



# THE NEW PEOPLE

PITTSBURGH'S PEACE & JUSTICE NEWSPAPER

VOL. 47 No. 11 February 2018

## REFLECTIONS FROM TMC DIRECTOR

By Gabriel McMorland

The Thomas Merton Center started out the new year with a spirited protest against wage theft in high winds and single digit temperatures. As I write this, we're preparing to head back out into Pittsburgh's icy streets for a rally against the criminalization of our public transit riders and for yet another picket line demanding PNC Bank stop financing nuclear weapons. Works for peace and justice don't stop just for the weather, but these dark, frozen months do still call many of us to quiet contemplation and reflection. I find my own mind returning frequently to the question of unity in movements for justice.

We know we can only reach peace through justice, and justice remains the only path towards unity in our personal relationships, our organizations, and broader movements. We want the the vibrant peace of freedom and justice, not the violent pacification of law and order. Similarly, I hope we can imagine unity as resulting from trust and honest conversation. For generations, people have raised issues of patriarchy, white domination, homophobia, and other patterns of oppression within social movements. Too often, these concerns are labeled as hostile or divisive and met with urgent calls for unity.

Let's welcome critiques from within our own communities and across movements for peace and justice. We can examine how the injustices of society repeat themselves in our own minds, relationships, and organizations. Many thinkers, including Thomas Merton, have observed that the way we engage in peace and justice work matters at least as much as achieving any temporary political goals. I believe we can start to unravel the cycle of weaponizing calls for unity and polite respectability. While this conversation has played out for more than one hundred years, I recently found inspiration in the words of racial justice writer Robert Jones Jr., who posted on Twitter: "We can disagree and still love each other, unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist."

I welcome responses to this letter, either in your own writing for the NewPeople or as a dialogue at [gabriel@thomasmertoncenter.org](mailto:gabriel@thomasmertoncenter.org). I look forward to joining so many of you in this work throughout 2018.

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## SOME SORT OF JUSTICE

BY EMILY DEFERRARI

January 7, 2010

At midnight the bells began.

A cacophony of Chinese wind chimes, and hand held bells, and sleigh bells, Sunday morning church bells, the sound of Eastern gongs, large bells and small bells; every bell imaginable was ringing in a great explosion of jubilant madness through the cold darkness.

Slowly the bells ebbed, the barks of the dogs emerged, and the roosters crowed, and before light

the muezzin was calling the Muslim to prayer, loud and near. And then the sun came up as if Orthodox Christmas were any other day in Jerusalem.

After that first night, I visited Jerusalem often in the winter of 2010 and though it is held dear by all the "People of the Book," Jews, Muslims and Christians, and though it is home to the ancient history of these people, it was a divided, divisive and tense city. Differences (bells and ancient history alike) aside, much of Jerusalem echoed familiar themes. The division between the haves and have nots, the

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Top: Activists gather across from the Courtyard Marriott Hotel on Campbells Run Road in Robinson to protest against wage theft from immigrants. (Photo: Pam Panchak/Post-Gazette)  
Bottom: Monica Ruiz of Casa San Jose speaks next to a "wall" of \$300 bills, representing fines that would be levied against transit riders who could not show a proof of fare payment, under a plan being considered by the Port Authority of Allegheny County. The event was emceed by Jordan Malloy, Merton Center board member, who is standing behind Ms. Ruiz. (Photo: Neil Cosgrove)

## EQT CAN'T BUY OUR COMMUNITY

BY RON READ

If you walk on Liberty Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh at night, you can see amongst the many skyscrapers the sign for EQT Corporation glowing in the distance. On the same night, you might also see on the side of Pittsburgh's buses advertisements for a reading program that EQT is now funding. If you attended the annual Pride March or Regatta this past summer, you might have also seen EQT's name advertised as their main sponsor. And if you are a high schooler hoping to attend college next year, you might be receiving an EQT ASPIRE grant to fund your higher education.

These examples of EQT's infiltration into various features of Pittsburgh are just some of the many ways it is gaining control over the region. Founded in 1888, EQT Corporation (formerly Equitable Resources) became the largest natural gas producer in the United States in 2017, with its acquisition of Rice Energy for 3.2 billion dollars. They own over 13,000 gross productive wells for oil and gas development and plan on adding 139 new Marcellus Shale wells in 2018. They also own hundreds of miles of pipeline in the United States, and are currently working on the 303 mile

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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.

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PITTSBURGH, PA  
PERMIT NO. 458

Thomas Merton Center  
5129 Penn Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15224  
[www.thomasmertoncenter.org](http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org)

# THE NEW PEOPLE

IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE THOMAS MERTON CENTER

5129 PENN AVENUE, PITTSBURGH, PA 15224

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**East End Community Thrift Store Hours:**  
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TMC supports these organizations' missions.

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## EQT CAN'T BUY OUR COMMUNITY (CONT'D)

BY RON READ

Mountain Valley Pipeline that activists in Virginia and West Virginia are working to stop. While EQT works on developing both production and transmission for natural gas, they also are working to develop natural gas vehicles, which will be serviced by EQT supplied natural gas stations in the future.

To strengthen their influence over politicians and public opinion, EQT invests heavily in state elections, community groups, and public events. In 2016, EQT spent over 280,000 dollars on campaigns for Republicans and a smaller percentage for Democrats (Open Secrets.org). The list of politicians that have taken money from EQT over the years includes Mike Doyle, Bill Shuster, Tim Murphy, and Keith Rothfus (Open Secrets.org). EQT has also infiltrated community organizations with employees that sit on the boards of entities as the Urban League of Pittsburgh, The Heinz Endowments, the University of Pittsburgh, and WQED. They also have a foundation which has poured millions of dollars into the non-profit community in the Pittsburgh region (EQT 990 Tax Form, 2015). And as mentioned earlier, EQT is a main sponsor for things like the Pride March (now the EQT Equality March), the Three Rivers Regatta (now the EQT Regatta), the Children's Theater Festival (now the EQT Children's Theater Festival, the Pittsburgh 10 Miler (now the EQT 10 Miler), and the Celebrate America Festival.

One of the chief characteristics of a petro-state is that the economy is built around the success or failure of oil in the global market. An example could be Venezuela, where the country experiences shocks to its economy whenever the price of oil falls. When companies like EQT corporation try to make themselves pillars of the community by taking over other large companies and financing social institutions, what happens when the price of natural gas falls or becomes worthless after humans realize the dan-

ger it poses for climate change? And what happens when the people they are funding realize (if they haven't already) the danger posed by fracking for natural gas?

If you want an answer, just ask those coal mining towns in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania what happens when the market for a natural resource goes away. And you can also ask the coal miners and millworkers what happened when they grew disillusioned with the benefits of living in a company town and organized for something better. Or talk to the folks who marched in the People's Pride demonstration this year. How were they treated when they stepped out of line?

Ultimately, corporations like EQT must be pushed into a minimal role in our society if we are to embrace clean, renewable energy and to also build a stable society. Yes we can work to make sure that our community has a low carbon footprint and delay pipeline expansions, but ultimately the root cause of these problems must be addressed. We live in an oligarchy where corporations control our society through large sums of money. EQT is one of those corporations and they are using their money to advocate for fossil fuel consumption while pacifying the public. We can blame ourselves for using cars and stoves all we want, but ultimately EQT must be held accountable for what they are doing.

**Ronald Read is a member of 350.org.**

## HAS THE AMERICAN STATE BEEN "CAPTURED"?

BY NEIL COSGROVE

Americans often express concern that their government has become too much in the thrall of ideologies, of ways of interpreting the world so extreme that the ideologues in question cannot acknowledge, much less accommodate, different viewpoints. But what if that isn't the main source of dysfunction in our government? What if the main problem is that our state has been "captured" by people motivated primarily by the desire for economic power and personal gain?

Operatives at the World Bank began using the term "state capture" around the year 2000, when one of them defined "state capture as the efforts of a small number of firms (or such groups as the military, ethnic groups and kleptocratic politicians)" to accrue private gains by such means as "purchase of legislative votes, executive decrees, court decisions and illicit political party funding."

The bank was concerned at the time with the activities of "oligarchs" in central Asian countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union. But the term "state capture" has since been used by protesters in Bulgaria and Romania, and in a most sustained and concentrated manner by the opposition in South Africa, unhappy with President Jacob Zuma's style of governance.

"State capture" differs from more ordinary forms of political corruption in that the outcomes of the actors' efforts are more certain, focused, and systemic. In South Africa, for instance, business associates of Zuma's son, Duduzane, the three Gupta brothers, are perceived as having strong influence over the president's decision-making. More generally, according to *The Economist*, Zuma is seen as putting people in charge of "state-owned enterprises and other governmental institutions" who then allow Zuma, his sons, and the Guptas to "loot public funds."

*The Economist* further reports that South Africa's "state capture" features the firing of "principled individuals," thus weakening institutions that might otherwise oppose corrupt practices and uphold the law. For example, in 2015 Zuma endured a serious political backlash when he attempted to replace a highly respected Finance Minister with a flunky. Zuma did eventually manage to rid himself of that troublesome minister, Pravin Gordhan, in March of this past year.

The effectiveness of the South African Revenue Service's "research and investigations" arm has been severely compromised, according to *The Economist*; particularly after a tobacco smuggling and tax evasion scheme involving another of the president's sons, Edward Zuma, inexplicably faded away. (The Revenue Service will come up 51 billion rand short of its targets this year, after increasing tax revenue on bank profits from 1% to 21% during this century's first decade.)

Gordhan alleges that "state capture" has now spread through "law enforcement, the state-owned enterprises, the revenue service, the Treasury and now the central bank." Despite hundreds of counts of

corruption accumulated by the National Prosecuting Authority against Zuma himself, related to an arms deal, no charges have been brought, while evidence against the Guptas has also been ignored.

We're guessing, at this point, that all of the above is beginning to strike our readers as uncomfortably familiar, rather than political machinations in a distant country of a kind President Trump speaks of dismissively. South Africa has one-sixth of the U.S. population, and over one-quarter of its labor force is unemployed, while the American economy seemingly thrives, at least if you are among those fortunate to possess an ample income. Still, the question nags: Is the American state in the process of being "captured?"

We do have our oligarchs, whether they be the Koch brothers with front organizations like ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) on the national level, or Art Pope of North Carolina on a state level. Many Republicans seem confident they can retain power by using their donors' deep pockets to purchase an alternative narrative they can relate to voters, despite the woeful unpopularity of their tax and health care policies.

As for our justice system, President Trump seemingly fired the FBI director after failing to strong-arm him into dropping an investigation into the activities of his campaign organization, and he routinely denigrates both federal judges and his own Justice Department. Appointment of federal judges has apparently been turned over to the Federalist Society, a highly conservative group of lawyers dedicated to an "originalist" interpretation of the Constitution (while still somehow managing to identify corporations as "persons"). Enforcement of environmental and tax laws are undermined by ongoing cuts in budgets and staffing at the Environmental Protection Agency and the Internal Revenue Service. Regulations meant to fight abuses in banking, consumer services, and resource extraction are habitually rolled back, to the applause of people who contributed directly to the campaigns of those now in office.

Sometimes the connection between policy and kleptocracy is obvious, as in the President's recent waiver of punishments levied on Deutsche Bank, to whom Trump owes as much as \$300 million, according to *the Financial Times*. Sometimes, as with the claim that the tax overhaul was a "jobs bill," there is at least an attempt to justify an action as more broadly beneficial. (Nevertheless, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin's one-page set of platitudes claiming to be an "analysis" of the bill's effects was a clear expression of contempt for both Congress and the truth.)

As a review of evidence in support of the assertion that "state capture" is occurring right here, in the U.S., we've only scratched the surface. We're sure readers can come up with plenty of other examples on their own.

**Neil Cosgrove is a member of the NewPeople editorial collective and of the Merton Center Board.**



More than 25 brave souls from the Thomas Merton Center and other local activist groups came out for the second picket against PNC Bank for investing over one billion dollars to fund nuclear weapons manufacturers. (Photo: Rev. Paul Dordal)

# SACRED VIOLENCE OR SACRED PEACE

## SACRED TEXTS WITH VIOLENCE AS SUB-TEXT AND STRUGGLE FOR NONVIOLENCE

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

Review of Book *Is Religion Killing Us?: Violence in the Bible and the Quran* by Jack Nelson Pallmeyer, 2003.

The title of this powerful book is a tad misleading since in addition to the violence of God as expressed in sacred scriptures, it addresses many other topics which are crucial in our struggle for nonviolence and the defeat of the culture of violence, war and militarism. The book, however, does start with emphasizing the importance of the role that violence in many of our so-called sacred texts plays in the perpetration of massive violence in our world today. Pallmeyer pulls no punches in declaring that the mother of all violence-advocating texts is the Hebrew Bible. Sadly it does not stop there, as he maintains that the New Testament (the Gospels and other documents) and the Quran proclaim the same “violence of God” tropes that the Hebrew Bible initiates.

Pallmeyer goes into great detail in explaining in what ways the God of the Hebrew Bible is a violent God and is the exemplar of all violence. There are three dimensions to this violence of God. The first dimension of the violent God is [the] liberating [violence of God], as told in the Exodus story. God liberates his “chosen people” and drowns in the sea their oppressors and opponents. He is a powerful God who liberates his “chosen people” but their liberation is dependent upon their submission and obedience to him.

The second dimension to the violent God of the Hebrew Bible is the punishing God, as revealed in the exile of the Jewish tribe leaders to Babylon under the Persian empire. Their exile was a punishment for their disobedience and straying from subservience to the dictates of the Almighty.

The third dimension of the violent God is the apocalyptic God, who visits upon his subjects destruction and war which wipes them out or saves the elect. Examples are the visitation of the flood upon the earth, with the destruction of all living things except for the elect few. Pallmeyer illustrates these three facets of the Hebrew God with copious and devastating quotations from the sacred texts.

Many people believe that the New Testament (the Christian Bible) presents a concept of God which is in marked contrast to the Hebrew Bible. By this they mean that the God of the New Testament is a God advocating love for one’s neighbor and even one’s enemies. Pallmeyer, however, maintains that the God of the New Testament, as presented in the Gospels and the other writings of Saints Paul and John, has many of the same violent characteristics of the God of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus’ death and crucifixion is understood by the Gospel writers as Jesus, instead of us, being punished for the sins of mankind. It is still the punishing God who goes even to the extent of killing his own Son for mankind’s redemption. Exile and apocalyptic memes are replicated in the New Testament in parables such as the sheep and the goats and the apocalyptic themes of the Book of Revelations.

In regard to the Muslim holy book, the Quran, Pallmeyer strives to show that al-Lah betrays the same characteristics of the Hebrew and Christian God—he is a liberating, exiling and apocalyptic God who rewards those who obey him and punishes those who disobey him.

Pallmeyer, however, does not end there. In essence he presents the thesis that the New Testament or

Gospel writers misrepresent Jesus and what he stood for. He has many things to say about Jesus that will seem extraordinary to many people, such as, “we have scholarly tools that show that Jesus neither claimed to be God nor to be the only way to God, as John’s Gospel suggests in many ‘I am’ statements attributed to Jesus.” With many illustrations from what some scholars consider to be the authentic words of Jesus, Pallmeyer asserts that he did not subscribe to the concept of a punishing violent God.

Beyond the sacred texts and the violence of the God they present, Pallmeyer is concerned with the extreme violence that US society and its ruling institutions exhibit and how they are reinforced by sacred texts and religious traditions. He maintains that in many ways the Bible and the Quran help to perpetuate “male conceptions of punishing, coercive violence that are projected onto God and used to justify violence against women and outsiders.”

Pallmeyer’s book is full of many other reflections on the violent state of today’s world and the overweening power and violence of the United States. He goes into some detail on the concept of a “chosen people” and its demonic consequences as played out in the Middle East. The self-understanding of the US elite as the “exceptional country” or the “indispensable country” has its basis in the sacred texts and betrays a similar will to violence and domination.

**Michael Drohan is a member of the Editorial Collective of the New People and a member of the board of Thomas Merton Center.**



Dr. Carol Zinn (Photo: The Catholic Leader)

## “CHOOSING THE WAY OF THE GOSPEL... WITHOUT COUNTING THE COST”

BY JOYCE ROTHERMEL

Celebrate spring’s coming renewal by renewing your spirits and deepening your desire to choose the way of the Gospel with Dr. Carol Zinn, a Sister of St. Joseph from Philadelphia. Dr. Zinn served as the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) representative of her order at the United Nations for eight years, years during which she participated in UN sessions on such issues as human rights, the eradication of poverty, peace and disarmament, sustainable development, health care – and more. Sr. Carol’s visit is sponsored by the Association of Pittsburgh Priests and is open to all.

During her time in Pittsburgh, Dr. Zinn will view the personal, political, and prophetic aspects of our times through the lens of the Christian Gospel message, a wide-angle lens to be sure, one impacted by her extensive, front-line experiences on the global issues noted above when she was at the UN representing 15,000 Sisters of St. Joseph ministering in 57 countries.

Her talk will also remind us of the Gospel’s Way of asking us “to always move toward mercy over judgment, love over fear, and inclusion over exclusion – never counting the cost.”

Dr. Zinn’s UN assignment ended when she was called home to lead her congregation in Philadelphia, after which she served as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) for three years.

Join us on Sunday, March 18 at 1:30 PM at Kearns Spirituality Center, 9000 Babcock Blvd. in Allison Park (beside La Roche College and behind the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Divine Providence) to experience Carol Zinn’s encouragement to: “...embrace these times with confidence, compassion, and courage. Our faith reminds us that wisdom, grace, and hope are always available to us.” Cost of the talk is \$20 and can be paid at the door. For information and to register in advance (not necessary), contact Fr. John Oesterle at 412-232-7512.

The Association of Pittsburgh Priests is a diocesan-wide organization of ordained and non-ordained women and men who act on our baptismal call to be priests and prophets. Its mission, rooted in the Gospel and the Spirit of Vatican II, is to carry out a ministry of justice and renewal in ourselves, the Church and the world.

**Joyce Rothermel is Chair of the Church Renewal Committee of the Association of Pittsburgh Priests.**

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# PALESTINE AND JERUSALEM

## SOME SORT OF JUSTICE (CONT'D) BY EMILY DEFERRARI

displacement, the clashing cultures, the political intrigues, felt much like Pittsburgh on steroids. And just as a tourist can miss the injustices brought upon Pittsburgh's working class and people of color, so too could a visitor to Jerusalem's holy sites miss the plight of the Palestinians. As, apparently, has one Donald Trump.

On Wednesday, January 3, 2018, Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, announcing the US embassy would be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This was a campaign pledge, influenced heavily by Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire casino mogul who finances Israeli settlements and donated tens of millions to Trump's campaign and inauguration. Shortly thereafter, Nikki Haley, in her role as US ambassador to the UN, vetoed the otherwise unanimous vote for the UN security council's resolution to recall Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. She then "took names," as the General Assembly tallied 128 in favor, 9 against and 35 abstaining from a vote that condemned the USA's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The name taking was to determine which countries would no longer be the recipients of US foreign aid. Trump plans to "save a lot of money."

What can be expected in the wake of this announcement? Reaction from the UN was swift, but what about from the Arab governments, the Israeli right wing and the Palestinian people? What difference will this make for the prospect of peace and justice in Palestine/Israel?

I'm writing this on January 9th, so things may change before publication. So far, the UN has condemned the move as a violation of international law. The Arab heads of state have been outed by the *New York Times* in their attempt to put on a public face of outrage, while privately supporting Israel's claims to Jerusalem. The Israeli right wing is emboldened, planning to annex more land and grow the settlements, annexing everything from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. This would leave bantustans-- isolated Palestinian enclaves -- and maintain the Jewish majority in Israel. ("There is blood in the water and everyone is smelling it," as Shalom Lipner of the Brookings Institution put it.)

The Palestinians have vowed that the US will no longer be party to the "peace process," as this move relinquishes the "honest broker" facade. Trump's actions have in reality given a very public face to the lack of support the US has given the peace process over the years. Talks continued while more private Palestinian land was expropriated for Jewish settlements. This has left the West Bank essentially an archipelago of detached communities bypassed by Israeli-only roads. It takes inebriation or magical thinking to imagine a two-state solution arising from the conditions the US has been funding, to the tune of \$3.5 billion per year for the last 5 years. And one state with human rights for all doesn't seem to be on the table.

Palestine has no international champion capable of taking on the quest for human rights. The US has never been willing, the EU is consumed with issues of existence and the Sunni leadership is focused on uniting against Iran. The international community of human rights activists (i.e. us) will need to intensify this struggle. Otherwise the Palestinians will be dealt "some sort of justice," as a *Post-Gazette* editorial seemed to think is sufficient. Let's hope it isn't similar to the justice meted out to the indigenous peoples in our own country. We need to get to work.

What can you do?

Remain informed. Mondoweiss and The Electronic Intifada are on-line places to start. Keep your eyes open for local activities. Jewish Voice for Peace and FOSNA (Friends of Sabeel North America) are both organizations active in Pittsburgh. Write letters to the editor in response to news or editorials. Contact your representatives as needed. (There is currently a campaign to engage congressional support to free Ahd Tamimi. If you are unaware of her circumstances, there is much to be found on the internet about her situation.) Get involved in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS Movement). Finally, encourage yourself to speak up when the topic of Palestinian rights comes up among family, friends and co-workers.

**Emily DeFerrari is a member of the local BDS Movement.**

## JERUSALEM'S RECENT HISTORY

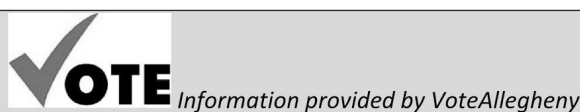
BY EMILY DEFERRARI

Some brief and relatively recent history:

From the 7th into the 20th century, Jerusalem was administratively linked to Constantinople, the capital of the Turkish Empire. In 1917, during the First World War, which spelled the end of the Turkish (Ottoman) Empire, Jerusalem fell under the control of the British and remained so during the Mandate post-war period. This was a period of time during which the defeated Ottoman Empire was broken into the countries of Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine (to be administered by the British) and Syria and Lebanon (to be administered by France.)

In 1947 the UN partitioned Palestine into two areas, one for the Jewish immigrants who had been recruited to Palestine by the Zionist movement and the other for the indigenous Palestinians. As part of the partition, Jerusalem was to remain an international city, which, unfortunately, never happened. Shortly after partition, Israel declared itself an independent nation and the war of 1948 broke out. At the end of the war, Israel came to control a larger area than the partition had intended, and within that area lay the western half of Jerusalem. The eastern half fell under the control of Jordan. The armistice line rendered Jerusalem divided, the status quo until the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel came to occupy all of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

In 1980, Israel declared Jerusalem to be its united capital. The UN responded by condemning Israel's annexation of Jerusalem, an act that was in violation of international law (UN resolution 181). In the meantime, the US had always maintained an embassy in Tel Aviv, but a consulate in Jerusalem, as did most other countries. (There are currently no foreign embassies in Jerusalem.) In 1995 the US Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act, a law that was drafted by AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and the ADL (Anti-Defamation League.) This law mandates moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The caveat is that the president can delay the move for a 6-month period if it is in the interest of national security. Every president since Bill Clinton has signed off on 6-month delays. Until Trump.



### 2018 Elections Calendar

**February:** Monday **2/5/18**—Last day to register before the Special Election for the 8<sup>th</sup> Pittsburgh City Council district

Monday **2/12/18**—Last day to register before the Special Election for the 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional district

Tuesday **2/13/18**—1<sup>st</sup> day to circulate nomination petitions for candidates in major parties (D&R) for the May primary

Tuesday **2/27/18**—Last day to apply for absentee ballot for Special Election for the 8<sup>th</sup> Pittsburgh City Council district

**March:** Friday **3/2/18**—Last day to return voted absentee ballot for Special Election for the 8<sup>th</sup> Pittsburgh City Council district

Tuesday **3/6/18**—Last day to apply for absentee ballot for Special Election for the 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional district

Tuesday **3/6/18**—Last day to circulate nomination petitions for the May primary

Tuesday **3/6/18**—SPECIAL ELECTION for 8<sup>th</sup> Pittsburgh City Council district (Dan Gilman's seat)

Wednesday **3/7/18**—1<sup>st</sup> day to circulate nomination papers for political bodies (including independents) for November election

Friday **3/9/18**—Last day to return voted absentee ballot for Special Election for the 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional district

Tuesday **3/13/18**—SPECIAL ELECTION for 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional district (Tim Murphy's seat)

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

**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](http://VoteAllegheny.org)**

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# THE CLUELESSNESS OF PRIVILEGE

## STOCK MARKETS: BAD FOR WORKERS' FISCAL HEALTH

BY NEIL COSGROVE

Some weeks ago, a letter-to-the-editor appeared in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette attempting to debunk the claim “that only rich people and corporations benefit from a healthy stock market.” The writer asked readers to recognize the value of IRAs and pension funds that supplement Social Security for “working class and blue-collar workers.”

“Shame on you,” the writer went on, if you are a worker not putting money into a retirement fund, as “a lot of companies” will contribute a percentage to your fund.

Well, even the writer was clearly conscious that “a lot” doesn’t mean “all” or the “great majority” of companies. Still, the letter is representative of an unconscious position of privilege and perhaps is best answered by a careful review of facts that call into question his assumptions about the current access “blue-collar” and “working class” workers have to an undefined “healthy stock market.”

• As of March, 2017, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 70% of civilian workers had access to retirement benefits in their jobs. That percentage is skewed upward by the 94% of union workers with such access. For non-union workers, the percentage is 66%.

• The availability of “defined benefit” plans, in which the employer invests pension funds for employees, and guarantees what the retiree will receive, has declined precipitously over the past 20 years. *Forbes*

reports that only 16% of workers with access to an employer-sponsored plan have a defined benefit plan, 63% have defined contribution plans, usually involving both employer and employee contributing to a tax-delayed 401(k) plan. Around 20% don’t participate at all, including those not eligible because they haven’t been in the job long enough, or are part-time, or under 25.

• Those with high participation rates, *Forbes* further observes, are union workers, employees in the public sector, and employees at large firms with workforces over 1,000. Those with low participation include employees at small firms and in the personal services industry, construction workers, non-citizens, and Hispanics.

• Monique Morrissey of the Economic Policy Institute says that among those with 401(k) plans “the typical household approaching retirement has less than two years worth of income saved in those accounts.” High-wage and heavily unionized states like Massachusetts and Virginia have the lowest percentage of “near-retirement residents” at risk of poverty or near-poverty, reports *Forbes*, while Florida, North Carolina and Texas have the highest percentages at risk.

• People the letter-writer shames for not putting money in retirement accounts are also people who don’t have money left over from their paychecks to do so, and also people who must pay higher percentages of their income for health insurance premiums. The

Bureau of Labor Statistics says that workers in the lowest 10% wage category pay about 40% of their premiums for family health coverage, while those in the highest 10% category pay 25% of their premiums.

• While workers in pension plans of any kind benefit some from a rising stock market, and also feel the greatest pain when the market drops, since such a high percentage of their assets are in stocks, the *Washington Post* points out that 40% of all stock is owned by the wealthiest one percent, and 70% is owned by the wealthiest five percent. “The bottom 80%,” observes Paul Krugman of the *New York Times*, own just seven percent of all stock.

Whether an economy so focused on stock values is good for the vast majority of Americans is highly debatable. The wealthiest among us purchase large amounts of stock in a company and then root for layoffs and suppressed wages that will increase the company’s profit margins. Unemployment, even if temporary, and low wages do not lead to “healthy” retirement savings for “working class and blue-collar workers.” What the facts truly suggest is that the best way to guarantee that workers have comfortable retirements is to give them living wages, often guaranteed through collective bargaining by unions. Those good wages result in higher Social Security payouts and more savings to invest.

**Neil Cosgrove is a member of the NewPeople editorial collective and the Merton Center board.**

## CLASS CLUELESSNESS IN AMERICA

BY JIM MCCARVILLE

Joan Williams book, *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America*, has a lot to teach about the consequences of a “professional privilege” that disadvantages what she calls the “white-working class”. It was a hard lesson for me to absorb. I suspect it will trouble many readers as well.

She acknowledges that much more could be written about the privilege leveraged over the non-white-working class, but that would be a more complicated story and maybe for another author.

Williams tackles the animosity that working class whites direct at the poor but she saves her major criticism for the animosity the white-working class perceives it gets from what she calls the Professional Management Elite (PME Elite).

Williams argues, admittedly with some slightly simplified math, that these top 20% of income earners (with family incomes over \$132,000), as a class have been complicit in helping structure policies that help the bottom 30% (family incomes under \$41,000) at the expense of the middle 50%.

She cites some key statistics to explain why the white working class resents the status quo:

“The typical white working-class household income doubled in the three decades after World War II but has not risen appreciably since.

The death rate for white working-class men and women aged 45-54 increased substantially from 1993 to 2003, a reversal from earlier decades. In 1970, only 25% of white children lived in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 10%; by 2000, 40% did.”

“In an era when the economic fortunes of the white-working class plummeted, elites wrote off working-class anger as racism, sexism, nativism,” as “beneath our dignity to take seriously.”

“Deriding ‘political correctness,’” she says, “becomes a

way for less-privileged whites to express their fury at the snobbery of more-privileged whites. They demand dignity”.

While *Hillbilly Elegy* captured some of this resentment, it also left this reader sensing that that author, to a large extent, felt that people in Appalachia were their own worst enemies.

Williams shows that a system that works quite well for PME Elites, just doesn’t work for the working class.

The book is arranged around questions like “Why Does the Working Class Resent Professionals but Admire the Rich?” and “Why Don’t They Just Go to College?” or “Why Don’t They Move to Where the Jobs Are?”

Progressive legislation, she says, has lavished attention on the poor for a century, but because America is testy about the kind of taxes European countries take for granted, our American programs are targeted and not universal, excluding the middle 50%.

To the extent this is true, it forces the “middle” to rely more on themselves and their families, and to resent those who benefit from the programs they are not eligible for and to resent those who crafted the programs.

She says that hard work for elites is associated with self-actualization. “Disruption” may mean founding a successful startup.

For factory workers, on the other hand, a “stand up” guy suffers the boss’s harangue with a smile just to support the family. “Disruption.., just gets you fired”.

Free spirits born into the working class can’t count on the second chances higher education and social contacts might provide. So, blue-collar families stress “family stability” and “self-discipline” and embrace institutions that support those traits. They socialize with those closest to them, not with those who they want to impress, network or just get to know.

For the same reasons, they find it hard to skip family events “because soccer is a higher priority”, or leave their families to go away to college or move to take a new job.

The working class doesn’t hold as many complaints against the super-rich, with whom they rarely have contact (and may secretly hope to be someday), but they suffer daily insults from the elites who criticize their work or ignore them as waiters, doormen or nurses’ aides.

When it comes to racism, Williams says, elite whites pit working-class whites against people of color, displacing the blame for racism by “distancing themselves from white-working class people, who they then construct as stupid and racist.”

Working class racism is more explicit. “Among the white working class, where the coin of the realm is morality, people of color are constructed as lacking in that quality.”

Among professionals “whose claim to privilege rests on merit, [they may] stereotype nonwhites as less competent”.

While not an excuse for either, her point is that elites should “stop justifying their refusal to acknowledge their class privilege on the grounds that those ‘others’ are racist”.

It is only recently that many non-white friends have helped me understand the consequences of white privilege. This is not a book about race or sexual privilege. It is a book about the privilege that one group, mostly white, holds, maybe unconsciously, over another group of whites. This may be the first step in a new education process.

**Jim McCarville is a member of the New People Collective and the TMC Board of Directors.**

# ORGANIZING ACTIVITY

## TMC WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER: EMILY NEFF

BY JOYCE ROTHERMEL

Last fall, the membership of the Merton Center elected three new board members: Fatema Juma, Emily Neff and Robert Wilson. You learned a little bit about them on the ballot. Last year Fatema served as *The NewPeople* Coordinator over the summer and a wonderful article about her appeared in the paper at that time.

This month, I am delighted to introduce you more fully to Emily Neff. Emily attended Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. During her sophomore year, she discovered an interdisciplinary minor called Values, Ethics, and Social Action. She was required to take a range of courses including religious studies, economics, and service learning theory. As part of her interdisciplinary minor Emily participated in service learning experiences in the Meadville community and served as a mentor at an alternative education school. For two years she engaged with students in weekly conversations about the cycle of injustice they faced at school. She found it to be profound to listen to a fifteen-year-old share his story and connect it to the systemic problem of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Post-college Emily taught first grade in rural Mississippi and then attended Teachers College at Columbia University to study education policy. Her students loved to listen to Martin Luther King, Jr. speeches and their favorite book was *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. Her students reminded her that you are never too young to pursue peace and justice. Emily noted, "I believe peace and social justice begins with our children."

Emily's mom, Linda, heard about the Merton Center through St. James Church in Wilkesburg. She suggested Emily check it out during the summer in between her years of teaching in Mississippi. Emily wanted to explore issues of social justice outside of education and thought the Merton Center would be a good place to start. As an intern, she worked with Stop Sexual Assault in the Military (SSAM, a project of the Merton Center) to develop resources for its committee. The following summer she again volunteered with SSAM. "Soon after, both my mom and brother joined the Merton Center as well."

When asked, "How do you live out your commitment to the values of peace and social justice?", Emily

responded, "First and foremost by listening. I believe in order to commit to and participate in peace and social justice work I must thoughtfully listen to the stories of others whose lives are impacted by issues of injustice."

Education is Emily's career and passion. In her current role as Public Policy Associate with the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, she advocates for access to high-quality early care and education experiences for children ages birth through five. Research shows the benefits of these programs, including reduced special education placements, increased graduation rates, and decreased crime and incarceration. She is committed to the values of peace and social justice through her career in education. Investing in young children and families provides a strong foundation and allows children to reach their full potential. Clearly children are a source of hope for Emily!

I asked Emily if she has a role model and she does. His name is John B. King Jr., the former Secretary of Education for the Obama administration. Prior to that role, he served as Education Commissioner for the state of New York and is now the President and CEO of The Education Trust. He has led school desegregation efforts at a systemic level through his policies. During Emily's time in New York City, her school district was awarded a grant he created as Education Commissioner. The grant allowed the district and its community members to research, plan, and implement diversity conscious student enrollment as a way to pursue school desegregation. She values his contributions to education and his leadership in pursuing social justice through policy.

The greatest challenge Emily faces in living out the values of peace and social justice is remaining informed and engaged in issues that threaten peace and social justice. She explains, "I challenge myself to be open to listen and learn from others' perspectives and to continue to check my privilege in my everyday life."

In serving on the Board, Emily says, "I think we clearly have our work cut out for us with this administration.... I want to spend the first few months listening and learning from board members, staff, and members. I

hope to create space for people to feel empowered to continue their peace and social justice efforts. I would like to support the mission and legacy of the Merton Center while also bringing in more young supporters."

In addition to service on the Merton Center board, Emily is also on the Advisory Council for the Women and Girls Foundation. There she has volunteered with the GirlGov program, which provides the opportunity for girls in 9th to 12th grades to learn about government, community organizing, women's history, and leadership.

The Merton Center is privileged to welcome Merton Center member, Emily Neff, to its board of directors for a three-year term.

(Next month, we will feature Robert Wilson, the third new TMC board member in *The NewPeople*.)

**Joyce Rothermel is a board member of the Thomas Merton Center.**



Emily Neff (Photo provided by Emily Neff)

## SIERRA CLUB ALLEGHENY GROUP UPDATE

BY MICHAEL PASTORKOVICH

The Sierra Club is the oldest and largest environmental organization in the United States. Founded in 1892 by naturalist John Muir, the Club's organization structure comprises three levels: the national organization headquartered in Oakland, California; various state chapters; and regional outfits called "groups".

The Sierra Club Allegheny Group is the regional organization covering eleven counties in western Pennsylvania, with approximately 5000 paid members. While both the national organization and state chapters at times employ salaried organizers, a Group is a strictly volunteer arm of the Club.

The Sierra Club national organization opened a regional office in Pittsburgh in 2004 as part of its efforts in the presidential election for that year. The office was shared by the national staff organizers with the Allegheny Group. The office remains open.

Last autumn, the regional office moved from its long-time location in North Oakland to shared office space in East Liberty near Bakery Square, in the old Liberty Bank building now designated as The Beauty Shoppe. The address is Suite 402, 6101 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206. There is no main telephone

number, and organizers must be reached via their personal phones. The Sierra Club Allegheny Group can be reached at the following number: 412-328-9817. We can also be reached at the following email address: michael.louis.joseph@gmail.com

Locally, the Sierra Club is involved in a number of important projects. Among them is working with the City of Pittsburgh on a Climate Action Plan to put the city on track for a 100% renewable energy future by 2035. This project is headed by Eva Resnick-Day. Tom Hoffman is leading the Clean Rivers Campaign dedicated to finding green solutions to ALCOSAN's (Allegheny County Sanitation Authority) raw sewage problems. Eva is employed by the national organization and Tom by the state chapter.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the Sierra Club Allegheny Group in the new year is an effort to stop the establishment of a proposed ethane cracker plant in Potter Township, Beaver County. When up and running, the plant will likely release harmful chemicals into the air and water, several of them known carcinogens. Worse yet, the plant is intended to be the first of several in the region. And, perhaps worst

of all, the end product of the petrochemical "cracking" process is plastic, a completely artificial and virtually "immortal" nonbiodegradable substance, which is already polluting our lands and our oceans.

If you are interested in becoming involved with the Sierra Club Allegheny Group or would like more information, please contact us using the information listed above.

**Michael Pastorkovich is a member of the Sierra Club Allegheny County Group.**



# CONFRONTING INEQUALITY

## PRAGUE WRITERS FESTIVAL, 2017: AMERICAN ON THE HOT SEAT BY MIKE SCHNEIDER

My friend Jan and I were in Prague as tourists in November, during the Prague Writers' Festival (PWF). While Prague's ancient culture and stunning beauty dazzle tourists, the theme of the festival, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, was just too good to miss.

*The Fire Next Time* conveys fierce conviction and courage. Baldwin acknowledges the fraudulence of the Harlem churchifying he practiced as a fill-the-offering-plate, teen-prodigy preacher. His renunciation of Christianity leads to his profound analysis of racism as a projection of fear and the historical burden of "whiteness" associated with this awareness.

Among writers at PWF from many places — Syria, Austria, Russia, Morocco, India — the most direct link to Baldwin was Washington Post journalist Wesley Lowery. As a reporter, Lowery covered police shootings in Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland and elsewhere and the protests that spawned Black Lives Matter. As with Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, Lowery's *They Can't Kill Us All* takes Baldwin as the forerunner to contemporary understanding of American racism.

The on-stage conversation (Monday, the 13th) with Baldwin's book as topic — gracefully moderated by Maria Golia, an American living in Cairo — veered quickly from *The Fire Next Time* to international politics. No surprise. It reminded me of other trips — Latin America and Europe — where I'd found myself in political discussion explaining, even defending, the USA, sometimes from a stance nearly opposite what I'd likely be taking if the same discussion were with Americans. I soon felt myself on that familiar ground.

Austrian novelist Robert Menasse almost gleefully took up the cudgel to beat up on the USA. Many EU problems, he said — throwing down the glove — are America's fault. Mentioning a report of 70 instances of U.S. bombing of other nations since WWII, Menasse

said American aggression creates messes, such as millions of refugees, with which European countries are left to grapple. Provocatively extending Baldwin's insight that American whiteness created "the Negro" as a mental construct, Menasse argued that America, by its aggression, creates its own terrorism.

Not without validity, though overstated and unqualified, Menasse's statement invited response. There was no lack of irony in the author of *They Can't Kill Us All* pushing back against the anti-American rhetoric, but Lowery embraced the challenge. In an increasingly global world, Lowery explained, people flow, as always, away from want, toward safety and opportunity. The EU, observed Lowery, doesn't absorb millions of immigrants from Latin America as the United States does. He added that unselfish American foreign policy helped to build EU prosperity from the rubble of World War II, and Europe didn't complain then at being rescued from its own fascism. Since the colonial era, he said, Europe has been America's model of how to conduct foreign affairs, including the use of force to achieve ends. "America," said Lowery, "didn't invent hubris."

The line drew applause from one audience member, silence from everyone else. Without evidence, Menasse asserted that Europe has a capacity for self-criticism that America lacks.

One notices that when people not from America talk about American politics, "America" is often a monolith. Such discussions tend to ignore stratifications of discourse — liberal, conservative; coastal, midwest; urban, rural; from many ethnicities — that inflect our politics and make it perhaps more complicated than European nations smaller and less diverse. The discussion remained civil, illuminated contrasting positions, and arrived at no particular conclusion.

Self-criticism and the capacity for it could have been a

cue to bring discussion back to Baldwin. *The Fire Next Time* is, in many respects, a project in self-criticism: from the perspective of an adult looking back at his youth and an American writer in Paris looking at the probably ineradicable stain on his country's heritage of democracy. No one took the cue. If they had, we may have heard something like these closing words from Baldwin:

"Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we — and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others — do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time!"

**Mike Schneider, a member of The Thomas Merton Center, is a widely published poet.**



Photo: Mike Schneider

## A TURN TO THE LEFT BY BETTE MCDEVITT

One day, thirty years ago, Mel Madden, a member of the Merton Center, now deceased, brought his out-of-town friend to have a look around the Center. "See, Charley," he said, "There's something for everyone here."

Something for everyone...it stayed with me. This month, part of a random series, I spent some time getting to know Bill Wegener, and find out what brings him to the Center.

Bill is a retired postman, who lives in Carnegie, feeds the birds, has a few dogs, listens to avant-garde classical music, goes on long bicycle trips, doesn't use the internet, and gives away half or more of his money to progressive organizations. He had encountered Joyce Rothmel, chair of our membership committee, a few times, and found the Merton Center a good fit for his interests.

Over lunch at Max's on the North Side, Bill told me about his "turn to the left." It's quite a story. "You're looking at a former lifetime member of the NRA. I'm an outdoors person, but I had a serious falling out with the NRA over the issue of using assault weapons to kill deer. I let them know how I felt about that, and it was the end of my association with them."

The change in attitude was a thoughtful one. "I was originally a conservative, influenced by a college roommate, at IUP (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) in the early sixties. We are still very good friends. Then, influenced by a lady friend, with whom I was one on one, I started seeing the light. I still say this about the right; if it was an ideal world, the right philosophy is not a bad thing, but we don't live in an ideal world, an egalitarian society, so we have to bear left, in order

to be realistic. My conservative friend told me that In order for the government to do anything for the people, they have to take it from you first. The more I thought about it, the more I turned to the left. This is the furthest we could be from an egalitarian society. If it were, everyone would be starting on the same rung of the ladder. Look at the blacks in the country; they didn't start on the same rung. They're hurting from the word go."

Convinced that education is a way to get up a few rungs, Bill is a supporter of college funds for Native American young people, part of the more than 300 nonprofit donations on his last year's tax return. Bill is not boastful about his philanthropy; the information only came out because I asked questions. "I don't spend a lot of money," he said. "I can live frugally. My car is 8 years old."

Although he doesn't use the Internet, he's on top of things through the many publications to which he subscribes. "I get two to three inches of mail per day. Unfortunately, they're cutting down trees for me. I belong to about 30 environmental organizations. Some of them are saving the world."

His favorite publications are *The NewPeople* and *The Progressive Populist*. "You've got to read that! It's a bear to handle, big pages, but Jim Hightower is in there all the time." He also reads *The Nation*. "It's easier to handle." And he listens to the radio: Democracy Now on WRCT. "I listen to David Pakman, on the radio before Amy Goodman, and after Amy, Law and Disorder."

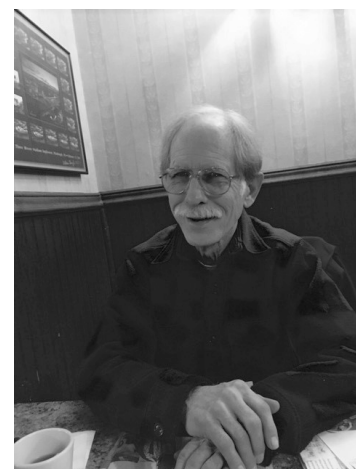
Among his heroes are Noam Chomsky and Ralph Nader. "Chomsky doesn't preach. I'm guilty of hammer-

ing at people, and Nader, he's the best thing that ever happened to this country!"

"I don't do enough activist stuff though," Bill admits. "I was at the Women's March in Pittsburgh. Even the right sees this humongous crowd of people, asking for change, which we didn't get with Obama, who was a corporate Democrat; half of his administration were big bankers. That's the reason we didn't get the change we thought we were going to get. He paid mind to the military industrial complex, with the war effort. With Trump, people are getting the opposite of what they expected."

As we left Max's, Bill said, "I've come to the conclusion that the right is a 'me first' society. One of the big things is you have to care. If you don't, you might as well get the hell out." Bill cares a lot and is in for the long haul. We can all be ambassadors for the Center, a community of people who care.

**Bette McDevitt is a member of the Editorial Collective and the Raging Grannies.**



Bill Wegener  
(Photo: Bette McDevitt)



# RACIAL JUSTICE = RADICAL CHANGE

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH BY MOLLY RUSH

I recently began thinking about a number of black activists, many of whom may be forgotten. I came to know some of them through my work with the Catholic Interracial Council (CIC), and then the Merton Center.

Many were a part of movements past whose work should not be forgotten. I'm sure there are others who you might add to the list.

Early on I attended Friday night meetings at Central Baptist Church in the Hill and joined in on actions of the United Negro Protest Committee.

I represented CIC at many press conferences at Hill House led by NAACP President Byrd Brown. I also represented CIC at meetings of the Allegheny Council on Civil Rights, which was actively involved in many interracial and interfaith activities. ACCCR organized buses for the March on Washington.

Then there was the formidable Frankie Mae Jeter, who chaired the Welfare Rights Organization of Allegheny County and achieved some changes in the system.

Mayme Lee, Director of Lutheran Meals on Wheels, organized Vibration II, a prisoners visitation

committee. An unforgettable tour of Western Penitentiary included the 'hole' where all we could see was the line of hands holding mirrors to allow them a glimpse of their rare visitors.

Sadly Mayme died at 45, her youngest child just ten. We organized a successful fundraiser for her family, a concert with Sweet Honey in the Rock. That girl is now an attorney.

Homewood activist Bouie Haden of the United Movement for Progress led a rent strike against slum landlords.

In 1969 Nate Smith of the Black Construction Coalition organized major protests as Three Rivers Stadium was being built. A deal was made to hire 1250 blacks, desegregating all-white unions. *Ebony Magazine* named him as one of the 100 most influential civil rights leaders.

Earlier heroes include Rev. Leroy Patrick, who in 1949 led a small group of blacks who waded right into the Highland Park swimming pool, integrating the all-white facility.

In the 1950s a woman, Frankie Pace, led protests of urban renewal that displaced Hill District residents and businesses, destroying this once thriving community.

Then there was Robert Lavelle, founder of Dwelling House Savings & Loan. It was the only black-owned bank in Pittsburgh.

Charles Kindle was chair of NAACP's South African Committee, fighting apartheid with weekly protests at the Gold and Silver Exchange on Smithfield.

Dozens of protest marches began at Freedom Corner on Centre Ave. & Kirkpatrick. A plaque is planted on the ground with the names of some of these and others who helped create real changes in Pittsburgh.

Add your memories about the many others who have blazed a trail for us to follow.

The struggle continues!

**Molly Rush is a co-founder of the Merton Center, a board member, and a member of the NewPeople Editorial Collective.**

## REFLECTION ON RACE BY THOMAS MERTON BY JOYCE ROTHERMEL

Thomas Merton believed that racism and militarism were the two most urgent issues of his time. While we may update the "urgent list" for our own time, it would certainly continue to include issues of racial discrimination and oppression. With the elections of President Obama, the overt racist rhetoric of the Trump administration, the growing awareness of police brutality towards people of color, the massive growth of minority incarceration finding expression in the expanding Black Lives Matter movement, the issues of race and white supremacy have gained greater currency in the public sphere, commanding a more insistent moral consciousness.

In the summer of 1963, Merton wrote what came to be known as "Letters to a White Liberal" in reaction to the civil rights struggles of the era and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," written on April 16 of that year. It later formed the basis for his book, *Seeds of Destruction* published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 1964, still a relevant read for all of us.

Alex Mikulich in his essay, "Merton's Letters a Call for White Atonement" wrote, "By 'white liberal' Merton does not mean partisan progressives. Rather, he means any white person, especially a Christian, who claims good intentions toward all people, including African Americans."

Merton took a prophetic and contemplative position against racism and white supremacy, a position not shared by many people of faith. He called on fellow Christians to confront their ongoing complicity in white privilege and the many ways it oppresses people of color. He cautioned those who fought for civil rights that "the success of the legislation [was] not the end of the battle but only the beginning of a new and more critical phase in the conflict." Changes in law can't change hearts, minds or the roots of violence in our country. Merton could see, as Martin Luther King did, that white racism was intimately intertwined with militarism and the valuing of profits before people.

Merton said, "As long as white society persists in clinging to its present condition and to its own image of itself as the only acceptable reality, then there is no room for real change and inevitably there will be violence."

Again, in his essay, Mikulich writes, "Merton believed that the nation stood at an impasse that demanded

the transformation of society. The seeds of destruction are stuck in the ground of the desires of white people to maintain power and privilege over and against the fundamental dignity and human rights of the Negro (to use the language of the 1960s)."

In other words, if society is going to fully respect African-Americans as human beings, not as a projection of the fears or ideals of white Americans, "then that society is going to be radically changed." Merton saw that racial justice demanded major sacrifices, including loss of white privilege in terms of status and economic advantage. Speaking to white liberals again and to many NewPeople readers, Merton believed that goodwill and charity were insufficient. He did not question liberal sincerity and generosity, but encouraged the creation and support of social, political and economic structures that are socially and economically just. He believed that social justice activism was an expression of God's love for the world. What he found so important was what Mikulich identifies as a "profound turning to African-Americans in their experience, wisdom and truth." Mikulich continues from Merton, "In other words, the condition of the possibility of white people being transformed into the love of God and neighbor is the freedom of African-Americans to thrive as human beings."

Through his writings Merton invited white Americans to look at themselves through the eyes of people of color, as they have seen and experienced 'white' society from the 1860s and beyond. If we were to do so, we would more clearly see where Jesus positions himself. Merton asks us to listen to the freedom and gospel songs and to read Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail." He counsels us to learn of the experience and wisdom of our Muslim brothers and sisters, including Malcolm X.

(References to the writings of Alex Mikulich, a research fellow on race at the Jesuit Social Research Institute, come from an article that appeared in the Jan. 1-31, 2013 issue of the *JustSouth Quarterly*, a publication of the Jesuit Social Research Institute, College of Social Science, Loyola University, New Orleans under the headline: "Merton's Letters a Call for White Atonement.")

(The following quote is from Merton's "Letters to a White Liberal.")

"In simple terms, I would say that the message is this: white society has sinned in many ways. It has betrayed Christ by its injustices to races it considered "inferior" and to countries which it colonized. In particular it has sinned against Christ in its lamentable injustices and cruelties to the Negro. The time has come when both White and Negro have been granted, by God, a unique and momentous opportunity to repair this injustice and to reestablish the violated moral and social order in a new plane." [66-67]

**Joyce Rothermel is a TMC board member serving on the Editorial Collective for The NewPeople.**

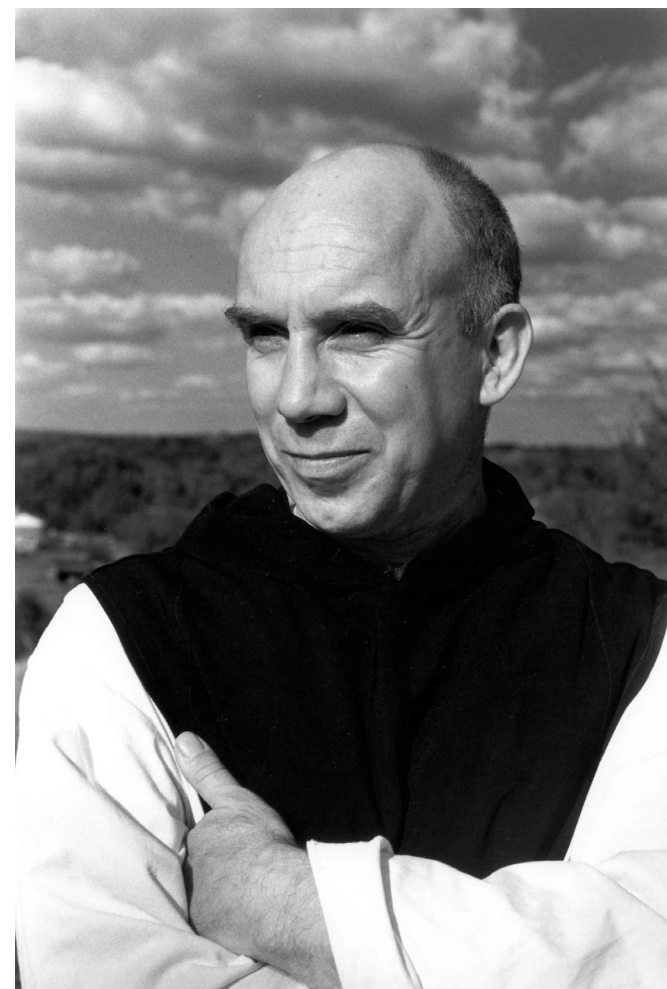


Photo: cathedralofhope.org

# THE PATH OF NON-VIOLENCE

## THE PRACTICE OF NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION

BY KATHLEEN GERACE

The practice of nonviolent communication has never seemed more urgent – or relevant-- than it does at the present moment in our history. Before the latest tragic mass shooting in Texas, and before Las Vegas, and before Charlottesville, and before Ferguson, and even before Columbine, there was Detroit. From June 20th to 22nd in 1943 an enormous riot left thirty-four people killed, over 600 injured, and the whole city in a state of panic and fear. One of the people in that city was an eight- year-old boy named Marshall Rosenberg, who had just moved in the week before. Young Marshall and his family didn't leave the house during those harrowing three days, but he saw the gruesome violence of the riots and wondered "Why do people do this?"

Alongside this terrifying event, Rosenberg saw his own family, which was very affectionate and loving. This left him with two questions that would become his life's work: what gets into us that brings out such violence? and how can we unleash our compassionate nature? He became the first member of his family to go to college, but even after earning a doctorate in psychology he found the answers to those two questions as elusive as ever. It was only after years of study that he developed Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life and began leading workshops worldwide. Rosenberg has worked with groups in many varied contexts, from parenting to business and from health care to prisons. He engaged in conflict resolution on an international stage, working in some of the world's most conflicted regions and making significant progress where many before him failed. He led workshops

on five separate continents, including global conflict zones Rwanda, Serbia, and Indonesia.

"I don't think any human being does anything except for good reasons," Rosenberg wrote in his book *Seek Peace in A World of Conflict*. "And what are those good reasons? To meet a need. Everything we do is in the service of needs. The "good reasons" that he identifies do not justify the behavior or imply anything "good" about the results. What is good about the reasons is that they are understandable and relatable in their universality. They are reasonable desires and needs that we all share. They offer us a glimpse into our common humanity, and accustom us to seek and recognize what is familiar within one another, rather than focusing on the things that alienate us and make us so glaringly different." (Marc Elbaum, "Bad Actions, Good People", *Huffington Post*, Aug. 23, 2017)

Rosenberg's approach is further explained by Joe Rechichie as follows: "Peace requires empathizing with the fears and unmet needs that provide the impetus for people to attack each other. Their unmet needs may be for connection, belonging, respect or safety. In the practice of NVC, we go there, try to help in identifying these unmet needs and address them; at the personal level and at the societal level. Once our former adversary feels that their intentions are understood we can then collaborate with them to find better strategies that meet everyone's needs." (Compassionate Communication Center of Ohio, August 19, 2017).

Marshall Rosenberg passed away in 2015, but he left behind a global community of people inspired by his

work. Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella, is one of them. "Microsoft's CEO has stopped infighting, restored morale, and created more than \$250 billion in market value... One of Nadella's first acts after becoming CEO, in February 2014, was to ask the company's top executives to read Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication, a treatise on empathic collaboration. Rosenberg describes the concept as 'a way of being very honest, without any criticism, insults, or put-downs, and without any intellectual diagnosis implying wrongness.'" Harry McCracken, "Satya Nadella Rewrites Microsoft's Code," Fast Company, quoted by Ben Kerschberg, "5 Technology Articles You Must Read Today," *Forbes Magazine*, September 18, 2017

Here in Pittsburgh, a small group of us gathered to form Compassionate Pittsburgh in 2013. Our mission is to promote peace, eliminate violence, and work through conflict systematically using Nonviolent Communication (NVC) principles and practices. We host an open public workshop on the first Saturday of each month at Homewood Library from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. We are sponsoring an introduction to NVC this spring on three Sundays from 1:00 to 5:00 pm, March 11th & 25th and April 8th at Winchester Thurston School, corner of Morewood and Ellsworth Ave. For more information about us and upcoming events please visit [www.compassionatepittsburgh.org](http://www.compassionatepittsburgh.org) or email [compassionatepittsburgh@gmail.com](mailto:compassionatepittsburgh@gmail.com).

**Kathleen Gerace is a member of the steering committee of Compassionate Pittsburgh and a Chaplain at UPMC Mercy Hospital.**

## US CATHOLIC BISHOP: "NONVIOLENCE OR NON-EXISTENCE"

BY BERNARD SURVIL

Bishop John Michael Botean of the Catholic Romanian Diocese, based in Canton, Ohio, was the only U.S. Catholic bishop to tell the faithful of his flock that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 would be an unjust war and one they could not participate in without sinning. This at the time that Pittsburgh's Bishop Donald Wuerl was quoted as saying at St. Mary's of the Point Church, downtown Pittsburgh, that the Commander-in-Chief ("W", not the Pope) had decided; discussion about the morality or advisability of the war should end.

Bishop Botean spoke to some 85 people at Kearns Spirituality Center adjacent to La Roche College, Allison Park on December 7, 2017. Surprisingly, his talk was covered by the editor of *The Pittsburgh Catholic* and written up in the December 15, 2017 issue of that weekly. Surprisingly too, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Pittsburgh attended, although several younger priests left before the Bishop finished because, as they told a source for this article, they found his presentation "too liberal".

It was in 2008 that Bishop Botean came out of the Marriott Waterfront Hotel, Baltimore, to thank the seven of us "Friends of Franz and Ben" ([www.bensalmon.org](http://www.bensalmon.org)), who had occupied the hotel where the US bishops were holding their semi-annual meeting. We had been forcibly removed by hotel security. The various placards we carried inside the hotel challenged the bishops to remember that Our Lord and Savior lived and preached the Gospel of nonviolence. Nonetheless the

Archdiocese for Military Service (AMS) was hosting its annual banquet for the bishops in the same hotel to remind them how closely the US Catholic Church is at the service of the Empire's military. That marriage was consummated 100 years ago when the US bishops – including Pittsburgh Bishop John Canevin -- told President Wilson that he could count on the full participation of US Catholics in the slaughter of German Catholics. The AMS also had a large exhibit about the military chaplaincy in the Marriott Waterfront Hotel corridor.

The night before we Friends of Franz & Ben had invited all the bishops to hear Joshua Casteel tell his story of how he had his eyes opened and conscience awakened to the awful truth of the Iraq War, when as an US Army interrogator at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison he discovered the humanity of those whom he was assigned to interrogate. Only Bishop Botean attended Casteel's talk and made valuable comments during the Q/A. Botean's Kearns talk included references to Joshua Casteel's story. It's found at: [www.joshuacasteel.com/](http://www.joshuacasteel.com/)

I discovered very recently that, as a seminarian, Botean had been an intern at the Center on Conscience and War in Amherst, Mass. The Center was founded by Gordon Zahn, author of *In Solitary Witness: The Life and Death of Franz Jagerstatter* (1964). That work was widely read by those who became Vietnam War resisters or Conscientious Objectors. It also led

to Austria declaring Franz a national hero, and the Austrian Church successfully advocating for the beatification of Franz in 2007.

We Friends of Franz/Ben were grateful for Botean's talking with Cardinal Blasé Cupich of Chicago to alert him and the Catholic Faithful of our staging a vigil at the gravesite of Ben Salmon on 20 June, 2017 at an Archdiocesan cemetery outside Chicago. As a result of that action, supported by Botean, the formerly unmarked grave now has a stone that reads: "Thou shall not Kill...There is no such thing as a just war... Benjamin Salmon."

Relatively young, age 66 in 2018, Botean is a lonely voice in the US Bishops' Conference. Even his colleague Bishop Tom Gumbleton of Detroit has given up on his fellow US Bishops seriously objecting to U.S. militarism. Yet Botean has not lost his voice nor his capacity to inspire, as he did on December 7th at Kearns. The talk is accessible at [https://youtu.be/RNx\\_F4-OwzM](https://youtu.be/RNx_F4-OwzM) recorded by the talk's sponsors: The Association of Pittsburgh Priests.

**Bernard Survil has been a member of the TMC since its beginning and is very appreciative that it channeled donations to his work in Central America during the 1980's.**

# IMMORAL WEAPONS

## EVEN THE POSSESSION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IS IMMORAL

BY MICHAEL DROHAN

2017 has been a momentous year, on the one hand for the great strides made in condemning and outlawing even the possession of nuclear weapons and on the other hand for the increased volatility of the international security situation. But first, to the progress towards abolition. For several years, a group called the Humanitarian Initiative to Ban Nuclear Weapons has been working on getting the UN to pass a resolution banning nuclear weapons, on the basis of the disastrous humanitarian consequences that would follow from their use. Need we anything more than a few minutes reflection on the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons in 1945 on the cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima to convince us of this?

The United Nations has already outlawed the possession or use of chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction as well as cluster bombs. A loophole remained with the most dangerous of all weapons of mass destruction, namely nuclear weapons. As a result of incredible work by the Humanitarian Initiative Group, in July 2017 122 nations at the General Assembly of the UN passed a resolution banning the use of nuclear weapons. The principal negative votes on the UN resolution came from the nuclear states, including the US, who have controlled the so-called Anti-Proliferation process for decades.

The success at the UN was followed by the awarding

of the Nobel Peace Prize to the the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) on October 17, 2017. It was awarded to ICAN for its role in pushing the Humanitarian Initiative resolution through the UN.

The last great success in outlawing nuclear weapons came at a symposium in Rome in November entitled “International Symposium on Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament.” One of the most astonishing developments at this Symposium was the address of Pope Francis, in which he condemned even the possession of nuclear weapons as immoral. In his address to the Symposium he stated: we cannot “fail to be genuinely concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of any employment of nuclear devices. If we take also into account the risk of an accidental detonation as a result of error of any kind, the threat of their use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned”. He continued “international relations cannot be held captive to military force, mutual intimidation, and the parading of stockpiles of arms.”

This marked a significant development on the part of the Catholic Church in its attitude towards nuclear weapons. In 1983, the Bishops of the United States produced what is called a Peace Pastoral in which they accepted the rationale of deterrence as a justification for the possession of nuclear weapons. However, it was

only as an interim measure on the way to the complete abolition of these weapons. In the intervening years, however, there has been but scant progress and the latest development is the US devoting \$10 trillion to modernizing and miniaturizing the stockpile.

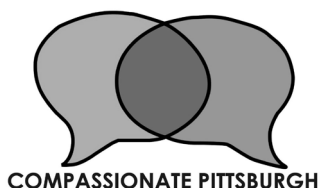
The other side of the ledger for 2017 is the increased volatility of the international situation. There is now a President of the United States who has said in regard to nuclear weapons, “What use are they if we do not use them.” Former Presidents have been at least more aware of the gravity of the possible use of nuclear weapons. Added to this is the belligerence and bellicosity of the US in the international arena. Nikki Haley, the US Ambassador to the UN, threatens reprisals on any nation who voted to condemn the US for its proclaiming Jerusalem the capital of Israel. In recent days, General Mattis, the US Secretary of Defense, while in South Korea declared, “Storm clouds are gathering over the Korean Peninsula” and told his audience of soldiers, “the US military must do its part by being ready for war.” This was followed by the head of the Marines, General Robert Neller, declaring on December 23 in Norway, “I hope I’m wrong; but there’s a war coming.”

Do we need much more evidence that the population of the US is being softened up to accept that our fearless leaders have war on their mind? The Korean War came in the 1950s, the Vietnam War in the 1960s, Central America in the 1980s, Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s; all disastrous failures inflicting pain and death on millions. But nothing was learned and here they go again ready to take on a nuclear armed state. Insanity seems to have infected the body politic.

As we advance into 2018, human survival is at risk from climate dangers, nuclear weapons and reckless politicians and military crackpots. Time is not on our side to dally in ridding the planet of the most dangerous weapons of mass destruction.

Consider joining the Anti-War Committee of the Thomas Merton Center to oppose the madness of war. We meet the fourth Saturday of the month at 11 AM at the Merton Center, 5129 Penn Avenue in Garfield.

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



### Speaking Peace:

#### Introduction to Compassionate Communication

Session 1: Sunday, March 11, 2018, 1:00 – 5:00 pm

Session 2: Sunday, March 25, 2018, 1:00 – 5:00 pm

Session 3: Sunday, April 8, 2018, 1:00 – 5:00 pm

#### Learn the powerful foundations of Nonviolent Communication:

- Engage in challenging or difficult conversations with more ease and confidence
- Create more possibilities to hear and honor your own and others’ true needs
- Feel understood and be able to offer understanding
- Build trust, cooperation and empathy in your interactions

People who learn these skills celebrate new insights and say they wished they had learned these tools years earlier. They value having a more calm presence in the face of conflict, greater ability to dissolve blame and resentment and say that they now experience **more freedom, more creativity, more energy and more joy.**

Led by by **Irene Bowers**, who has practiced and shared NVC since 2004, this workshop offers an experiential learning process that support participants in learning and practicing these skills. The class is open to anyone who wants to develop their communication skills.




Where: Winchester Thurston School, 555 Morewood Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Cost: \$120 per person (before February 28, an early bird price of \$95 per person)

Register with others and save an additional 10% per person.

Scholarships are available, send inquiry about an application to [CompassionatePittsburgh@gmail.com](mailto:CompassionatePittsburgh@gmail.com).

**To register online: [compassionatepittsburgh.org/upcoming-events](http://compassionatepittsburgh.org/upcoming-events)**



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# FEBRUARY 2018 EVENTS

## CALENDAR

**Mon 02/05 -** **Trans Equity Day**  
Pittsburghers for Public Transit, the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 85 and the Sierra Club are publishing a Post Gazette Joint Op-Ed celebrating Transit Equity Day on Rosa Parks' birthday.

**Wed 02/07 -** **Amazon HQ2 Forged for All? Forum**  
When: 4PM - 5:30PM  
Where: University of Pittsburgh, Parran Hall, School of Public Health  
  
Perspectives on Higher Ed: Amazon HQ2 and implications for Human Rights of Residents

**Fri 02/09 -** **Stop Banking the Bomb Action**  
When: 12PM - 1PM  
Where: PNC branch in Squirrel Hill 5810 Forbes Avenue  
  
On Friday (2/9) at noon Stop Banking the Bomb is having a demonstration outside the PNC branch in Squirrel Hill at 5810 Forbes Avenue. Anyone who is willing to come and hold signs, pass out flyers, or sing a few chants is encouraged to come.

**Sat 02/10 -** **Amazon HQ2 Forged for All? Forum**  
When: 11AM - 1PM  
Where: Human Services Bldg. 1 Smithfield St. Pgh 15222  
  
Forged for All? Amazon HQ2 & the Future of Pittsburgh: Human Rights, the Right to the City, and Equity implications of the City of Pittsburgh's "Future. This forum will provide space for an overdue conversation about the City of Pittsburgh's proposal to host "Amazon HQ2."

**Sun 02/11 -** **Peace Forum: Who are the DREAMERS?; An Update on DACA**  
When: 3PM - 5PM  
Where: Kearns Spirituality Center  
  
Description: Presenter: Suzanne Susany, OSF, Immigration Attorney with the Community Justice Program has worked with Hispanics in Puerto Rico, Ohio, Georgia, and Pennsylvania.

**Sun 02/18 -** **Mass Surveillance in the 21st Century Workshop**  
When: 4:30PM - 5:30PM  
Where: 100 Porter Hall - Carnegie Mellon University  
Come learn about Pittsburgh's role in mass surveillance and what can be done about it in on both an individual and communal level in modern society. This workshop is event is being organized by Students for a Democratic Society -CMU, Restore the Fourth Pittsburgh, and the IWW General Defense Committee.

**Tue 02/20 -** **Technology, Human Rights, and Social Transformation**  
When: 12PM - 1PM  
Where: Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh  
The Center on Race and Social Problems announces its next speaker series lecture featuring Dr. Waverly Duck of the University of Pittsburgh.  
No registration required; limited seating is available.  
Contact Center Administrative Assistant at 412-624-7382 with any questions.

**Thu 02/22 -** **Technology, Human Rights, and Social Transformation**  
When: 6:30PM - 8:30PM  
Where: Health and Human Services Building, Downtown Pittsburgh  
Join diverse residents of our city in a conversation about the role of technology in our communities and how we can work together to ensure that technology is used to advance human rights and justice in our city rather than to further racial and class inequities. (Homestead Grays Room)

### REGULAR MEETINGS

**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, TMC Annex  
**Anti-War and Anti-Drone Warfare Coalition**  
4rd Saturday at 11:00 am at TMC, 5129 Penn Ave., Garfield, PA 15224

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As a member, The NewPeople newspaper will be mailed to your home or sent to your email account. You will also receive weekly e-blasts focusing on peace and justice events in Pittsburgh, and special invitations to membership activities. Now is the time to stand for peace and justice!

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\_\_\_\_\$25 Introductory / Lapsed Membership  
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Call 412036103022 for more information.