most confidence in "the simple invitation of God. Not the all powerful in the traditional sense," he says, "but the God who invites us to live authentic lives. If we want to learn authentically, then we must be honest with ourselves and learn from our own experience," he concluded.

Jim McCarville is a member of the TMC Board of Directors.

STOCKING STUFFERS (CONT'D)

By Bette McDevitt

privatizing liquor stores in Pennsylvania. The "State Stores" represent one of the few government programs that work and painlessly generate real millions for the state coffers, support thousands of good paying union jobs, and are efficiently run.

Duquesne University, for continuing to refuse to recognize and bargain with Duquesne's NLRB-recognized adjunct faculty union, and thus dismissing Catholic social justice teaching as irrelevant to their religious freedom.

All the guys who can't keep their paws, and other appendages, off women, and, yes, other men, who don't welcome their advances, public shaming, coal, and worse.

And Donald Trump, a truckload of coal, to be delivered to the basement of his Mar-a-Lago mansion, so he can run the air-conditioning in a way that will possibly provide a half-day's more pay to some deserving coal miner.

A mighty lump of coal to Jeffrey Beauregard Sessions, the Secretary of the Department of Justice who

cannot distinguish lies from truth.

Plenty of coal for Senator Pat Toomey, the sycophantic follower of the Twit-in-Chief, who knows not what principles mean.

Coal galore for Neil Gorsuch, the new member of the Supreme Court who lied his way all the way to the bench. Contradictions supreme indeed.

Here are those who will get some sweets in their stocking.....

Pope Francis -- for his strong support of the notion of citizen "stewardship" regarding the environment and positive views of addressing climate change. Also, his comments on the building of walls couldn't be more anti-Trumpian.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for their strong statement on the immigration issue, support of sanctuary cities, health care, environmental issues and gun control. Bishop Zubik deserves local recognition and gratitude for his stance..

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette for

publishing a local newspaper, under stressful monetary conditions, providing us with investigative reporting and an open forum on local issues.

Mayor Bill Peduto, for public statements regarding sanctuary cities and climate change. Also for his declaration in Bonn that Pittsburgh would abide by the commitments of the Paris Accord to limit the human effects on the climate crisis.

Pittsburgh City Councilwoman Natalia Rudiak, police, firefighters and citizen groups in the Mount Oliver/Carrick area for their valiant efforts to confront the opioid crisis in their area.

Patty DiMarco, for her book *Pathways to our Sustainable Future; A Global Perspective from Pittsburgh*, and for being the driving force in making the new Forest Hills Township Boro Building a green building aiming to qualify for LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — Gold designation, the second-highest certification of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Colin Kaepernick, former quarterback for the San Francisco 49'ers, who began kneeling instead of standing during the national anthem last season to protest racial inequality and police brutality. He began a national discussion.

Amy Goodman, who resolutely tells truth to power daily in *Democracy Now*. Truth will prevail.

Elizabeth Warren, in her defense of consumer rights and for standing up for economic justice and fairness to those most deprived in society.

And our amazing members, who deliver *The NewPeople*, come to events, march in the streets, serve on the board, volunteer on committees and in the office, and whose support keeps our lights on and doors open - Cornerstone Sustainers, Monthly Peacemakers, organizational, family and individual members...Thank you!

Bette McDevitt is a member of the NewPeople Editorial Collective.

BIG HISTORY

THE NEW COSMIC STORY

By Michael Drohan

The Universe came into existence approximately 13.8 billion years ago with what is called the “Big Bang,” as astrophysicists calculate it. If you like, this is the new creation story, replacing the various tribal mythical stories of the origin of the universe, which were based on primitive knowledge of physics, astronomy and mathematics. Generally when one speaks of “history,” it is understood that one is speaking about the history of humans who have been around for only two hundred thousand years or so. But the universe itself has a history going back infinitely longer, and John Haught uses the term “Big History” to describe this broader concept of history.

In order to get an idea of the grand sweep of the big history epic, Haught invites us to look at the span of history from its beginning as a library shelf of 30 large volumes, each having 450 pages. If each page represents a span of one million years, cumulatively the shelf of 30 volumes represents the long haul of the universe’s existence. Our solar system begins at volume 21, 4.5 billion years ago, but the earliest instances of life do not appear until volume 22, 3.8 billion years ago. Life remains single-celled until the end of volume 29, when the Cambrian explosion occurs. Life at this stage becomes more complex, but it is not until the middle of volume 30 that dinosaurs make their appearance. Our human

ancestors turn up in the last few pages of volume 30, but anatomically modern humans make their appearance only half way down the last page of the last volume. After the first living cells appear in volume 22, Darwinian evolution takes over. With it comes a kind of fixed formula for life’s ongoing transformation. In this sweep of big history, we humans seem to be a cosmic afterthought with no reason to think of ourselves as special.

The big question, however, is whether this epic history has a direction or meaning. Here is where Haught parts company with other believers in Darwinian evolution. To most of the latter, the evolutionary path is going nowhere except for more and more complexity. The viciousness of nature, with its natural selection and survival of the fittest iron laws, negate any benign designs or direction that humans may assign to it.

Haught points out that the vast majority of the scientific community subscribes to this position. He calls their reading of history archaeonomy (“arche” in greek means beginning or origin and “nomos” means law). This reading of the universe assumes that everything that happens in the history of nature is predetermined by inviolable physical laws established at the beginning.

Haught rejects the archaeonomy view

in extensive argumentation. He points out that it inevitably leads to cosmic pessimism. Cosmic pessimism, according to Haught, is a belief that the universe is altogether devoid of lasting, or any, meaning.

The second way of reading and interpreting the epic of the universe is what Haught calls “analogy”. According to this view the perishable things in nature are imperfect representations or analogies of eternal and invisible originals existing beyond the empirically available world. This view posits a realm of perfect being that exists beyond the world of becoming and perishing. According to analogy it is religion, not science, that awakens us to the real world. Analogy, no less than archaeonomy, usually doubts that anything of lasting significance is really going on in the long history of the physical universe. Haught refutes at great length the analogical view of the history of the universe. He maintains that the analogical view has deep roots in myths that long preceded the birth of philosophy and science and is generally subscribed to by religious groupings.

The third understanding of the epic of the universe’s history is what Haught calls “anticipation.” Unlike the other two views, it considers time to be real and not an illusion. Anticipation allows that more-being or fuller-being can emerge in time. According to Haught,

the cosmic story has had at least three inflection or turning points. The first of these is the appearance of life on earth 3.8 billion years ago. This was a radical, unpredictable change of direction in the story of the universe. The second inflection point was the emergence of life conscious of itself, that is, the emergence of intelligent beings just a few million years ago. The third inflection, according to Haught, was the emergence of “religion,” understood as the awareness of “rightness” and purpose in the universe. Anticipation, he says, “acknowledges rightness to be the greatest of present facts and as something waiting to be realized. Particularly relevant to the third inflection were developments such as Daoism, Buddhism and Hinduism in the axial age (800 to 300 BCE).

Haught’s writing is a challenging but rewarding read. It challenges the world view of materialism as held by most of the scientists in the modern era.

John Haught spoke in Pittsburgh in October on “Evolution and Faith: What is at Stake?” for the Association of Pittsburgh Priests Speakers Series.

Michael Drohan is a member of the Editorial Collective and the Board of the Thomas Merton Center

PIIN WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR

Jamaal Craig began serving in Pittsburgh as the new Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) on Monday, October 2.

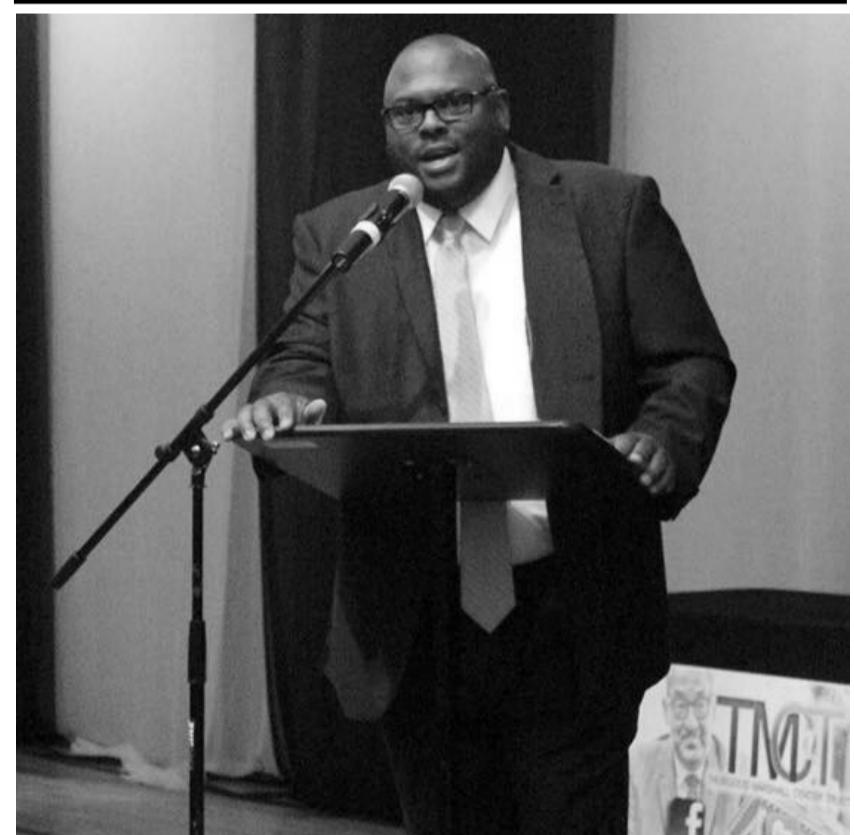
Mr. Craig has an extensive labor organizing background, including positions with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) – United Healthcare Workers West in Sacramento, California; the AFL – CIO in both Cincinnati and Chicago; and the United Steelworkers International here in Pittsburgh. Mr. Craig has also worked on two Presidential campaigns as a political organizer on the state level in Michigan and Iowa. His educational background includes formal study in Criminal Justice, Ethnic and Diversity Studies, Political Science, and Public Policy. Currently he is a Ph.D. candidate in Public Policy and Administration, and he teaches courses in Political Science and Ethnic and Diversity Studies at the Community College of Allegheny County.

A native of South Carolina, Mr. Craig resides with his family in Carnegie,

Pennsylvania. He serves as President of the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, co-chair of the Pittsburgh NAACP Labor and Industry Committee, and Board member of the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute. He is a member of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, and the Fetzer Advisory Council on Labor, Trades, and Crafts. Mr. Craig and his family are members of Wesley Center AME Zion Church.

Fred White served as Acting Executive Director, following the retirement of long-time Executive Director Lois Campbell earlier this summer. Fred and the other PIIN staff members – Bill Bartlett, Susan Lithgow, and Sue Thorn – sustained PIIN’s momentum during the transition period.

Please watch for opportunities to become acquainted with Jamaal over the coming months. PIIN plans to go forward with its work of moving people of faith into action to eliminate structural racism and economic inequity.



Jamaal Craig, PIIN's new Executive Director (Photo: PIIN.org)

REGULAR MEETINGS

DECEMBER 2017 - JANUARY 2018 EVENTS CALENDAR

12/01 - 8th Annual Benefit Concert

When: 7:30PM - 10PM
Where: Pittsburgh Friends Meeting House

12/02 - Midwife Center Open House

When: 2PM - 4PM
Where: 2831 Penn Ave
Power Pittsburgh Forward
When: 12PM - 2PM
Where: The Union Project

12/06 - Human Rights Festival and Write-a-thon

When: 6PM - 9PM
Where: Calvary Episcopal Church

12/07 - End Gerrymandering in PA

When: 6:30PM - 8:30PM
Where: Repair the World Workshop
Bishop John Michael Botean to Speak in Pittsburgh: "Nonviolence or Nonexistence: Christian Moral Relevance Today"
When: 7PM - 8PM
Where: Kearns Spirituality Center

12/08 - Witness Against Nuclear Weapons

When: 5PM
Where: Intersection of Forbes Ave and Bigelow Blvd

12/09 - Introducing the City's Gender Equity Commission: Press Conference

When: 11:30AM - 12:30PM
Where: City County Building Lobby

12/11 - Living Stones: Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land

When: 7PM
Where: Calvary Episcopal Church

12/12 - Demand Safe & Affordable Water: Hilltop!

When: 6:30PM
Where: Hill Top United Methodist Church

12/14 - Memorial for Victims & Survivors of Gun Violence

When: 6:30PM
Where: First United Methodist Church

12/16 - TMC Holiday Open House

When: 12PM - 3PM
Where: Thomas Merton Center

01/09 - 2nd Annual Pre-Summit Town Hall

When: TBD
Where: TBD

01/20 - 20th Annual Summit Against Racism

When: All Day
Where: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
*Early Bird registration ends on December 26th

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Sundays:

Book'Em: Books to Prisoners Project
First three Sundays of the month at TMC, 4-6pm
Contact: bookempgh@gmail.com

Mondays:

SW Healthcare 4 All PA /PUSH Meeting
3rd Monday, 6:30 — 8 pm
Squirrel Hill Library
Contact: bmason@gmail.com
Association of Pittsburgh Priests
2nd Monday, 7—9 pm,
St. Pamphilus Parish
1000 Tropical Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15216
Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILP)
2nd Monday, 7:00 PM
Thomas Merton Center, 5129 Penn Ave
Amnesty International #39
2nd Wednesday, 7—9 pm
First Unitarian Church, Morewood Ave.
15219

Wednesdays:

Darfur Coalition Meeting
1st and 3rd Wednesdays, 5:30 – 7:00 pm,
Meeting Room C Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill
412-784-0256
Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (PADP)
1st Wednesdays, 7-8pm, First Unitarian Church, Ellsworth & Morewood Avenues, Shadyside
Pittsburghers for Public Transit
2nd Wednesday, 7pm, 1 Smithfield St., lower level

Thursdays:

International Socialist Organization
Every Thursday, 7:30-9:30 pm at the Thomas Merton Center
Global Pittsburgh Happy Hour
1st Thursday, 5:30 to 8 pm, Roland's Seafood Grill, 1904 Penn Ave, Strip District
Green Party Meeting
1st Thursday, 7 to 9 pm, 2121 Murray, 2nd floor, Squirrel Hill
Black Political Empowerment Project
2nd Thursday, 6 pm: Planning Council Meeting, Hill House, Conference Room B

Fridays:

Unblurred Gallery Crawl
1st Friday after 6 pm, Penn Avenue Arts District, 4800-5500 Penn Ave., Friendship and Garfield 15224
Hill District Consensus Group
2nd Friday, 10 am — 12 pm, Elsie Hillman Auditorium, Kaufmann Center 1825 Centre Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15219
People of Prisoners in Need of Support
3rd Friday, 7:00pm New Hope Methodist Church, 114 W. North Ave, Pittsburgh 15212

Saturdays:

Project to End Human Trafficking
2nd Sat., Carlow University, Antonian Room #502
Fight for Lifers West
1st & 3rd Saturday, 1 pm, East Liberty Presbyterian Church
Anti-War and Anti-Drone Warfare Coalition
4th Saturday at 11:00 am at TMC, 5129 Penn Ave., Garfield, PA 15224

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