

THE NEWPEOPLE



Thomas Merton Center
Pittsburgh's Peace and
Social Justice Center

PITTSBURGH'S PEACE & JUSTICE NEWSPAPER

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A Splendid Body of Tigerish People

By Bette McDevitt

A Splendid Body of Tigerish People

Those are the words Alexander Cockburn, the deceased, former writer for the *Nation Magazine*, used to describe the The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), who know how to raise a ruckus.

The Merton Center will honor this most relevant group at its award dinner, on Monday, November 20, at the Sheraton.

Choose an issue—abusive immigration practices, torture, war crimes and militarism, criminalizing dissent, racial injustice—and you'll find that CCR has been on the case. They were born of dissent, in the civil rights struggle of the 1960s, and have been using the law in creative ways ever since.

Jules Lobel, President of CCR and professor at the University of Pittsburgh Law School, put it well, with

the title of his book, *Success without Victory*. "It means that when you take a case, you often have to have broader goals than just winning in court. Many of the cases that the Center for Constitutional Rights has taken and that I personally have worked on, were cases that we knew would be difficult to win in court. Sometimes, like in the Guantanamo case, stop and frisk, or the Pelican Bay litigation (that effectively will end indeterminate, long-term solitary confinement in all California state prisons) we managed to win. But often we did not. Even when we didn't win in court, though, we had broader goals of aiding political movements, educating the public about an injustice, and challenging oppression when nobody else would. When we were able to achieve those goals, we were successful even without courtroom victory. If you take this attitude you can even sometimes win cases that nobody else would have brought. But my point is, even when you don't win, you can still be successful if you help a movement against injustice."

Like many readers, I'm on semi-familiar terms with CCR through watching Democracy Now every

morning. I particularly remember one of the last appearances of Michael Ratner, now deceased, but much loved President of CCR. His eyes lit up when he said that Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld all experience anxiety about traveling abroad, due to warrants and criminal cases filed against the scoundrels at the International Criminal Court, for their evil deeds of torture in secret places and at Guantanamo. The issues have been raised, made public and people call out these men as war criminals.

At the awards dinner, we will meet and hear from Vincent Warren, the Executive Director, who has a long list of accomplishments in advocacy and litigation. I'm sure Jules Lobel will tell us more about Vincent Warren at the dinner.

In years past, the Merton Center has honored national and international figures, including Studs Terkel, Father Daniel Berrigan, Bill McKibben, Jeremy Scahill, Dorothy Day, Joan Baez, and Amy Goodman.

Bette McDevitt is a member of The NewPeople Editorial Collective.

Vincent Warren, Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights (Photo: CCR Website)



Thomas Merton Award Dinner

Date: Monday, Nov. 20

Time: 6:00- 9:00pm

Registration: 5:00pm

Place: Sheraton at Station Square

Price: \$65. (Scholarships available) \$75 at the door

Reservations: access Eventbrite at <https://2017mertonaward.eventbrite.com> or send in check with invitation reservation form.

For more information call 412.361.3022

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The Turning Point

By Ginny Hildebrand, as told to Bette McDevitt



Ginny and her sister, Chris
(Photo: Rosemary Trump)

Ginny Hildebrand had a story and I happened to ask the right question: "How did you become an activist?" I took it down as she spoke.

"I was enormously moved at the April 15, 1967 rally at the United Nations, (the Spring Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam. It changed me and my life's direction."

"In high school, I became a miserable, alienated teenager...rules and regulations from my parents and school as well as 4 hours of nightly homework. Oh, I was well behaved but underneath I was seething with a sense of unfairness."

"Then, while watching tv. I saw people my age being attacked with firehoses and dogs, just for trying to ride a bus or drink a coke at a lunch counter. My problems seemed

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Poll: 60% Of Americans OK First Use of Nuclear Weapons

By Molly Rush

"The lack of a sense of history is the damnation of the modern world." -- poet Robert Penn Warren

Back in 1980, I was sweeping my porch. I heard a young boy go by with his friends. He said, "The kids all say we're all going to die."

The U.S. was developing a first strike system to use against the then Soviet Union. There were protests across the U.S. The Plowshares Eight entered a GE plant in King of Prussia and hammered on Mark 12-A warhead casings. Over 100 Plowshares actions have fol-

lowed, continuing to this day.

In the 1980s, the Merton Center sponsored the River City Campaign. For ten years we vigiled weekly at military contractor Westinghouse. We handed out 300 copies of a new leaflet each week. We did civil disobedience and were jailed. We met with officials. Read a wonderful account of the campaign, *Mere Citizens: United, Civil and Disobedient*, by Liane Norman.

In 1982, one million people protested nuclear weapons at the United Nations in New York City.

(Continued on Page 5)

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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Office Phone: 412-361-3022 — Fax: 412-361-0540
Website: www.thomasmertoncenter.org

The NewPeople Editorial Collective

Neil Cosgrove, Michael Drohan, Russ Fedorka, Bette McDevitt, Calvin Pollack, Joyce Rothermel, Molly Rush, and Jo Tavener.

TMC Staff, Volunteers & Interns

Executive Director: Gabriel McMorland

Finance Director / Project Liaison: Roslyn Maholland

Support Staff: Sr. Mary Clare Donnelly

Activist & Office Volunteers: Christina Castillo, Monique Dietz, Nancy Gippert, Lois Goldstein, Jordan Malloy, Joyce Rothermel, Judy Starr

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www.bookempgh.org

Cities for CEDAW

Fight for Lifers West
fightforliferswest@gmail.com
412-607-1804
Fightforliferswest.org

Greater Pittsburgh Interfaith Coalition
Anne Wirth 412-716-9750

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(prisoner support and advocacy)
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info@steelsmilingpgh.org
www.steelsmilingpgh.org
412-251-7793

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412-361-3022
hildebrew@aol.com

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412-654-9070 abolitionistlawcenter.org

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info@amnestypgh.org - www.amnestypgh.org

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Sr. Barbara Finch 412-716-9750
www.associationofpittsburghpriests.com

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Tim Stevens 412-758-7898

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www.ceasefirepa.org—info@ceasefirepa.org
Citizens for Social Responsibility of Greater Johnstown
Larry Blalock, evolve@atlanticbb.net

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www.globalsolutionspgh.org

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412-369-3961
email: info@arc.northpgh.org
www.arc.northpgh.org

PA United for Single-Payer Health Care
www.healthcare4allPA.org
www.PUSH-HC4allPa.blogspot.com
412-421-4242

(TMC projects follow TMC guidelines and receive financial and ongoing resources and support from the Thomas Merton Center.)

jumphook@gmail.com;
www.pittsburghdarfur.org

School of the Americas Watch W. PA
412-271-8414
rothermeljoyce@gmail.com

Environmental Justice

Marcellus Shale Protest Group
melpacker@aol.com 412-243-4545
marcellusprotest.org

Pittsburgh 350
350pittsburgh@gmail.com
World.350.org/Pittsburgh

Shalefield Stories (Friends of the Harmed)
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brigetshields@gmail.com

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724-837-0540
lfpochet@verizon.net

Economic Justice

Harambee Ujima/Diversity Footprint
Twitter @HomewoodNation

Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance
412-512-1709

Pittsburgh Area Pax Christi
412-761-4319

Pittsburgh Cuba Coalition
412-303-1247 lisacubasi@aol.com

Pittsburgh BDS Coalition
bdspittsburgh@gmail.com

Pittsburgh North People for Peace
412-760-9390 info@pnpp.northpgh.org
www.pnpp.northpgh.org

Pittsburgh Palestine Solidarity Committee
info@pittsburgh-psc.org www.pittsburgh-psc.org

Raging Grannies
412-963-7163 eva.havlicsek@gmail.com
www.pittsburghraginggrannies.homestead.com

Religion and Labor Coalition
412-361-4793 ojomal@aol.com

SWPA Bread for the World
Joyce Rothermel 412-780-5118
rothermeljoyce@gmail.com

United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)
412-471-8919 www.ueunion.org

Veterans for Peace
Paul Dordal 412-999-6913
vfp47wp@yahoo.com

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
Edith Bell 412-661-7149 granbell412@gmail.com

TMC is a Member of

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network
412-621-9230 office@piin.org
Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty
Martha Conley 412-361-7872,
oosterdm@earthlink.net

TMC supports these organizations' missions.

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The Turning Point

By Ginny Hildebrand, as told to Bette McDevitt

tiny in comparison. There was something horrifically wrong with the rules the government was imposing on Black people.”

“I lived in a very white New Jersey suburb. But my parents were ethical Christians and became active in the fair housing movement, working with black families against realtors and landlords who discriminated. That stirred my awareness: action can and should confront moral wrongs.”

“At the same time, there was this war. I watched the nightly news in horror. Early April, my older sister Chris, who had moved to Boston, wrote saying there would be a big anti-war demonstration in New York on April 15th, 1967 and invited me to meet her at the New York Port Authority. ‘How will I find you with all those people?’, I asked. ‘We’ll be the ones with the signs ‘Bring the Troops Home Now,’ she wrote... My parents were away. I told my beloved Nana Lulu that I was just going to meet Chris in NYC...no questions asked.”

“Sure enough, I took the bus in and located Chris and her friend. Chris whispered, ‘You’re not gonna believe this. We made these signs with SOCIALISTS!’ And thanks to my sister, every sign I carried after 1967 was made by a socialist...me.”

“The demonstration was huge, more people than I’d ever seen. Among the speakers were Howard Zinn, Stokely Carmichael, the president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Martin Luther King. I really listened to these people. They were united, but came from different angles. I remember

that Stokely Carmichael was talking ONLY to the Black people. I didn’t have the experience to fully grasp the significance of this. I just remember feeling envious of those being embraced by this fiery orator.”

“That day’s experience is why I’m so strong on demonstrations as crucial to any strategy for change. Its impact on me is not unique. Specifically:”

“First, I stopped feeling alone. Here I was with over 100,000 people sharing outrage against the war’s injustice, although others seemed to understand it better than I did.”

“Second, I saw that many people were different from me. Some were atheists, some wore habits, people of different races, socialists, pacifists, a cross section taking a stand together. I said ‘Oh my God, this is something!’”

“Third, I sensed the power, energy, purpose and unity. It made me feel this was something that could change rules, regulations, even wars. It prepared me to understand, as I studied history in college, the role of the people, movements in forging history.”

“Going back to New Jersey, I wasn’t mature enough to absorb all this. But the feelings were overwhelming. Part of me remained a miserable love-sick teenager. But a more important part of me had gained an inspiring sense that I was going to be part of something bigger and more important than myself. And I couldn’t wait to get to Boston Uni-

versity. I was going to college to help end the war in Vietnam!”

“My first day, I went to the *Boston University News* office and asked, “Where’s SDS?” The editor turned to his reporters and said ‘I think this is going to be a good incoming class.’”

“Howard Zinn was one of my professors, and I was at teach-ins and marches with him and Noam Chomsky. In 1969 I was introduced to feminism. I sat-in for Black Studies and picketed with striking electrical workers. I was arrested and unjustly convicted of assault and battery on a police officer, a felony. (Now expunged)”

“I’m about to turn 69, and I can’t regret it. If I was younger I would have missed those people, those compelling events... I wouldn’t give that up. They confronted my political and moral assumptions, pushed me to study and think deeper and challenged me to put my body on the line. I gained determination and optimism from those around me. It was thrilling!”

“No wonder I became an activist!”

Postscript—by Bette McDevitt

You may wonder what happened next in Ginny's story. Here's the short version, in her words:

"I was a committed socialist, Marx was right, common people are the force for change, and I wanted to learn about unions from the bottom up. I moved here to become a steelworker, and when the mills shut down, I became a coal miner, and when the mine shut down I became a machinist and when that was shutting down I finally admitted that I had been driven to the dogs, and I became a dog groomer. I’m afraid I’m the typhoid Mary of Pittsburgh industry."



Ginny and her sister, Chris
(Photo: Rosemary Trump)

The Thomas Merton Center kneels in solidarity with professional athletes and their staff who, under their first amendment rights, have utilized the public arena to witness to the values the U.S. flag is supposed to represent, namely the dignity, freedom and equality of all.

Letter from TMC Director By Gabriel McMorland

I’m asking a question I’m sure the peace movement holds ever-present at the front of our minds. Why is the US still unfurling endless war around the world? We’ve all seen the spectacular televised displays of military aggression, and we know the secret cruelty of covert actions remains an everyday reality. After rising to power on a tide of racism and misogyny deeply rooted in American culture, our president now rivals Barry Goldwater’s atomic cowboy attitude with threats of nuclear war. The toxic trinity of racism, capitalism, and militarism that founded this country still shapes domestic and foreign policy. We know why our elites plan wars, but why do so few people demand peace?

If the peace movement wants to make progress, we must understand the perspectives of the rest of US society. What do people know about the violence carried out on behalf of our government? What do they think about the

situation? We should be especially curious about the opinions of people misinformed by warhawk propaganda. In many ways, mobilizing our neighbors becomes more important than academic analysis of foreign policy itself.

The violence of our politics at home helps explain why so many in the US accept global conflict. From the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the war on terror, state violence has always been justified by contemporary popular culture, science, and religion. The fear and hatred that stems from racist xenophobia drive our domestic politics. Both political parties seem to agree that the violent ideology of law and order repression is the only solution worth offering. Many people also cling to our founding mythology that everyone can become rich if they try, and that the success of corporations and billionaires benefits us all. If our neighbors won’t support shifting fund-

ing from militarized police to social workers, why would they find anything wrong with a federal budget that robs from human needs to expand military spending?

Let’s also reflect on the striking differences between today’s cultural moment and the 1970s peak of the US anti-war movement, while harvesting lessons learned from the decades in-between. We can look to successes and shortcomings of anti-nuclear activists, solidarity with Central America in the 1980s, and the protests of the invasion of Iraq in the early 2000s.

Consider each in their cultural context. Would the anti-war resurgence in the early 2000s have such strength without the larger movement of anti-capitalist actions against globalization? As always, the most valuable lessons often come from movements of marginalized people and the leadership of black and brown communities.

We know white supremacy at home lies at the heart of this global crisis of militarism. The words of Thomas Merton still ring true today, ..."the Cold War and its fatal insanities are generated within the purblind guilt-ridden, self-deceiving, self-tormenting and self-destructive psyche of the white man."

As director of the Thomas Merton Center, I welcome your thoughts and stories of your own experience. I would love to know your thoughts on the questions I raised today. Together, we can build peace through justice.

Gabriel McMorland is the Executive Director of the Thomas Merton Center.

Mobilizing for Justice

Congratulations, Molly Rush!

By Joyce Rothermel



CLASS (previously United Cerebral Palsy) is holding its 25th Annual Community Heroes Awards Dinner on Wed., Oct. 25, at 5:30 PM at the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) Hall on the Southside. Individuals and organizations are recognized as champions of their causes, who ensure that all people, regardless of race, gender, ability or affiliation, have a valuable role to play in their communities.

Photo: TMC Website

This year Molly Rush, co-founder of the Thomas Merton Center, is among the Honorees. We are grateful to CLASS for their decision to honor Molly in this celebratory way. “Molly, we are proud of you and all you have accomplished in your long-term commitment to the mission of the Thomas Merton Center. Your witness has inspired people all around the world, and continues to inspire us at the Merton Center and the Pittsburgh community,” said Gabriel McMorland, Executive Director of the Merton Center.

Others to be recognized at the upcoming dinner are Carolyn Hare, Director of Arts for Autism Foundation of Pittsburgh; Frederick Massey, Jr., CEO of Family Links; and Star Transportation Group with services including accessible cabs and opportunities for veterans.

For more information about the event, contact Shannon McCarty, Development Director, at 412-683-7100 x 2158 or smccarty@classcommunity.org



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Restoring Justice By Jim McCarville

“Justice” is a universal ideal that often falls short of what we hope for.

Karen Clifton, Executive Director of the Catholic Mobilizing Network, came to speak at the Association of Pittsburgh Priests’ (APP) Speaker Series, September 11. She presented some pretty good arguments about where our justice system falls short, why it gets so little public attention and some interesting organizing people can do to improve it.

Her talk was titled “Ending the Death Penalty: Promoting Restorative Justice”.

The APP used Clifton’s presence to also call together a number of Pittsburgh groups working on related issues to discuss strategies for implementation. Clifton praised this effort, including participation with Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, Center for Victims, and Mercy Hospital Chaplaincy. Joyce Rothermel, an APP and TMC board member, also compiled an impressive list of other related organizations.

With a drop to 30 death row executions in 2017, many in this pro-life movement were optimistic. But that was before the elections. She said there were ballot box setbacks in California, Nebraska and Oklahoma, and other actions in Delaware and Arkansas, that all went the wrong way. “We need voices. We need to build new alliances,” she said. In particular she mentioned the new found interest among social conservatives that now see this issue as pro-life. Clifton also had meetings at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and St. Paul’s Seminary. The more diverse your voices, the more effective you will be,” she added. And we do have a challenge.

The strategy of her organization is to focus on the county level, citing a little known fact. “The county bears 3/4ths of the cost of incarcerating a capital punishment prisoner”, she said.

Going beyond the death penalty, Clifton questioned the efficacy of our current incarceration policies aimed at retribution. She said the usual statistics indicate that somewhere between 60% and 80% of inmates either have serious mental issues or are in prison because they cannot afford bail. The same statistic is quoted by a local group alleging mismanagement of the Allegheny County Jail so bad that they are calling for its closure.

Clifton talked about crime having two hurting parties: the victim and the perpetrator. If we want the good of society, if we are to restore right relationships, both parties have to be involved. Perpetrators willing to participate in the program have to be willing to face the victims and to face the consequences of what they have done. For those that do, the recidivism rate is down to 7% (14% including probation violations).

For all the logic of a better system, few people are aware that there are better answers or of what our churches are supposed to be teaching. Even fewer people give voice to their opinions.

The Catholic Mobilizing Network works with parishes and other organizations in training people to be advocates and to be peacemakers. “We need to have these strategies not just in our prisons,” said Clifton, “but in our homes, our offices and our organizations.” Peacemaking!

For free Catholic Mobilizing Network Engagement Tools, available to everybody, go to catholicmobilizing.org. They are available to everybody.

Jim McCarville is a member of the TMC Board.

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Poll: 60% Of Americans OK 1ST Use of Nuclear Weapons (Cont'd) By Molly Rush

All over Europe protests had sprung up, as the realization of the threat of all-out nuclear war hit home. In England for instance, women's peace camps were set up around U.S. military bases there. For most people the use of nuclear weapons was unthinkable.

A VERY DIFFERENT STORY TODAY!

Fast forward to 2017.

Most people have very little information about the immense power of nuclear weapons, the U.S. role in the tragic history of their use in World War II, the widespread disposal of radioactive waste, including in Western Pennsylvania, and its health effects in places like Apollo, PA.

Worldwide, eight countries possess nuclear weapons. There are 9920 bombs, according to the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, which recently moved up their Doomsday Clock to two minutes to midnight. Miraculously, there have been no bombings since 1945. There have been many close calls due to accidents. Lack of security at weapons sites poses another danger.

Now the U.S. is pouring hundreds of billions into updating the enormous stockpile of bombs.

The first of 100-150 truckloads of

dangerous highly radioactive liquid waste was recently transported on public roads from Canada to South Carolina, with little or no public awareness. [See the September issue of *The NewPeople* for details.]

Until North Korea tested their missiles, the media paid little attention to the continuing threat posed by these weapons. The public remains uninformed.

A poll by MIT has found that 60% of Americans are willing to make a first strike against Iran, killing two million civilians. "They haven't really thought about it," said Atmospheric Scientist Brian Toon.

The 15 kiloton A-bomb "Little Boy," that the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 wiped out 90% of the city and killed 80,000 people. Tens of thousands died from radiation exposure. And others suffered from cancer, brain damage to fetuses, and genetic effects to children born to survivors.

In the 1980s, several Hibakusha [survivors of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima.] toured the U.S., stopping in Pittsburgh. Their stories were chilling. They presented us with paper peace cranes they had folded as a gesture of goodwill.

Today's hydrogen bombs may be as much as 15,000 kilotons; 2400 bombs

are in the U.S. stockpile, equal to 159,000 megatons.

One thermonuclear weapon can cause severe radiation damage for hundreds of miles and make large parts of the entire earth uninhabitable, affecting water, the atmosphere, animals and the food chain. [www.Isan.org] The radiation and toxic pollution would lead to a mass extinction event.

In 1995 the Pew Research Organization found that 50% of those polled believed there must be another alternative to nuclear weapons. In a new poll by the Council on Global Affairs about sending troops to defend South Korea from attack, 62% said yes while 28% supported the use of troops to destroy the North's nuclear facilities.

UN TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS ADOPTED

For the first time in the seven-decade effort to avert a nuclear war, a global treaty was negotiated to destroy all nuclear weapons and forever prohibit their use.

Two-thirds of the 192-member United Nations finalized the 10-page treaty after months of talks. It was formally adopted at UN headquarters in New York.

It's open for signature as of September

20th and would enter into legal force 90 days after ratification by 50 countries. The US must sign. That requires a movement to pressure public officials to support the treaty. A determined and persistent international effort is needed to see that the treaty is enforced. We have our work cut out for us if we are to succeed.

(On September 18, 2017, the Board of the Merton Center endorsed the Nuclear Weapons Ban Petition Campaign sponsored by the U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. To see a copy of the treaty, go to <http://undocs.org/A/CONF.229/2017/8> To participate in the Campaign, call Edith Bell at 412-661-7149.)

Molly Rush is a co-founder of the Thomas Merton Center and a member of the Center's board.

Thinking Strategically at the TMC By Jim McCarville

Is it time to strategically re-assess the Thomas Merton Center? That question has come up a couple of times recently. First, at the last TMC Board meeting, a number of Board members volunteered to look at the TMC's outreach in peace efforts. That discussion spurred a similar reflection among the Board members, who recently agreed to liaison with the environmental projects. I was fortunate to be present at a meeting on the Center's peace and non-violence strategies and will try to capture the discussion.

Just like the proverbial Generals not wanting to be caught "fighting the last war," there is an equal concern about "waging the last peace and justice campaign." In any case, it is helpful to review what we have been doing, what's changing, what's essential to us, and how we might respond. Traditionally, the Merton Center has had four focus areas: peace and opposition to war, environmental justice, economic justice and human rights, and we are active in each.

As Gabriel McMorland, Executive Director of the TMC explained, "We engage on three levels: education, witnessing to justice and focusing on winnable or strategic campaigns."

Taking it another step, TMC Board Member Mark Dixon, asked "What is it we want to be?" He suggested four possible good answers: (1) agents of

cultural change on a massive scale; or (2) builders of communities; or (3) channellers of volunteer energy; or (4) candleholders for peace and justice while awaiting a coalescing event.

I found myself slightly chagrined to recognize that we are sometimes only number 4; however, none of the above goals are mutually exclusive. Maybe we need a little of each, but the question remains, "Where do we best focus our limited energy?"

Dixon suggested that we need to focus on the interconnectedness of the problems we face. "The roots of war," he said, "are based in the imperial pursuit of others' resources at the expense of the developing our own local or alternative resources." (Resources broadly include energy, raw materials and human, economic, educational and social development.) "It is all interconnected, a system of systems" he said, "it's intersectional."

Intersectionality is a major challenge for a broad-based organization like the TMC. Simply described, it is the idea that the solution to one social problem isn't complete unless it takes into consideration (and possibly solves) the potential negative impacts the said solution may have on other social issues. Laudable, important, and problematic. Intersectionality can build understanding among groups in the best case scenario, but it can also

stymie cooperation or even sow division in the worst case. It requires a great deal of humility on the part of all involved to do it right.

Neil Cosgrove, a retired writing professor and an active member of the New People Collective, spoke about "the importance of honing all of our communications in a way people can see the connections." He and others suggested the need to make obvious the linkages between immigration and our disastrous foreign policies in Central America, the Middle East and Africa; between wars abroad and domestic militarization at home, and vice-versa; between war and its environmental degradation; between not raising taxes and the lack of resources to solve problems today; and between war-cost borrowing and inadequate resources available to solve problems tomorrow -- especially environmental problems with costs that increase exponentially.

TMC board member Joyce Rothermel, who is also a member of the Anti-War Committee, pointed out that "people are upset, but they are upset about a thousand things, a thousand complicated things. Some leaders want to confuse us and make us afraid -- so we will do nothing. They want to scare us into fear and to lull us into the comfort of simple answers and non-thinking inaction."

Pat Fenton, the TMC board member

who initiated our review of the TMC Peace and Nonviolent efforts, observed that "we need to move beyond attacking these things sporadically or for specific events; we need to show connections, but we also need strategies. This includes planning, budgeting, training, data collection, communications and relationships with like-minded organizations."

Mark Dixon underscored the importance and immediacy of needing to act smart, strategically and soon. "Many veteran protesters have already burnt out, but we can't wait. We have to demonstrate why it is in your interest to be anti-war. Why is it in your interest to be environmental? We have no more room in the atmosphere for CO2. Any new fossil fuel infrastructure, after 2018, will make the Paris Accord unsustainable."

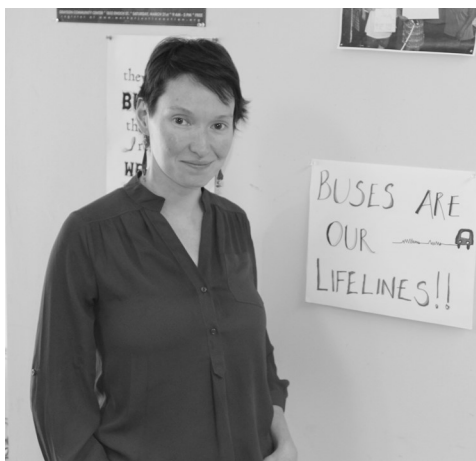
Wanda Guthrie, another board member, summed up the challenge to the TMC another way. "We need to recognize what we are and to understand the spiritual and faith dimensions of our work. Our spiritual lives are counter-intuitive and our challenge is to BE The Peace. We are required to follow a third way."

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

Public Transit Challenges

PPT and Its New Director Ready for Transit Challenges

By Neil Cosgrove



Laura Wiens, Director of Pittsburghers for Public Transit
(Photo by Neil Cosgrove)

Laura Wiens, who became the director of Pittsburghers for Public Transit (PPT) this past June, feels fortunate to be leading such a strongly functioning organization. She knows PPT has “a really smart coordinating committee,” one that is “involved while giving freedom to the staff.” She is grateful for her staff—for Chandana Cherukupalli’s recruitment of resident leaders for the coordinating committee; for Crystal Jennings’ work connecting affordable housing issues to transit issues.

But Laura’s highest praise is directed towards her predecessor, Molly Nichols, and how she kept the organization’s focus on social equity, on broadening access to transit, on fair-

ness in transit policing, on support for the workers who sustain the system’s daily operations. “Molly was such an amazing leader,” said Laura, “bringing together riders, drivers and residents.”

The path taken by an activist on the way to full social, moral and civic engagement often makes for enthralling stories, and such is the case with Laura Wiens. Laura’s path began with the Watson Fellowship she received following her graduation from Williams College in Massachusetts with a degree in Asian Studies. (Both her mother and her step-mother are Chinese, and she speaks fluent Chinese, as well as Spanish.)

The fellowship required that Laura live in parts of the world she had never been before, and over the next year-and-a-half she worked, primarily at radio stations, in the three “post-conflict” cities of Chiapas, Mexico; Cape Town, South Africa; and Belgrade, Serbia. During this time she learned to question societal structures and to engage in such issues as the privatization of water resources. Her proudest accomplishment at that time was the production of a tri-lingual (Serb/Croat, Chinese, English) radio documentary on the Chinese community in Belgrade.

It was in Belgrade that Laura also took up her avocation of singing jazz standards, first as part of “Lora and the Bel-

grade Boys” and here in Pittsburgh with two different ensembles—RML Jazz and the big-band Jazz Conspiracy.

With the fellowship completed, and confronted with the necessity of making a living, Laura took a job as a buffet cook at a casino in Charles Town, West Virginia. “A couple of years into this work,” she recalls, “I got recruited into a union-organizing campaign at the casino.” The campaign ultimately failed but through it she met her husband, John Cooper, and they now have a one-year-old named Gabriel.

In 2010 Laura came to Pittsburgh as an organizer with the Hospitality Workers Union’s Unite Here campaign. In the five subsequent years, she helped successfully expand union membership at downtown hotels and at the Erie, Meadows, and Wheeling casinos. Then she returned to her radio roots by performing “outreach” for the Union Edge broadcasting project located in the Letter Carriers Building on the North Side. In addition, Laura did some “hosting, producing, and engineering. It was exciting, diverse work,” and through her organizing she had come to “know a lot of the players.” Laura also serves as secretary for the Battle of Homestead Foundation’s governing board.

Her life experiences so far have certainly prepared Laura for directing PPT and for successful completion of

their current campaigns—to convince the Port Authority of Allegheny County to adopt a civil, rather than criminal, proof of payment system on the “T” (See related article on this page.), and to ensure that the Bus Rapid Transit System proposed for the Oakland-Downtown corridor respects the needs for access and affordability of those most dependent on public transit, especially those who live, often out of economic necessity, in the near eastern suburbs.

Another troubling issue is the recent attempt by Pennsylvania’s Republican House leaders to raid the Public Transit Trust Fund as one means of balancing the state’s 2017-18 budget. The proposal would deprive regional transit authorities across the state of \$357 million and Allegheny County of \$80 million in operating funds, with catastrophic results. With such challenges ever present, our citizens are grateful that PPT, a Merton Center project, and Laura Wiens are ready to meet them.

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

Merton Center, PPT Seek "Civil" Fare Collection

By Neil Cosgrove

In 2015, nearly 11 million people were arrested by American police officers, a fact Emily Yoffe of *The Atlantic* attributes to the criminalization of “so many behaviors” by legislators. The worst effects of this spike in arrests have, predictably, been felt by the poor and people of color, people who are commonly singled out by even fair-minded cops, and people who commonly can’t afford strong legal representation or the draconian fines often levied.

Despite these truths, the Port Authority of Allegheny County (PAAC) has been planning since early spring to criminalize fare evasion on its light-rail system, to have Port Authority police “randomly” ask passengers for proof of payment, and to run passengers’ names through criminal records for outstanding warrants if such proof can’t be produced. Fines of up to \$300 are to be put in place, and multiple infractions could result in up to 30 days in jail.

The initial reaction of some has been that the Port Authority plan is fair, that there should be a price to pay for fare evasion. But the Thomas Merton Center, Pittsburghers for Public Transit, Casa San Jose, and the Alliance for Police Accountability have formed a coalition to forcefully oppose this policy, arguing that there are less expensive, more efficient, less punitive, and less potentially discriminatory ways for the Port Authority to reach its goals.

Just what are the authority’s goals? Right now, fares on the “T” are received by train operators or fare booth collectors placed at station exits. During periods of peak use, lines can form at the door of the train where operators are checking fares, or at the station exits. Trains are consequently delayed, backing up traffic all along particular lines. So the authority wants to implement a “proof of payment” system in which passengers can enter trains at any door, knowing that they might be asked to show they paid their fares either on a train or in a station.

The Coalition raising issues with the Port Authority does not oppose such a system, only the manner of enforcement. Instead, the Coalition advocates the use of civilian, unarmed “fare ambassadors,” who would randomly check passengers for proof of payment and cite those who cannot supply the proof. The citations would then be passed on to a collection agency, as already happens with parking fees.

Why are “fare ambassadors” and a civil process for collecting fares preferable to the Port Authority’s plan? First of all, the Coalition points out that creating “thousands of extra encounters” between the public and armed police each week is guaranteed to produce “unnecessary confrontation and ‘use of force’ incidents,” especially for passengers of color. Criminalization places an “everyday necessity” for the poor into the legal system, and

means that immigrants could be pushed into “an unconstitutional process of detainment and deportation,” all for failure to pay \$2.50 fares. Students who ride to school and who occasionally or chronically misplace their bus passes could be subject to arrest or a large fine, thus worsening “the school-to-prison pipeline. In New York City, 70% of arrestees were 16 to 17 years old.”

All such instances seem like unnecessary and overblown reactions to a minor infraction due to carelessness, poverty, or even malfunctioning ticket machines or damaged Connect Cards. Moreover, with criminalization the Port Authority will get back only the \$2.50 fare, while any fines go to the municipality where the incident occurred; in contrast, a civil process results in all citations supporting public transit. The Coalition points out that “on average \$1000 in taxpayer money” is required to process a fare evasion case through the courts.

Studies which have compared rates of fare evasion in proof of payment systems have found little difference between those that use criminal or civil enforcement, and in Buffalo, NY, where a civil process is used, the actual rate is less than two percent. The coalition recommends fare inspectors receive extensive training in such skills as “cultural responsiveness” and “de-escalation.” Such an approach encourages ridership, rather than criminalizing a behavior Port Authority of-

ficials have admitted is “not currently a concern” on the rail system. “Data shows that almost everyone will pay, almost all the time,” adds the Coalition.

If necessary, a fare inspector could summon a Port Authority police officer to assist with a particularly difficult passenger. But Laura Wiens, Director of Pittsburghers for Public Transit, insist that such officers should generally be left “to perform the job for which they were hired, ensuring the safety of both drivers and passengers.”

Recent actions by the Coalition have included the sending of postcards to State Representative Dom Costa, a Port Authority Board member reportedly in strong favor of the criminalization process, urging him to reconsider his position. A press conference at Rep. Costa’s office was planned for last month, and testimony against criminalization by institutions (e.g. schools) and organizations took place at the September 29th Port Authority Board meeting.

The PAAC originally intended to implement its criminalized fare enforcement system on July 1st, then said it would need until the end of year to put in the necessary infrastructure.

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

Single Payer at the Tipping Point

By Bob Mason

As I write this article on Wednesday morning, September 13th, single payer advocates across the nation eagerly await Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' press conference later today, announcing introduction of his Medicare for All legislation. Many people, including political commentators, believe that we are at a tipping point towards enacting truly universal health care in the United States, utilizing a single payer model. What follows is the evidence:

1. A June 2017 Kaiser Health Tracking Poll reported that " 53% favor a single-payer plan in which all Americans would get their insurance from a single government plan." 64% of Democrats, 33 % of Republicans, and 55 % of Independents favor this type of plan.

2. Recently Kaiser Health News reported in a poll that 56% of doctors support single payer.

3. Rep. John Conyers' Medicare for All legislation, HR 676, in the U. S.

House has gained 117 co-sponsors, 60% of the Democratic caucus.

4. As of this morning, Sanders' legislation has 15 co-sponsors.

5. Recently retired Senator Max Baucus, whose committee crafted the Affordable Care Act and, to his shame, excluded single payer from discussions and evicted single payer advocates from a hearing, announced his support for single payer.

6. Warren Buffet announced support for single payer.

7. The Editorial Board of the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, a conservative newspaper, earlier this month published an op-ed entitled "Medicare for all? Let's copy what works in other nations." This piece states, "It's now clear that creating a single-payer health care system is the top priority of the Democratic Party and millions of Americans."

8. In the *American Conservative*

Chase Madar penned "Conservative Case for Universal Healthcare: Why in 5 Years the American Right Will Embrace Socialized Medicine," published July 25th.

9. A *Washington Post* editorial on July 1st stated "While the Democratic Party may have been moving left on health care, its (single payer) momentum may be inevitable."

And in our Commonwealth:

1. Last weekend the Democratic State Committee voted unanimously to endorse HB 1688, establishing a single payer plan for Pennsylvania, soon to be re-introduced by State Representative Pam DeLissio.

2. A State Senator from the eastern part of Pennsylvania is planning to introduce similar legislation this fall.

3. Throughout Pennsylvania progressive candidates running in local elections, including for the legislature, are highlighting their support for single

payer.

Of course, the financial clout of the health care industry, made up of monopolistic hospital systems, insurance companies, and the pharmaceutical companies, is still a mighty obstacle to overcome, but Health Care 4 All PA and many allied organizations believe that overwhelming and active public support can carry the day. You can find out more information about our support of both federal and state single payer legislation and how you can help at www.healthcare4allpa.org. Follow us on Facebook @healthcare4allpa. To get involved locally, join us every third Monday evening (6:30 PM) at the Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library.

Bob Mason is President and founding board member of Health Care 4 All PA .

The Growing Movement to End Corporate Rule

By Greg Coleridge

Much organizing in this country since last November's election has focused on opposing President Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress. Reacting to tweets, responding to appointments and resisting proposed policies and decrees has been the playbook of those dedicated to peace and justice in all their forms.

This overall strategy and the many employed tactics have made perfect sense, given the threats to people, places and the planet of a racist, classist, undemocratic and environmentally destructive agenda. The people's pushback has scored important victories, most notably in preventing the enactment of so-called "health care" replacements to the Affordable Care Act.

Continued reaction, response and resistance are urgent, but they have glaring limits. By definition, energy cannot be invested educating and organizing proactively for positive alternatives from the local to the global levels. Moreover, if attention is only directed at the players (i.e. elected officials and candidates for public office) and plays (i.e. laws and regulations) in our playbook, we ignore the fundamental "rules of the game" that are and have been stacked against We the People.

Our government is broken because the system is fixed, as in structures and institutions rigged to benefit the super

wealthy and corporate interests. This isn't a new condition, or one that originated following the 2010 Supreme Court Citizens United v FEC decision. The rigged rules of the game are provisions within the U.S. Constitution and several subsequent Supreme Court rulings over 100 years, which include anointing corporations with never-intended constitutional "personhood" rights and defining money as constitutionally protected First Amendment "free speech."

The political power and influence resulting from corporate "personhood" and "money as speech" have profoundly influenced virtually every sector of our lives. Laws and regulations passed either by corporate-friendly public officials or decreed by courts have touched all of us – from the food we eat, to the water we drink, transportation we use, taxes we pay, work we do, products we buy, ads we see, energy sources we consume, federal programs we depend on, health care we have (or don't), natural world we have left, and everything/anything else in our lives that have been privatized/corporatized.

More than simply influencing decisions via lobbying, political donations/investments and court decisions expanding their constitutional rights, corporations increasingly rule. They set the terms and conditions on oil and gas extraction, trade policies, foreign policies, vote counting, financial

"reform," and environmental protections. And along with super wealthy individuals, large business corporations possess inordinate influence on what issues are discussed during political campaigns, whose voices are heard and who gets elected.

A growing national movement to legalize democracy by abolishing corporate constitutional rights and money defined as speech is being organized by Move to Amend. MTA's "We the People Amendment," HJR 48, calls on Congress to pass a Constitutional Amendment to end these bizarre legal doctrines. Corporations are not mentioned in the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, which was meant to protect individuals from organized state power, yet those same corporations now claim Bill of Rights "rights" to shield themselves from us. Money is not speech, but property. If money is speech, then those with the most money possess the most speech, drowning out the voices of the vast majority of citizens without the ability to politically donate.

MTA is under no illusion that such an amendment will pass prior to the formation of a massive people's movement that must be authentically racial and gender inclusive and politically independent. Social movements have led to the passage throughout history of many Constitutional Amendments expanding the rights of people who were originally not part of We the

People. It's time to radically expand human rights once more by ending the constitutional rights of corporations and money.

More than 600 communities have already passed municipal resolutions or ballot initiatives in support of such an amendment. Hundreds of labor, faith, civic and community organizations have also passed supportive resolutions.

"Creating an Authentic, Participatory Democracy" is the title of a presentation and subsequent discussion on the Move to Amend movement and larger democracy movement that will take place on Thursday, October 26 at 6 pm at the East Liberty Library, 130 S. Whitfield St. in Pittsburgh. The program is sponsored by the local chapter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Resisting the injustices and violence of the present times can and should continue, but needs to be complemented with the strategy of fundamentally creating a more just legal system guaranteeing the right of people -- not money or corporations -- to decide.

Greg Coleridge is Co-Director of Outreach of National Move to Amend

In Memory:

Thorne Hayes, past member of the Thomas Merton Center who was active in the formation of Amnesty International, chapter #39 in Pittsburgh, passed away on September 6, 2017. Thorne was a Vietnam Veteran. Following his time in the service, he was active and ardent in his support of peace, human and animal rights, and the environment. Memorial gifts can be made to the Molly Rush Legacy Fund.

Truth: War's First Casualty

Bumbling Nonchalantly Towards Armageddon

By Michael Drohan

The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* announced at the beginning of 2017 that their Doomsday Clock was advancing from 3 minutes to midnight to 2 and a ½. This alert to humanity was based on the increased threat of nuclear war and climate change to the survival of humanity. The scientists' action took place before the inauguration of Donald Trump as President and his threats to deliver "fire and fury such as the world has never seen" on North Korea were it to persist in firing ballistic missiles and testing nuclear bombs. It also preceded the catastrophic hurricanes Harvey and Irma of September 2017 and President Trump's climate change denier cabinet now in place.

When President Trump delivered his "fire and fury" tweet, a friend of mine told me that she called her son, suggesting that they bring the family together, as it may be the last time they would have an opportunity to do so. This friend has been involved in the nuclear abolition movement for decades and is consequently acutely aware of the unthinkable threat that a nuclear war would pose to the survival of humanity. But this seems to be exactly what Trump was going to unleash on the planet. How different to hers, however, is the response of the mainstream press to Trump's insane outbursts. On Sunday September 3, all a reporter could ask Mr. Trump was

"Will you attack North Korea?" while a more reasonable question might be "Are you out of your mind in threatening war on North Korea?". The question posed suggests that in many ways we may be suffering from "psychological numbing," whereby we live in denial of the Damocles' sword that is hanging just inches above the neck of humanity and the planet.

On September 11, as I write this article, the US brought a resolution before the UN Security Council that imposes economic sanctions on North Korea that will virtually strangle the country. This resolution imposes a ban on importing natural gas liquids, textile exports and new work permits to North Koreans working abroad. This is in addition to earlier imposed sanctions that banned North Korea from exporting coal, iron, lead and seafood, which amounts to one third of its entire exports. Such measures, the US hopes, will constrain North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions. From North Korea's viewpoint, however, these sanctions are war by other means. It is difficult to understand how rational politicians could imagine such a crazy way to resolve a crisis with such global survival implications.

The Russian Federation and China were adamantly opposed to the new

sanctions but caved in and voted for them. The President of the Russian Federation declared at the recent BRICS Conference that the North Koreans "will not give up their nuclear program if they do not feel safe. For this reason we must try to open dialogue between the parties concerned." Both Russia and China have proposed a two-pronged approach to the problem: North Korea would suspend its nuclear and missile development and the United States and South Korea would suspend their joint military exercises. All in all, a rational and reasonable solution.

By contrast, demands for a diplomatic solution to the crisis have met with rejection from the Trump camp. "Talking is not the answer" in dealing with North Korea, he tweeted on August 31. He elaborated on September 8, saying "We've had presidents for 25 years now; they've been talking, talking, talking, and the day after an agreement is reached, new work begins in North Korea" on its rogue nuclear weapons program. The truth, however, is quite different and Mr. Trump manifested a complete ignorance of the facts. In 1994, President Clinton forged an agreement with Kim Jung Il (the then President of North Korea) called the "Agreed Framework." The terms of this agreement were that Pyongyang would suspend

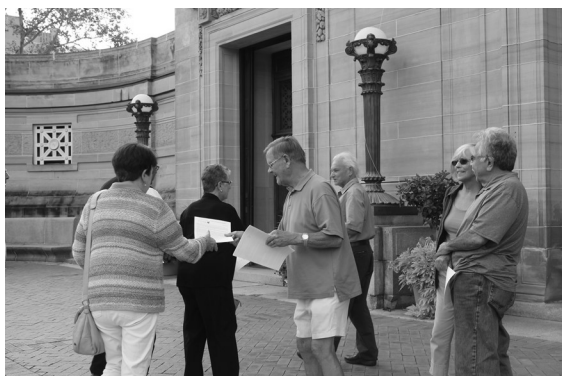
the testing and deployment of all medium and long-range missiles in return for an end of enmity and a promise of 500,000 tons of crude oil to be delivered to North Korea. However, one month after concluding the agreement, the Republican Party became the majority in Congress and never ratified the agreement. Appropriations for the oil deliveries were never passed and full normalization of political and economic relations never took place. The US and not North Korea were the ones responsible for the failure, which rubbishes Mr. Trump's fake facts. In 2003, under President George W. Bush, North Korea was declared part of "the axis of evil" and he tore up the agreement reached by Clinton. Thus, relations were further soured by the obstructionism coming out of the White House.

As with practically everything coming out of the US administration at this time, the truth is in the negation. We need to look in the mirror and see who the real aggressor is. Congress, in the meantime, has forgotten that the constitutional powers to declare war or initiate war rests with Congress. A diplomatic solution is possible and "we the people" must demand it.

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

The Vietnam War Never Ends

By David Hughes



Merton Board Member Michael Drohan hands out the Anti-War Committee's (a Merton Center project) recent statement on North Korea to attendees of WQED's preview of Ken Burns' documentary on the Vietnam War. (Photo by Neil Cosgrove)

Near the beginning of the new Ken Burns' PBS documentary "The Vietnam War", the narrator states: the Vietnam War "was begun in good faith by decent people." This, after Burns and his team at Florentine Films spent ten years working on this documentary.

At the age of 14 in 1960, I met John F. Kennedy and became a political junkie. In August 1964, President Johnson used the fabricated second attack on US naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin to get Congress to pass a Resolution giving him authority to start a bombing campaign against north Vietnam. I heard Lyndon Johnson speak in October 1964 at the Civic Arena. He said the US needed to defend south Vietnam from the "international outlaws" of north Vietnam because of our obligation under the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). He also said he had no plans to escalate our involvement in Vietnam, stating that: "We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."

Three months later, in a speech class at Pitt, the Teaching Assistant would

have us discuss current events to help us develop extemporaneous speeches. He constantly brought up the war in Vietnam and was obviously opposed to US involvement. I was the most outspoken student in the class and would argue with the TA, taking the Kennedy/Johnson administration line. One day the TA said to me: "David, did you ever think we were wrong in Vietnam?" and I replied "no". It never occurred to me that our president would lie.

After class, I went across the street to Carnegie Library and read the 1954 Geneva Accords that settled the French attempt to recolonize Vietnam. The Conference Declaration clearly states that the "temporary demarcation line" at the 17th parallel "is not to be construed as an international or territorial boundary". The fog that I had been in started to clear at that moment. Then I read the 1954 SEATO treaty (Southeast Asia treaty organization). I quickly saw that Vietnam was not a signatory to the SEATO treaty. I realized that the US claimed north and south Vietnam were two countries so it could justify intervention in a revolutionary conflict. The following Wednesday, on a cold January 1965 afternoon, I joined that TA on a picket

line in front of Soldiers & Sailors Hall to protest US intervention in south east Asia. That was the start of a life of antiwar activism.

The US Indochina policy was not conducted in "good faith," nor can the architects of that policy be considered "decent people." There is nothing good, or faithful or decent about lying to cover real intentions that resulted in a criminal enterprise that caused immeasurable and never ending harm to the lives and land of millions of people. And the worst part of it is that no one has been held accountable for this historic crime, and never will be. All the principle decision makers are dead, with the exception of the world's greatest evildoer, Henry Kissinger.

Those of us who know this history have a duty to help Americans learn the lessons of Vietnam so that they have a better understanding of the causes of US aggression today. This is not an easy task. Like most, if not all wars, the mainstream media has yet to give an accurate history of the Vietnam War. In addition, in 2012 Barack Obama included \$65 million in the defense budget to whitewash the real history of the Vietnam War. The capitalist empire cannot let the truth hinder its imperial plans.

It is also important that Americans learn the lessons of Vietnam because of the impact that war has had on our psyche. As philosopher and Vietnam war veteran Camillo Mac Bica says: "For more than a generation, instead of forging a path to reconciliation, we have allowed the wounds the war inflicted on our nation, our politics, and our families to fester. The troubles that trouble us today are a direct conse-

quence of our reluctance to admit the hard truth of U.S. criminality and of the appropriation of memory to portray this nation's involvement and our soldiers' behavior in Vietnam as honorable and noble. The troubles that trouble us today—alienation, resentment, and cynicism; mistrust of our government and one another; breakdown of civil discourse and civic institutions; conflicts of ethnicity and class; lack of accountability in powerful institutions—so many of these seeds were sown during the Vietnam War.*

Just as they did in Vietnam, our leaders continue to lie to justify seven current US wars of choice and the stationing of US Special Forces in 137 countries. We fail to learn the lessons of the Vietnam War at our peril. Let's see if the Burns documentary helps or hinders that effort.

*"Burns' and Novick's The Vietnam War: Honest Reappraisal or New Obscuration", *Veterans for Peace Volume 2, Full Disclosure: Truth About America's War in Viet Nam. 2017.*

David Hughes is a member of the Antiwar Committee. He was an anti-Vietnam war activist from 1965 – 1972 and a full time organizer with the Indochina Peace Campaign from 1972-1975.

Conflict's Hidden Sources

Death Squads Continue To Stalk Colombia

By Dan Kovalik

In a recent report, Amnesty International (AI) confirmed what the Colombian and U.S. governments continue to deny - that paramilitaries (a/k/a death squads) still exist in Colombia and they continue to carry out human rights abuses. The AI 2015/2016 report states: "Paramilitary groups ... continued to commit crimes under international law and serious human rights violations, despite their supposed demobilization in the government-sponsored Justice and Peace process that began in 2005. Paramilitaries - sometimes acting with the support or acquiescence of state actors, including members of the security forces - threatened and killed, among others, human rights defenders".

In these mere two sentences, AI says so much. It cannot be emphasized enough how adamant both the U.S. and Colombian governments are that the paramilitary death squads are now a thing of the past. When I was on a delegation to Colombia recently, I met with the U.S. Ambassador, Kevin Whitaker, at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota and he scoffed at the idea that there were still paramilitaries. Instead, he insisted, as the Colombian government does, that there are merely criminal gangs that are carrying out violence throughout the Colombia. While this may seem to be a distinction without a difference, it is not.

The implication that Whitaker, et al. are trying to make is that the killings by the groups (whose true name dare not be mentioned) are not politically-motivated and are not linked to the Colombian state, as the paramilitary crimes have historically been. Of course, such a position is self-serving, for it allows both the Colombian state and its U.S. sponsor to be held blameless for serious human rights abuses done on their behalf.

One of the most prominent Colombian human rights activists, Father Javier Giraldo, S.J., explained these very facts to Ambassador Whitaker's predecessor, Peter Michael McKinley, in a letter dated September 20, 2011. Fr. Giraldo wrote: "Those of us who try to work in the field of human rights can clearly see that the speeches about the de-activation of paramilitaries do not coincide with the truth. ... why would it be that those organizations [now referred to as gangs], with new names, are constantly sending threatening messages to social leaders and to defenders of human rights, using language that supports official policies? Have you not noticed, Mr. Ambassador, how many of those threats have been fulfilled implacably, with disappearances and extrajudicial executions, displacements and exiles, while, as always, the identity of the perpetrators of such crimes remains a mystery?"

As the new AI Report shows, this letter could have just as well been written today, as U.S. aid continues even in the face of continued human rights abuses by the Colombian state and its paramilitary allies. Thus, as the AI report explains, "the USA allocated some US \$174.1 million for military and US \$152.2 million for non-military assistance to Colombia. In September, 2015, 25% of the total military assistance for the year was released after the US Secretary of State determined that the Colombian authorities had made progress on human rights." However, the U.S. Secretary of State's determination in this regard is at variance with the facts on the ground.

Reminiscent of Father Giraldo's concerns, AI explains that, "in his January report, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ... expressed concern about impunity and the human rights impact of the conflict, especially on Indigenous and Afro-Descendant communities and human rights defenders. Although the report noted that all warring parties were responsible for human rights abuses and violations, it stated that paramilitaries ... represented 'the main public security challenge.'" As AI notes, such human rights abuses include forced disappearances, now numbering over 45,000 (some have put this figure at over 90,000); and forced displacements, now numbering over

6.6 million.

As of the end of August, 2017, over 100 social leaders have been killed in Colombia. And, with the FARC totally disarmed in accordance with the peace agreement, it is undoubtedly the right-wing paramilitaries who are responsible for the vast majority of these killings.

Of course, it is the denial of the very existence of the paramilitary death squads — the worst human rights abusers in Colombia — which gives the U.S. the pretext to certify Colombia's human rights record and to continue delivering lethal military assistance to that country. And, there is certainly a logic to this, for the very purpose of the paramilitaries - the brain child of U.S. General William Yarborough back in 1962 - was to allow for massive repression in Colombia and other countries while giving plausible deniability for such repression to U.S. client states and their U.S. backer. It appears that this strategy is going quite swimmingly, much to the detriment of Colombia's civilian population.

Dan Kovalik is a lawyer for the United Steelworkers who also teaches at Pitt Law School.

Military personnel in Colombia have been sent for training to Ft. Benning, GA, the home of the Army School of the Americas, now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISEC). The Second Annual Binational Convergence at the U.S./Mexico border in Nogales, Arizona calling for a closing of the school, will be held November 10-12. Its focus is on addressing U.S. military aid and training as happens in Colombia to Mexico and Honduras. These countries face tremendous bloodshed and repression from this situation; and addressing U.S. foreign policy as the root cause of migration.

For more information about this year's Convergence, visit www.soaw.org/border Are you interested in participating and/or supporting others who are going? Let us know by calling the Merton Center at 412-361-3022 or sending your donation to SW PA SOA Watch, c/o Thomas Merton Center, 5129 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15224. (Checks should be made out to TMC with SW PA SOA Watch in the memo section of the check. Thank you for your support.)

Stop Banking The Bomb Campaign By Rev. Paul Dordal

Saturday, September 9, 2017 marked the official start of a new anti-nuclear weapons campaign in Pittsburgh that will focus on removing the money from the nuclear war-making machine. Several members of the Anti-War Committee of the Thomas Merton Center and other organizations met to put together a long-term strategy to force PNC Bank to divest from the \$1.186 billion they've invested in corporations that produce nuclear weapons. We call this campaign Stop Banking The Bomb. Our main target for this campaign is PNC Financial Services Group, Inc., more commonly known as PNC Bank.

An initial letter was sent to William Demchak, the CEO of PNC Bank, on September 13th, informing him of our demand for PNC to divest of these immoral loans and investments. We have invited Mr. Demchak to meet with members of the campaign steering committee to discuss our demands. We have made it clear to Mr. Demchak that we are ready to engage in a protracted public relations campaign to shine the light on the reality that it is corporate banks that actually fuel the nuclear arms race. We are awaiting a response from Mr. Demchak.

On July 6, 2017, the United Nations overwhelmingly approved a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. 122 countries signed onto this treaty. Sadly, the United

States has not signed the treaty. We believe that it is now up to the people to do what the politicians will not do: join the rest of the world in ridding our planet of nuclear weapons. We will target PNC Bank with two basic demands: divest of all loans and investments in companies that are involved in the manufacture of nuclear weapons and commit to never investing in or loaning money to nuclear weapons manufacturers.

The Stop Banking The Bomb Campaign, using lessons learned from other similar campaigns, will engage in divestment organizing, letter-writing, leafleting, pickets, and other direct-action tactics to achieve our goals.

Additionally, as an integral part of the campaign, we will be asking individuals and organizations to volunteer to cease banking with PNC. We will provide a list of alternative banks and credit unions that are not invested in arms manufacturing to those interested in divesting themselves from PNC Bank. We would also like to video anyone who is interested in publicly making their last withdrawal as a protest and pressure tactic.

If you are interested in being part of this timely campaign or have more questions, please contact me at pauldordal@gmail.com.

(The Thomas Merton Center Board endorsed The Stop Banking The Bomb Campaign at their Sept. 18th, 2017 meeting and encourage other groups and individuals to support and get involved in this targeted and important campaign opposing nuclear weapons.)

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

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Confronting Fascism

Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It

By Paul LeBlanc

Those who want to push back the actual fascist threat in the United States today need to think clearly about what the realities are in order to be effective. We must understand what fascism actually is, and who we actually are, if we are to triumph over it.

Fascism was a mass political movement that in certain countries – Italy under Benito Mussolini and Germany under Adolf Hitler – took power. Its ideology contained a fake populism that spoke for “the people” while explicitly advocating a dictatorship over the people. Its ideology blended this populism with a violent rejection of “the Left” (especially socialists and communists) that stood for equal rights for all and rule by the people over the political and economic life of society. Fascist ideology included a set of well-articulated elitist doctrines glorifying super-nationalism, a strong authoritarian state, militarism and war and imperial conquest. In the case of Hitler’s Nazis, it also had well-developed doctrines of extreme racism. Organized mass movements – complete with uniforms and insignia and centralized command structures – were forged around these doctrines.

To use the term “fascist” loosely muddles our ability to think clearly and act effectively. King George III, Robert E. Lee, Teddy Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George Bush each in their own way opposed equal rights for all, were

against genuine rule by the people, represented militarism and war and imperial conquest, and favored repression of progressive and left-wing forces. But they were not fascists.

Today’s Republican Party is not a fascist party. And Donald Trump is not a fascist – although he is bad enough: an opportunistic, bigoted, irresponsible political amateur (less disciplined and more shallow than the others mentioned) whose rhetoric and actions have given aid and comfort to would-be organizers of a still-embryonic fascism. They are attempting to draw increasing numbers of people into open demonstrations glorifying racist heroes of the old Confederacy, promoting an “Americanism” that demonizes religious, ethnic and racial minorities as well as the so-called “leftist threat.”

These consciously fascist elements hope to create an organized base on the U.S. political scene by appealing to a confused, semi-populist bigotry among large numbers of people angry about their deteriorating quality of life. But they are not there yet.

To use an imperfect analogy from the history of German fascism – we are not in 1933; we are closer to 1919. One reason the analogy is imperfect is that in 1919 Germany there was a very big left-wing working-class movement – led by moderate socialists, but also with a rising current of

communist challengers. The only consistent opposition to fascism came from this organized Left.

In the United States, there is no such working-class movement. There are large numbers of relatively unorganized Bernie Sanders supporters; there are various de-centralized “peace and freedom” and human rights groupings; there are relatively small and relatively dis-united groups of socialists and anarchists and communists and radical pacifists. At least some of this opposition could also find a mass base among large numbers people who are angry about their deteriorating quality of life, which could become a mass movement of the Left. But we are not there yet.

Such a movement must grow and triumph – and establish “liberty and justice for all,” a society of the free and the equal – if the threat of fascism is to be forever vanquished.

All progressive-minded people are anti-fascists, and many have actively opposed fascism for decades. Among those opposing the fascist threat of our own time, there are some utilizing the short-hand term “Antifa,” and among these there are some who advocate utilizing violence against demonstrations of the embryonic fascist movement. In reaction against this, some progressive-minded people have mistakenly equated “Antifa” with the fascists, denouncing both.

This is problematical.

Yet debate on anti-fascist tactics is certainly necessary. Small-group violence will scare away many people who would be prepared to mobilize against fascism and racism, and it will confuse many more who are uncertain about what the issues are. Violent tactics by handfuls of anti-fascists will also be used to justify state repression to protect “law and order,” which can be used against the Left in general.

Far more effective is to develop tactics geared to building up and winning more and more people over to a massive progressive Left. Non-violent, boldly articulate, democratic mass mobilizations against racism and fascism can be utilized to apply effective mass pressure – impacting both on the government and on the consciousness of more and more people, outnumbering and demoralizing the fascists, and helping to pave the way for the social change we need – a society of the free and the equal.

Paul LeBlanc is a Professor of History at Laroche College and a member of ISO Pittsburgh chapter

Fighting Fascism

By Michael Drohan

The United States makes claim to being the exceptional country, according to which the US is supposed to be a beacon of justice, freedom, peace and democracy in the world, unlike any other country in history. In this narrative, the US is immunized against various forms of totalitarianism, including fascism. Most rational people, however, realize at some level that this hubristic view of the US is totally mythical. In addition, the events of the last year, leading to the victory of Donald Trump in the Presidential election, suggest that American exceptionalism is just a fantasy designed to cover the harsh reality. In fact, this historical moment might well be our fascist hour in the sun.

The Trump election puts winds in the sails of a variety of white supremacist and white nationalist movements such as the alt-right. Shortly after his election, Richard Spencer, the reputed founder of alt-right and a declared white nationalist, said in Washington, “America was, until this last generation, a white country designed for ourselves and our posterity. It is our creation, it is our inheritance and it belongs to us.” Four days after Trump’s inauguration, the same Spencer declared, “Trump is a white nationalist, so to speak. He is alt-right whether he likes it or not.” Many of Trump’s policies are clearly out of the white supremacist and white nationalist playbook. The policies he has initiated

since his election such as banning immigrants from seven Muslim countries, building a wall with Mexico, ending DACA, and gutting of social programs for the poor in his proposed budget, are all tainted with white nationalist animus towards everyone not white.

The events in Charlottesville, VA on the weekend of August 12-13 brought out into the open the forces of white supremacy and white nationalism. In response to the decision of Charlottesville’s city government to remove a monument of General Robert E. Lee, a Confederate military general, the alt-right, KKK adherents, and various neo-Nazi groups descended on Charlottesville University of Virginia to protest the removal of this symbol of American slavery. They were confronted by anti-fascist counter-protestors. During the violence that broke out between the two groups, a neo-Nazi member drove his truck into the counter-protestors, killing a young woman named Heather Heyer. In response to the violence exhibited by the neo-Nazis, Trump declared that there was violence “on both sides.” He refused to condemn the neo-Nazis, claiming that many of these protestors were “good people.” He elaborated at length his defense of the neo-Nazi action and did everything short of declaring himself to be one of their number.

In addition to Charlottesville, there have been clashes between the alt-right and opposing groups in Berkeley, California and Seattle, Washington. The occasion in Berkeley was the opposition to an alt-right speaker, Milo Yiannopoulos. Violence broke out and the talk was cancelled.

The increasing frequency of white nationalist and supremacist events and the ensuing violence has raised concern in many parts of the progressive movement. Commentator Laurie Marhoefer, writing in *Nation of Change*, sees parallels between the events described above and what happened as Nazism grew in Germany. Hitler was very adept at deflecting the fears of the German people from fear of the Nazi thugs to the fear of Communism and the left. The build-up of such events enabled Hitler to eventually declare “emergency police powers,” which ended most civic rights such as freedom of speech, and freedom of the press and led to surveillance over peoples’ movements and activities. It seems not at all too fanciful that Trump should go this route, if history is to be any guide in understanding the present moment.

So how do progressive people committed to ending racism, white supremacy and the forces that underpin these evils react? The Southern Poverty Law School Center suggests that counter-protestors to neo-Nazi events

should schedule their events in another location and not confront them directly, as violence is bound to ensue. Others have pointed out the danger of damaging property and businesses as playing into the Trump playbook. The result is division among progressive groups, leading to infighting rather than cooperation in facing the danger than we are living at this moment.

Our Pittsburgh experience during the opposition to the G-20 in 2009 may serve as a template for how we can oppose the rising tide of quasi-fascism that we see around us at this time. On that occasion, some groups could not agree to a policy of non-violence, whereas others such as the Thomas Merton Center were committed to non-violence as essential. A kind of pact was reached whereby each respected the position of the other but agreed to non-violence in their joint actions. To conclude, at this moment the various factions of the left must unite and fight the clear and present danger we face but exclude violence from actions of the united front.

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

Organizing for Inclusion

Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh shuts out dissenting community members

By Moriah Ella Mason

On Thursday, August 31, I was profiled and rejected by my Jewish Community. It was a little after 6 p.m. when I walked into my local Jewish Community Center to attend the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh's annual meeting. This was a publicly advertised event where the Federation had planned to share reflections on their work from the past year and to announce next year's projects—including young adult programming. I passed through a well-dressed crowd of older Jews milling in the central hallway of the Center and got in line for walk-in registration. I stood behind two other women, who registered with their names and addresses, paying \$7 for the event, made name tags, and were admitted. When an older woman with a clipboard came up to help me register, she told me that she needed my ID for security reasons. I did not see either of the women in front of me being asked for their ID.

I don't know why I was singled out for this extra level of security, but I can say the only ways in which I obviously stuck out in the environment were that I was a young woman, that I wore dress pants instead of a dress and high heels, and that, though my clothes were formal, they were clearly

less expensive than the majority of other attendees.

The woman handed my driver's license to a large man with a list and he began cross-referencing my name. After several minutes he told me I was not allowed to register for the event and that I had to leave immediately. I asked why and he told me it was because I was a member of "IfNotNow" - a movement of young American Jews who believe in dignity and equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians. I couldn't believe I wasn't allowed to simply attend a community meeting because I hold a dissenting opinion.

Jewish institutions are constantly asking, "Where are the young Jews?" that night, the Federation proved that they don't want us. They don't want young Jews who take our values seriously, who aren't afraid to question authority and wrestle with difficult questions of morality. They don't want young Jews who demand that our community be accountable for our actions and our complicity in the Occupation—whether that's the complicity of silence or the complicity of actively funding organizations that fuel illegal settlements and worsen the conflict.

The three cops deposited me on the sidewalk in front of the community center, beneath a sign that read, "The JCC is for Everybody!" In a moment when our people are being threatened by newly emboldened neo-Nazis and white supremacists, these police officers, whatever they thought they were there for, were not protecting the Federation from anti-Semitism and hate. Instead, they were protecting the Federation from the discomfort of opinions they would rather ignore.

Still shaking, I walked across the street to where twenty IfNotNow members had gathered. They were holding light-up letters spelling "RePower Gaza." Since April, Palestinians in Gaza have had, on average, only two hours of electricity per day, and due to the Israeli and Egyptian led blockade of Gaza, resources that are needed to keep backup generators running are scarce. This urgent power crisis is a symptom of the continued occupation and it is a perpetuation of violence.

Two hours of power a day means hospitals are frequently out of power. It means families in Gaza who are already living on starvation rations because of the blockade cannot store

food. It also means that sewage facilities, as well as facilities that provide clean drinking water, can only work for two hours a day. People are dying every day from this crisis.

Just last week Cynthia Shapira, the Chair of the Pittsburgh Jewish Federation wrote that "Hatred toward anyone is an affront to all of us." We hope the Jewish Federation takes those words to heart. The power crisis and occupation in Palestine is a system of violence and separation that Israel uses to deny Palestinians freedom and dignity by depriving them of civil, political, and economic rights. But until they do, I'll be outside with the other young Jews building a movement.

Readers who want to learn more about IfNotNow Pittsburgh or to get involved, can sign our petition at bit.ly/dontsilenceus or sign up for our email list at <http://bit.ly/INNPGH>

Moriah Ella Mason is a member of Jewish Voice for Peace and of If Not Now.

Circle of Faith Pittsburgh 2017

By Jeffrey A Miller

"THE CIRCLE OF FAITH PITTSBURGH" is a free, interfaith, public event on Sunday, October 15, 2 to 3:30 pm in the tent at Schenley Plaza, coinciding with Gay History Month and further highlighting the drive for LGBTQ and basic human rights. Many faith communities will proclaim open minds, open hearts and open doors. But does that hold in their approach to people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender? That's a serious question asked by LGBTQ folks who seek to find a faith-based community in the Pittsburgh area.

Circle of Faith publicly demonstrates that even if one's "home" faith community is not welcoming, one can find a "new home" among the faith groups present at the Circle event. Despite gains that have been made in other parts of society, challenges remain for LGBTQIA+ people who seek to attend and be welcomed in their various denominations and faiths. Though the number of places of worship that welcome LGBTQIA+ people and their families to their services has increased, there still is room for improvement and the need for such public witness continues.

Our missional statement is simple. The Circle of Faith is: "A public witness to welcome and inclusion for LGBTQIA+ persons, their families and allies by varied faith communities. We believe the Divine's love is inclusive and that all are to be wel-

comed into the 'family circle' that faith communities offer."



Circle of Faith Pittsburgh began in 2013 as an initiative for inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons in all aspects of religious services and activities. The idea for the event came from First United Methodist Church in Shadyside. The church has been among those in Pittsburgh which are in the forefront for LGBTQIA equality for many years. "It's vitally important that people of good will come out in large numbers to Circle of Faith to support the inclusion of LGBTQIA persons in worship services wherever they are held in the greater Pittsburgh region," said Rev. Bob Wilson, the pastor at the time. More than 250 individuals—representing more than 25 faith communities and regional advocacy organizations—joined together to walk in a circle of support around the

Highland Park Reservoir at the inaugural Circle of Faith event. In Market Square, the 2014 Circle gathered interfaith advocates and created a giant rainbow of colorful ribbons. 2015 and 2016 found us in Schenley Plaza filling the tent with enthusiasm. An interfaith group of gay and straight persons who are committed to the purposes of this program has planned the Circle each year.

Circle of Faith 2017 will include •drumming by ABAFASI, which means "many women." The founder, leader and teacher of the group is Kelly E. Parker. The group consists of nine women playing various West African instruments, including djembe, djun djuns and other percussion instruments.

•Music led and performed by international, national and local jazz vocalist and musician Lori Russo.

•Original poetry presented by Ciora Thomas, who is a member of LGBTQIA Advisory Council in Pittsburgh, Board Member at Proud Haven and President of SisHersPGH.

•Spoken word by Rev. Shanea Leonard of Judah Fellowship Church will offer a challenge to move forward with the theme of the day, "Welcoming, Affirming, Embracing... Together We Can!"

•Other activities will be included, notably a celebratory act that will

highlight the historic and living champions of LGBTQIA+ inclusion and justice in our various faith traditions.

•A social time and opportunity for networking will follow the event.

Circle of Faith provides a safe space for all ages to experience an accepting and welcoming body of persons engaging in a spiritually focused event. Through the witness of this event, hope can be provided and the mood lifted for those who may think that there are no persons in the faith community to provide support and advocacy for them. Come and join the Circle on October 15.

circleoffaithpgh@gmail.com for more information. Follow us at Circle of Faith Pittsburgh on Facebook.

Jeffrey A Miller is a member of First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh, retired clergy, and coordinator of the Circle of Faith since its inception in 2013.

Solidarity Day

Labor Day September 4th, 2017 - People Fighting for a Union Join Forces With Union Members and Community

By Alex Wallach Hanson and Tom Hoffman



Photo: Samey Jay

On Labor Day 2017 at 7:00 in the morning 51 fast food workers walked off their jobs. They were on strike for \$15 an hour and a Union at work. This was the largest strike ever of fast food workers in the several year old Fight For 15 campaign in Pittsburgh. When they walked off the job they were met by a crowd of nearly 200 Pittsburghers from the labor, faith and activists community in a rally for worker’s rights outside the Oakland McDonalds - the national symbol of the fast food industry in America.

With chants of “15 and a Union” and “This is what democracy looks like” the crowd marched to UPMC to show their support for \$15 and a Union for all workers at the city’s largest health care institution. The marchers also heard from grad students and faculty at Pitt who are fighting for worker rights at the city’s largest education institution. The Oakland events were organized by Fight for 15, the Service Employees International Union, Pittsburgh United, Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network, Pittsburgh’s chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America, the University of Pittsburgh grad students and faculty who are organizing with the United Steelworkers, and

many others. “My husband and I are raising two disabled children on an eight dollar an hour wage at Subways,” said Mercedes Pillette, a member of the Pittsburgh Fight for \$15. “Today, we decided to go out on strike for a union so that we can provide a better quality of life for our family. When our kids are sick and we take off of work that loss of income sets us back significantly. The fast food industry is a multi-billion dollar business and they can afford to pay workers a livable wage and offer benefits.”

The crowd was men and women, young and old, white, black and brown and they all had one thing in common. They have seen the communities that they live in and love come under attack from the Trump administration. They have seen rights they had come to expect be threatened. They have seen families torn apart by unfair immigration laws and enforcement.

Those community, faith, and environmental organizations came together for Labor Day in Oakland because it has become clearer and clearer that

they must come together to build a large progressive movement that fights and wins.

One of the largest community contingents was from the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network, bringing more than 100 people of faith to show their support for livable pay for honest work. As White Lily Baptist Church Pastor Antawn Coleman, 32, of Crafton, told the *Post-Gazette*, "The Bible says if you don't work, you don't eat, but if you do work, you should be able to afford to eat."

Another group that co-organized the event was the Democratic Socialists of America. Arielle Cohen was also quoted in the *Post-Gazette* saying, “Our involvement was initiated by chapter members," said Ms. Cohen. "Nothing matters more than a life that is decent and worth living. We stand by workers.”

The Sierra Club also organized a contingent of environmentalists to march that morning. Tom Hoffman of the Sierra club said, “We are here to build power for all Americans. We recognize that our fight for the environment is inextricably joined with workers’

struggles because many of the companies that refuse to pay a decent wage are the same companies that are destroying our environment and communities - especially low income ones.” After the rally in Oakland the action moved to Freedom Corner in the lower Hill for another rally near the beginning of the traditional Labor Day Parade through downtown Pittsburgh. The symbolism of the new labor movement exemplified by the Fight For 15 joining with and being welcomed by the traditional labor movement exemplified by the parade was exciting to see.

Tom Hoffman works for the Sierra Club on the Clean Rivers Campaign and Alex Wallach Hanson is an organizer for Pittsburgh United, building regional power for workers.



Photo: Samey Jay

Black Man Walking

By Liane Ellison Norman

Liane Ellison Norman is a Pittsburgh writer and former members of the Thomas Merton Center Board of Directors.

black man walking down the street;
black man sitting to wait for his kids from school;
black woman kissing her white boyfriend on a Hollywood street
which cops take to be a reason to put her in handcuffs;
black man gasping I can’t breathe;
black woman driving a red Nissan with her four children stopped because the cops are looking for a tan Toyota;
black teen-ager beaten by police who imagine he’s up to no good when he cuts across the lawn to visit his grandmother,
and the boy, a violist, is hurt enough that he can’t play viola anymore.
One instance after another after another, another....

Why Don't Media Address The Science of Continuing Global Climate Chaos?

By Wanda Guthrie and Scilla Wahrhaftig

As we write this article, climate chaos has been sweeping a good portion of the country. We see the devastation of Hurricane Irma, Houston awash, the Western US experiencing heat waves, enormous fires and other extraordinary looming disasters. Meanwhile the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt told CNN in an interview that the time to talk about climate change isn't now. because: "To have any kind of focus on the cause and effect of the storm; versus helping people, or actually facing the effect of the storm, is misplaced."

Television and print have been doing a great job discussing the storms, the horror, devastation, resourcefulness, courage and care for one another. However, few are talking about climate change and addressing the environmental hazards of these disasters. Little is mentioned about the lack of regulations in Houston that permit oil refineries to be built right next to residential areas, and the discharge and release of pollutants as a result of having to close them down during the flooding. What about the environmental impact of these devastating fires that leave trees vulnerable to disease and insects?

As chaotic weather events increase

yearly the media have normalized the experience and, in fact, treated these as so natural that environmental regulation and policy have been allowed to be dictated by big business. Where is it being reported that the world must begin the shift to zero-carbon sources of electricity as soon as 2018 to avoid adding new fossil-fuel power plants that will lock in dangerous climate change? (conclusion from a team of Oxford University researchers)

But why and when did this effort begin to silence mainstream media? Due to hackers who used stolen information to make fraudulent claims and misrepresent factual information, the Climate talks were in disarray. The peer reviewed science was in question and reporters stopped covering climate change based on scientific knowledge. The problem became a test of whether journalists understood climate science. It became much easier to treat this as a matter of political debate, with two sides and equal attention.

Thus, in two weeks time, print, broadcast, and radio news worldwide reported on this as a scandal called "Climategate." CNN aired "Global Warming: Trick or Truth?" on

the day of the opening of the United Nations climate summit. This began the cycle of "objective science news," despite the faulty data and research of the 3% science skeptics.

In the early years, there was reported skepticism from the science community. We are now aware that these reports were from business interests. In fact, the Bush administration silenced its own climate scientists. In 2004, Dr. James Hansen, the top climate scientist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), told the *New York Times* that scientists were being muzzled and that he was prevented from giving the public the full grasp of what lay ahead concerning climate change and the future risks.

We now know that Exxon and other oil and gas industries understood as early as 1977 that the science of climate change and the role of carbon and methane induced greenhouse gas. They knowingly spent millions to promote misinformation..

Media reporting is not framed factually, acknowledging that human manufactured carbon dioxide is the main contributor to climate change. Treating scientific evidence as opinion,

while ignoring in-depth science coverage, including the urgency of ending fossil fuel exploration, consumption, and development are treated as a matter of opinion. When mentioned, climate and environment are the work of political and economic reporters. A current example is a September 19 article, in the *Cannonsburg Times Leader*, where West Virginia Oil and Gas Executive Director Anne Blankenship and Benedum Foundation President William Getty agree that West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania can benefit in the face of the Gulf Coast hurricane if we collaborate. "The debilitating effects of a hurricane on the Gulf Coast point to the need for creation of another large storage hub in the U.S., geographically distant from the Gulf Coast," said Blankenship.

Finally, we see more and more people turning to social media for their information and we tend to turn to information sources that fit our own political leanings.

Wanda Guthrie and Scilla Wahrhaftig are members of the Eco-Justice Working Group.

From Cancer Alley to Toxic Valley By Sophie Riedel

PITTSBURGH, Pa., (Sept. 18, 2017) – From Cancer Alley to Toxic Valley



Photo: Petrochemical Landscape, Petrochemical America by Richard Misrach and Kate Orff.

Organizations concerned about the region's air quality, environment and future have come together to present a multimedia exhibition, Petrochemical America: From Cancer Alley to Toxic Valley. The exhibition draws on the parallels of the petrochemical network along a stretch of the Mississippi recognized as "Cancer Alley" for having one of the highest rates of cancer in the country, and the four to five petrochemical plants slated for our region. The exhibition collapses the distance between upstream and downstream, as the scale of our addiction to fossil fuel grows.

"We've reached the point where the idea of natural gas as a 'bridge fuel' to a renewable future is a marketing slogan, not a realistic claim." (Bill McKibben, 2016, *The Nation*) The incoming petrochemical developments will only increase our dependence on natural gas derivatives, setting up a supposedly transitional infrastructure.

Shell's cracker plant, under construction in Potter Township, will convert ethane from natural gas into

polyethylene, used as a building block for plastics.

Not only will the plant produce ten times more greenhouse gas emissions than the City of Pittsburgh's operations, including buildings, public works, and vehicle fleet (DEP eFacts), but the petrochemical system brings with it a web of dirty auxiliary industries – from well pads to pipelines, cryogenic plants to underground ethane storage caves to seismic testing – that will proliferate in our region, and not just in Beaver County.

The accompanying map above weaves together an "Ecological Atlas" created by landscape architect Kate Orff/SCAPE Studio with local stories documented by photographers of the Marcellus Shale Documentary Project and journalists at *The Public Herald*.



© Scott Goldsmith/MSDP 2015

The two-week exhibit, of which it is a part, will open in downtown Pittsburgh's SPACE gallery, Sept. 27-Oct. 7, and move to the Beaver Station Cultural & Event Center for a second showing Oct. 16-20. Three events are planned in Pittsburgh and one is planned in Beaver, Pa.

September 27 – 5:00 to 8:00 pm
Opening Reception with Wilma Subra

October 4 – 3:30 to 6:00 pm
Regional Visioning Session. Elected officials and the public are invited to a conversation around a healthier economic future.

October 7 – 5:30 - 8:00 pm
Closing Reception with Gena Wirth of SCAPE Studio
Bus Tour of the Petrochemical Plant in Potter Township

October 16
Opening Cocktail Reception with Sandra Steingraber
Beaver Station Cultural & Events Center

Reservations for all events are required through Eventbrite: <https://petrochemicalamericaaqc.eventbrite.com>
Facebook @PetrochemicalA

Sophie Riedel is devoted to community activism and environmental justice issues. Her recent work has focused on the relationship between infrastructure and the social dynamics of landscape. She is a recent graduate of the School of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon University.

Finding Fresh Perspectives

Storms Promote "Neighborliness," But for How Long By Neil Cosgrove

The outpouring of “neighborliness” among people in northeast Texas and in Florida following Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, including all sorts of people rescuing others from their cars and homes regardless of ethnicity, creed, or salary-level, contrasts sharply with the exclusionary policies based on much of the same characteristics that currently pervade our civic lives.

It is obvious that catastrophic weather events, or external attacks like 9/11, appear to be the only kind of events that prompt Americans to put aside their class, race and cultural differences for a time, and to work towards some perceived common good, like saving each other from drowning or starving. Maybe massive flooding that obviously affects every segment of the population is the one bit of visual evidence to induce altruistic behavior, much more so than photos of a blue, white and tan sphere floating in the infinite blackness of space.

Harvey and Irma are events that cannot be parsed or abstracted. They demand immediate responses. In such situations it’s hard to draw a mental picture of your neighbor as somehow unworthy of help, as someone who is a mere failure or “loser” within the great American reality show. When surrounded by multitudes sinking before our eyes, it usually doesn’t occur to us to congratulate ourselves for not having been caught in the riptide. Instead, people are glad to employ objects normally regarded as part of the

clutter of affluence—bass boats, canoes, jet skis, dune buggies, big trucks with elevated axles—to actually save lives.

Devastating weather reminds us of what was once called the “fickle finger of fate.” Misfortune is truly that—trouble visited upon all of us regardless of how celebrated or obscure, self-assured or downtrodden, affluent or impoverished we may be. The problem we have as Americans is that we too often confuse good fortune with personal worth. Too many of us are born on third base and then convince ourselves we’ve hit a triple. We turn the less fortunate into abstractions, avatars of such disdained traits as sloth, dissolution, or venality. Some years ago a man wearing an Obama mask and medical scrubs was photographed protesting the Affordable Care Act with a sign that read, “Thank You for Subsidizing My Poor Life Choices;” as if only the feckless could possibly benefit from such a law.

Turning our fellow human beings into symbols we can vilify allows us to ignore just how the systems under which we live function in ways that massive storms demonstrate, laying waste to lives equally as worthy as our own. As the hurricane that hit New Orleans in 2005 graphically illustrated, the systemic discrimination that is as American as civic voluntarism is seldom obscured for long by catastrophe, if we choose to pay attention after the national journalists have moved

on.

Following Katrina, New Orleans lost 96,000 Black residents, one-third of its African-American population, because much of those citizens’ former housing was bull-dozed rather than re-built, according to Richard Eskow of OurFuture.org. Traditional schools were replaced with for-profit charters that have not produced any improvement in New Orleans’ woefully underfunded public education. Both these examples illustrate a phenomenon Naomi Klein has called “disaster capitalism.” Too great a proportion of recovery expenditures are invested in fancy retail outlets and luxury high-rises, and not enough in affordable housing, accessible mass transit, and eco-friendly development.

Following SuperStorm Sandy in 2012, Governor Chris Christie focused his public statements on helping “homeowners” and “small business owners” recover, observes Kevin Walsh of Fair Share Housing in New Jersey. Established policies for storm relief reflected Christie’s discourse, to the extent that renters and mobile home owners often received far less help, as depicted in an article by Janell Ross of the Washington Post. Recognizing the problem, the Obama administration created equity and civil rights guidelines for the departments of Justice, Housing and Urban Development, and Homeland Security to follow when confronted with future disasters. These guidelines are still on the

books, and social justice activists should pay close attention to how closely they are implemented in Texas and Florida.

The Houston area was still drying out when The Guardian reported that landlords were still charging full rents and late penalties to evacuated and flooded-out tenants, since a dwelling must be “completely uninhabitable” under Texas law for rent to be waived. Will the tens of billions eventually spent on storm recovery assist these tenants? Will that money help the poor whose cars have been destroyed by the storms with their insurance deductibles, or with replacement costs if they are among the 15% of Houston residents Eskow says didn’t have insurance? Will that money help improve transit systems so fewer low-income people need cars to carry on with their lives?

And will these storms create greater acknowledgment among politicians of the ecological degradation of our planet, a degradation that visits misery disproportionately on the poor, as Pope Francis has forcefully argued? Can these recent storms sustain our neighborliness beyond a week or a month, and continue to expand our awareness of who is our neighbor?

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

The 2017 Election By Ian Price

On Tuesday, Nov 7th, 2017, Pennsylvanians go to vote. But unlike last year, there are no Federal races: this election is all about us, our State, our community, and how we govern ourselves moving forward. And the smaller the race, be it school board, sheriff, or magisterial judge, the more power your individual vote has to change the direction of your life and your community. And the majority of races on the ballot are the ones I always find most difficult: Judges.

Electing judges is one of those quirks of living in Pennsylvania, like beer distributors and the Liquor Control Board. We’re one of the only states that gives the electorate such vast control over the judiciary. And we elect people with an incredible amount of discretion over our lives! But it feels like there’s never enough coverage, even locally, to make an informed decision, and I have to admit in years past to guessing, like in a multiple choice test I don’t understand. I think a lot of people either guess or vote down the party line, but we are giving these people we elect such incredible power that I feel it’s worth taking the time to learn who they are, what they stand for, and what they plan to do once elected.

Voters will be asked to elect judges for the Magisterial District, the Court of Common Pleas, the Commonwealth Court, the Superior Court, and the State Supreme Court. The Magis-

terial District Judge is the most local and the judge most likely to touch our neighborhoods and everyday lives, as the judge who issues or denies warrants, determines bail, thus affecting prison overcrowding, handles violations for traffic and kids skipping school, and, pertinent during the opioid epidemic, determines on a pre-trial basis if a person goes for treatment or to jail. Among ordinary citizens, the Magisterial District judge handles landlord tenant disputes, and civil suits up to \$12,000 (small claims court). Common Pleas Judges hear civil suits, trials for serious crimes, and appeals from the Magisterial District court. Importantly, Common Pleas has a family division that handles divorce, child custody, and domestic violence, and a wills/orphans division that handles probate - all topics that may affect our lives at any time. Likewise, the Superior Court Judges hear appeals from the Court of Common Pleas. The Commonwealth Court is a special entity that hears cases involving state government regulation -- which is pertinent in labor disputes, housing and land use, and fracking. At the top of the chain, the State Supreme Court hears appeals from both the Superior and the Commonwealth courts.

During the 2016 election, people talked about political revolution. The revolution begins here. Putting good people with strong values of fairness and social justice into positions where

they can make a difference can improve by degrees our whole society. And there are many candidates to get excited about. I would encourage everyone to find out who their candidates are and what they stand for, and to go vote Nov 7th.

View your Ballot (your Ward and District are on your voter ID card): <http://apps.county.allegheny.pa.us/website/ElectPollPlace.aspx>

Pennsylvania Bar Association Recommendations <http://www.pabar.org/site/Public/Media/NewsReleases/2017-News-Releases/Jan/JEC2017>
Allegheny County Bar Association Recommendations <http://www.judicialvote17.org/>

Ian Price is a long time Pittsburgh resident with an interest in evidence-based decision making, good governance and social justice.



Information provided by VoteAllegheny

2017 Elections Calendar

September: Wednesday **9/6/2017**—Recommended time to register to vote: <http://register.votesPA.com>

Wednesday **9/20/17**—Verify your registration
<https://www.paVoterServices.state.pa.us/Pages/VoterRegistrationStatus.aspx>

Tuesday **9/26/17**—National Voter Registration Day

October: Tuesday **10/10/17**—Last day to postmark registration for general election.

Tuesday **10/24/17**—Board of Elections meeting before election

Tuesday **10/31/17**—Last day to apply for civilian absentee ballot

November: Friday **11/3/17**—Last day for county to receive civilian absentee ballots

Tuesday **11/7/17**—General election for Pgh Mayor, County Sheriff, City & County council seats, some borough executives, judges (all levels), school boards, and polling place election officials

Monday **11/27/17**—Board of Elections meeting to certify election

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

Upcoming Events

Creating an Authentic Participatory Democracy

By Edith Bell

“Creating an Authentic, Participatory Democracy” will be the topic of Greg Coleridge’s speech on Thursday, October 26 from 6-8pm at the East Liberty Carnegie Library at 130 S. Whitfield St. Pittsburgh, PA 15206.

Greg Coleridge is Outreach Co-Director of Move to Amend. He previously worked for more than three decades with the American Friends Service Committee in Ohio, where he educated, advocated and organized on a range of justice, peace, environmental and democracy issues -- including helping coordinate Move to Amend activities in the Buckeye state.

He is the author of *Citizens over Corporations: A Brief History of Democracy in Ohio and Challenges to Freedom in the Future* (2003), writer of the documentary “CorpOrNation: The Story of Citizens and Corporations in Ohio” (2003), and has contributed several articles to the anthology *Defying Corporations, Defining Democracy - A Book of History and Strategy* (2001). He currently maintains and distributes via email a weekly REAL Democracy History Calendar and Monetary History Calendar.

Greg is a Principal with the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy (POCLAD) and Advisor to the American Monetary Institute (AMI).

He previously served a term on the national governing board of Common Cause.

Move To Amend works to amend Citizens United, so that "we, the people" means actual people, and money is not speech and corporations do not have the same rights as human beings.

The event is sponsored by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom-wilpf.pgh@gmail.com.

Edith Bell is a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

John Haught to Speak in Pittsburgh: “Evolution and Faith: What Is at Stake?” Monday, October 2, 2017

By Joyce Rothermel

John Haught, a Georgetown University Distinguished Professor, will be the second of four speakers in this year’s fall speakers’ series of the Association of Pittsburgh Priests. The title of his talk is “Evolution and Faith: What Is at Stake?”. He has done extensive research in theology and science that provides a platform from which he views various scientific theories from a faith perspective. Haught laments the ‘modern project of desacralizing the natural world,’ as well as biblical fundamentalists who remain closed to scientific truths.

“Do not miss this challenging opportunity to deepen your Christian understanding of science from a faith perspective,” invites Fr. John Oesterle, spokesperson for the Association of Pittsburgh Priests.

Haught’s research has also involved aspects of cosmology, evolution, and ecology, leading to the publication of 20 books, hailed for bridging the divide between faith and science. In his book, *Resting in the Future: Catholic Theology for an Unfinished Universe*, Haught notes: “Biology, cosmology, and other fields of science now pro-

vide the setting for a whole transformation of Catholic thought from a still predominantly pre-scientific informed vision of God, humanity, and the natural world.”

He will speak at the Kearns Spirituality Center on Monday, October 2, 2017 at 7 PM. It is located at 9000 Babcock Blvd. in Allison Park beside LaRoche College and behind the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Divine Providence.

The fee for the upcoming talk is \$20. Participants can register at the door the evening of the talk. For more information and questions, contact Fr. John Oesterle at 412-232-7512 or johnoesterle2@gmail.com You are also invited to visit www.associationofpittsburghpriests.com Pre-registrations can be made to the Association of Pittsburgh Priests, P.O. Box 2106, Pittsburgh, PA 15230.

The series will continue on Thursday, Nov. 9 with “Faith and Violence: Is Religion Killing Us?” by Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer. The final talk will be on Thursday December 7th : “Nonviolence or Nonexistence: Christian Moral

Relevance Today” by Bishop John Michael Bo-
tean.

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



Photo: tirprogram.com

Joyce Rothermel serves as Chair of the Church Renewal Committee of the Association of Pittsburgh Priests.

A Citizen’s Perspective on Russia, Putin and Crimea

By Edith Bell

Kim Weichel, who recently participated in a fact-finding trip to Russia, her 8th trip there, will give a powerpoint presentation titled “A Citizen’s Perspective on Russia, Putin and Crimea.” Thursday, November 2 at 7:30pm at the Friends Meeting House , 4836 Ellsworth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15213.

As US relations with Russia are more precarious than since the Cold War, Kim Weichel can help us understand the current situation. On her most recent trip to Russia she met with many leaders, including a two-hour meeting with former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. She was the delegation leader to Crimea. She gained many insights that provide a different perspective than we get from our mainstream media about Russia and the US-Russia relationship.

She presents background, key issues and her findings, and ways to build collaboration between our countries. Kimberly Weichel is a social entrepreneur, peacebuilder, citizen diplomat and non-profit leader who has worked on the forefront of building bridges between cultures and peoples for over 25 years. As CEO of Peace x Peace, an international woman’s peacebuilding

and leadership organization, she supported and mentored their global network of women peacebuilders in over a hundred countries. Kim has extensive global experience in Russia, South Africa, East Africa, Southeast Asia, United Arab Emirates, Germany, Canada and Australia. She has led international programs working with a variety of international agencies, including several UN agencies.

Kim has written several books, including her latest book *Beyond Borders: One Woman’s Journey of Courage, Passion and Inspiration*. She will also speak at LaRoche College at 4:30pm on Nov. 2, and share her experiences with students at Chatham University on Friday, Nov. 3. All events are sponsored or co-sponsored by the Pittsburgh branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom wilpf.pgh@gmail.com

Edith Bell is a member of WILPF, the Merton Center, and a founder of the Raging Grannies.

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Any questions? Call 412-736-4600

October 2017




Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Mahatma Gandhi Birthday Celebration 2p.-5pm @ Frick Fine Arts Building, University of Pittsburgh Book'Em Book Packing Meeting 4pm—6pm @ TMC	2 John Haight, APP Speakers Series, 7PM @ Kearns Spirituality Center	3	4 Darfur Emergency Coalition Meeting 5:30-7pm @ Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (PADP) meeting 7-8pm @ First Unitarian Church Toxic Valley Conversation, 3:30PM @ SPACE Gallery	5 In Our Hands 7-9pm @ Big Idea Bookstore	6	7 Fight For Lifers West Meeting 10am-12pm @ TMC Annex Outreach HarvestFest Dinner 6pm—8pm @St. Paul's Episcopal Church Southwest Chapter of Healthcare for All PA 7:30—8:30pm @ 2101 Murray Ave, Squirrel Hill Bus Tour of Petrochemical Plant, 5:30PM @ SPACE Gallery
8 Book'Em Meeting 4-6pm @TMC 4.12K Run/Walk for Casa San Jose 9am—10am @ Southside Riverfront Park Women in Black Monthly Peace Vigil 10am—11am @ Ginger Hill Unitarian Universalist Discussion about Anti-Fascism with Mark Bray 3pm @ NALC Branch 84 Hall	9 Amnesty International Monthly Meeting 7-9pm @ First Unitarian Church Association of Pittsburgh Priests Meeting 7pm @ St. Pamphilus Church	10 Black Political Empowerment Project Meeting 6pm @ Hill House Association	11	12 In Our Hands 7-9pm @ Big Idea Bookstore	13	14
15 Book'Em Meeting 4-6pm @TMC Circle of Faith Event, 2-3:30PM @ Schenley Plaza	16 PUSH Meeting @ 6:30pm @ Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill Toxic Valley Reception @ Beaver Station Cultural Center	17	18 Darfur Emergency Coalition Meeting 5:30-7pm @ Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill	19 In Our Hands 7-9pm @ Big Idea Bookstore	20	21 Fight For Lifers West Meeting 10am -12pm @ TMC Annex
22	23	24	25 CLASS Community Awards Dinner, 5:30PM @ IBEW Hall	26 In Our Hands 7-9pm @ Big Idea Bookstore Move to Ammend Event, 6PM @ East Liberty Library	27	28
29	30	31	1 Darfur Emergency Coalition Meeting 5:30-7pm @ Carnegie Library, Squirrel Hill Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (PADP) meeting 7-8pm @ First Unitarian Church	2 In Our Hands 7-9pm @ Big Idea Bookstore	3	4 Fight For Lifers West Meeting 10am -12pm @ TMC Annex

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

Thomas Merton
Quote of the Month

October is a fine and dangerous season in America...a wonderful time to begin anything at all. You go to college, and every course in the catalogue looks wonderful.