



The Workers' Edge

The Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

Fall 2011



What Does the Occupy Wall Street Movement Mean for Us? by Gina Lord Shattuck and Pete Meyers

After hearing about the Occupy Wall Street protests in Manhattan, we wondered what the protests mean in terms of the issues that are of driving concern to us, issues of economic and social inequality that we witness on a daily basis in Tompkins County and Central New York. Issues resulting from the ways in which power is doled out to those who can game the system simply because of their own economic privilege. We decided to do an informal fact-finding mission on behalf of the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC) on October 1st, the day of the march to the Brooklyn Bridge.

Upon our arrival, we were struck by the diversity and commitment of everyone who was at that Saturday protest.

Many aspects of the weekend were impressive, but one thing that stood out was witnessing

700 people being arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge and the subsequent media attention that this garnered. On the other hand a few days before, 700 United and Continental Airline pilots took part in a unified march as part of the Occupy Wall St. protests (see Forbes.com) for which there was very little media coverage. [Did you know that the starting salary for airline pilots in the United States averages just \$21K a year?]

The following questions that led us to check out the Occupy Wall Street movement, and which we found to be very well expressed there, include:

- How can we, as a society, justify corporations reaping large profits while paying their workers a minimum wage, rather than a Living Wage? This leaves the taxpayers to subsidize the services our workers desperately need, effectively subsidizing these same wealthy corporations.

- How can we justify the nation's largest corporations' record profits, especially the banking industry, while small businesses struggle to survive?

- How can we justify bailing out large multinational banks through the use of our tax dollars, with their CEOs getting major bonuses? At



Occupiers chanting during the October 1 rally.

Photo: Gina Lord Shattuck

the same time, many of us are having a hard time making ends

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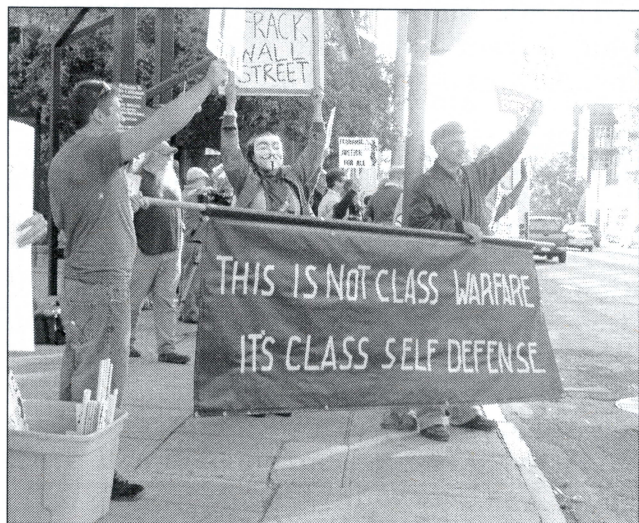
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Occupy Ithaca rally October 5.

Photo: Linda Holzbaur

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607-269-0409

Member Spotlight: Ana Ortiz

by Linda Holzbaur

Ana Ortiz is a single mom of three who is a native of San German, Puerto Rico. The single mom part is important, as is the fact that English is her second language. She's overcome a lot and says, "If I can do it, others can do it, too!"

Ana is the founder of No More Tears/No Mas Lagrimas, a community organization which has thrown some fantastic parties: the Puerto Rican Festival, going on its third year, and the Three Kings Celebration which is held at the Southside Community Center during the holiday season. Three Kings is a traditional celebration of Epiphany, the day when the Kings (or Wise Men) reached the newborn Jesus, an important Latino festival around the world.

No More Tears was started to create community and to make people feel that they are not alone. "All of us have our worries," says Ana. "But many people sit at home, crying, and they feel all alone. No More Tears helps people know that we care and can help each other with our problems." Ana's family felt this themselves recently when her daughter's father died in an ac-

cident. "People came around, saying 'do you need food? Let me help.' We all need this: community."

The inspiration for starting the group was Ana's three children. "As a a single

mom, I need to make sure my kids have lots of people to care about them. And I want to break the bad cycles around us: I don't want kids doing drugs. There were some hard years when I cried a lot. Then I said, no more! I'm going to do something about this."

Everyone is welcome at No More Tears but the focus of the group is Latino culture. Ana stresses that 'we don't work for the political, we work for people.' No More Tears plans to have Puerto Rican and Three Kings festivals every year. "Come and join a team," she urges. "And come to the festivals! We want to create opportunities for people to have family time."

When Ana started to organize the first Puerto Rican festival, many people told her she could not do it because she didn't have the experience, because she doesn't have a degree and because Spanish is her primary language. "People laughed at me," she says. "Sometimes they were so mean, I went home and cried. But I kept working. Anyone can do it! You just have to keep trying."

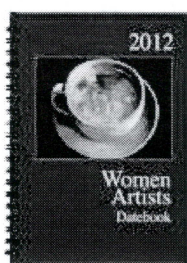
Ana came to the Workers' Center because "there's good and smart people here. There's good information and good ideas here. The potlucks are a nice place to meet and have a conversation with people you've just met. We can all work together!" Ana is now a Community Union Organizer, helping us spread the word about workers' rights across the community.

If you would like to join a No More Tears team or go to an event, send us an email or call. We'll make sure Ana gets your name.



Ana and kids

2012 Calendars are Here!



Everyone loves the Syracuse Cultural Workers' annual Peace Calendar and Women Artists Datebook. Support the Workers' Center during this holiday season. WC members get 20% off on all Peace & Justice Gift Shop purchases.

Labor Day Awards

by Linda Holzbaur

Our annual Labor Day picnic has been blessed with sunshine and blue skies for many years... but 2011 was not one of them. With the party moved inside the large pavilion, we may have been a little damp but our spirits were not.

While Ithaca's favorite Evil City String Band played, picnic-goers lined up to get their burgers and side dishes. We were a smaller group than usual, but the pavilion was filled to the brim with smiles and conversations at every table.

Besides picnic food and music, the Labor Day picnic is the scene of the annual labor awards ceremony. Awards are chosen by Midstate Central Labor Council and the Workers' Center.

The Mother Jones Award is given in honor of the woman who was called 'the most dangerous woman in America' because of her leadership in the movements for workers' rights and abolition of child labor. This year, Jamie Dangler, professor of Sociology at SUNY Cortland and organizer with United University Professionals (UUP) received our Mother Jones Award. Jamie is a forceful speaker and stands up for those in her union every day.

The Ithaca College students who founded the Labor Initiative Promoting Solidarity (LIPS), the campus group that led the campaign for the living wage for IC Sodexo workers, received the Joe Hill Award. Joe Hill was a Swedish immigrant who was found guilty of a murder he did not commit, because

he was a Wobbly (Industrial Workers of the World) organizer.



Pastor Rich Rose and family

For his tireless service and work on behalf of workers throughout our community, Pastor Rich Rose of the First Baptist Church received the Friend of Labor Award. Rich's commitment to social justice in his work and daily life, and his strong community role in both the Sodexo campaign and exposing local corporate employers who unethically employ foreign students visiting the US on J1 visas, made him the ideal Friend of Labor.

This year, we gave a special Media Award to Theresa Alt, long time Ithaca activist and Workers' Center secretary and Leadership Team member. Theresa tirelessly uses her cable access show DSA Presents to document worker issues and economic and social justice activities in Tompkins. You can

count on Theresa at every bus ride to a DC march and at every local rally, speaker, debate or event.

And how can we forget our Goat of Labor? The Goat of Labor is that employer or individual whose behavior is so anti-worker that we just can't let it go by without spotlighting it once again. This year, we had two candidates so worthy of a group raspberry that they both received a Goat.

The Regis Corporation got their Goat because of its illegal policy forcing employees to sign a pledge never to unionize. In fact, the pledge stated that if the employee ever voted for a union, their vote would not count.

Closer to home, our Second Goat was given to the governor of the Empire State himself, Andrew M. Cuomo, for his anti-worker and anti-union positions



and his refusal to support tax fairness.

Alas! Neither the Regis CEO nor Mr. Cuomo was present to accept their awards.

Join the movement! Call the Workers' Center at 269-0409

Occupy Wall St.

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meet and losing our homes—with no bailout?

• Why do the wealthiest one percent of our country own approximately 35% of our nation's privately owned wealth? Why do the next nineteen percent own 50%, and the bottom 80% own only 15% of our nation's wealth? Or is there a 'gaming' of the system going on?

• How is it that funding is cut to programs, services, and benefits across the board while we, the bottom 80 percent, pay more in taxes while the very richest among us are paying a decreasing amount of their wealth into our tax system?

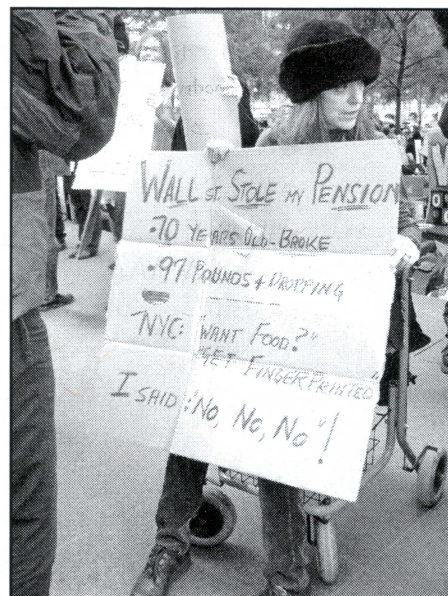
It is becoming more and more clear that our nation is in crisis. Many of us feel that we have no influence over how this affects our lives. The time has come when decision making and policy creation must center on the needs of the many instead of the wants of a few. It often seems that these issues are unrelated: certainly, we all experience them differently. But the bottom line and the common denominator is that our elected officials are more often than not influenced by lobby-

ists that represent corporate interests above human value.

The corporate-owned media continues to say that there is no central demand or goal of the Occupy Movement. But it was apparent to us in NYC on October 1st, in Ithaca on October 5th, when the TCWC organized 300 people who gathered in Bank Alley, and in cities across the nation, that people are making the connection in their minds and in their hearts: the time has come to reclaim our rights, as citizens and as human beings, to a democratic government that is truly of and by the people instead of by and for the monied interests.

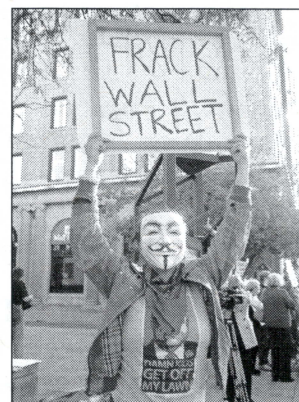
To stay updated on local events and activities related to the Occupy Movement, go to the TCWC website at www.TCWorkersCenter.org, <http://occupyithaca.com/> or to several different Occupy Ithaca pages on Facebook. Go to www.occupytogether.org to find events around the country.

Gina Lord Shattuck is a member of the Tompkins County Workers' Center as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the Advocacy Center



Above, Disability rights activists joined the crowd at Liberty Square near Wall Street on October 16.

in Ithaca. Pete Meyers is the Coordinator of the Tompkins County Workers' Center.



Three hundred people attended the October 5th Occupy Ithaca rally at the Tioga and Seneca Street Bank Alley entrance. Photos: Linda Holzbaur

Why Occupy Wall Street Matters Locally

by Linda Holzbaaur

Been laid off? can't pay your student loans? watched as coworkers retire -- and their jobs go unfilled? work a couple of minimum wage jobs? It's happening all around us. In fact, we don't have enough room in our newsletter to talk about all the many ways our community is suffering because of budget cuts and unfair taxation. Here's just a few of the program cuts we know about:

Tompkins County Teen Parenting and Pregnancy Program: this program, part of a larger statewide network, was cut entirely and will end as 2011's last days approach. Working with expectant and new mothers and fathers, TP3 helped these young people find doctors, jobs, housing and childcare. They helped nurture these young families with parenting guidance, GED and TC3 enrollment and other assistance. The Workers' Center helped many of the TP3 clients on the job because, as you can imagine, this is a vulnerable group of workers. TP3 and Family Support Services were administered through the Child Development Council.

Family Support Services: Family Support was another program like TP3 but for parents over 21. Parenting programs have been hit hard. What kind of society sacrifices children for tax breaks for corporations?

Even Start: This federal program also hit the chopping block, closing at the end of the summer. In our region, Evenstart helped many rural families, providing assistance for low income families with children birth through 8. Not only were preschool classes offered for children but par-

ents were simultaneously enrolled in GED and parenting programs. One of the most important facets of this program was that families were picked up and taken to local schools for their programs. In rural areas of great poverty, there are many isolated people who cannot afford to own cars and do not live near bus routes.

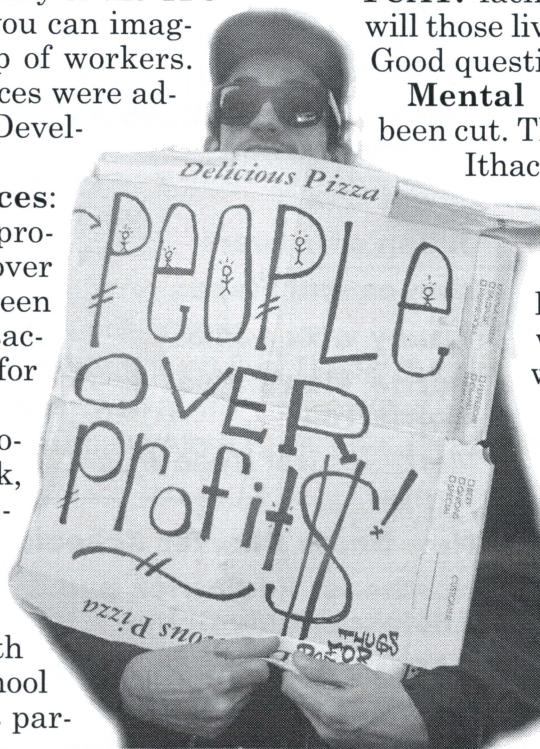
The Women's Opportunity Center: lost three quarters of its staff. The Bridge Program, which helped low income parents with kids under 18 get jobs and keep jobs, has been cut entirely. The Displaced Homemaker Program offers great computer classes for people entering or re-entering the job market and it, too, has had serious staff cutbacks. This program has been so helpful to the unemployed who need to develop new skills; it must have fewer classes now.

Community Dispute Resolution Center: lost 70% of their funding, including county and city courts counselor/facilitators.

TCAT: facing serious down-sizing. How will those living in rural areas get to work? Good question.

Mental health services have also been cut. The death of Keith Shumway in Ithaca highlighted the tragic effects of these cuts. Keith sought mental health counseling and was put on a waiting list. Unfortunately, the wait was too long for him to deal with his severe illness alone.

The most vulnerable people in our community are being targeted. It's time for the 99% to work together for change. It's time for direct democracy. Come to a rally or march and cheer with us: 'We are unstoppable! Another world is possible!'



We need some help!

We'd like to know 'What Keeps You Up at Night.' What concerns do you have about the future? Do you have an idea

about how to fix it? As a member-driven organization, we need to know what our community members are talking

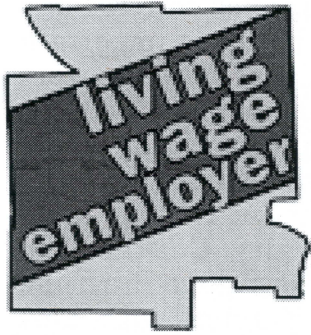
about and worried about in order to plan strategically for our campaigns.

Please call either Paul or Linda at 269-

0409 to sign up for a Listening Session. It is a conversation taking about 30 minutes, in a spot convenient for you.

Support our 72 Certified Living Wage Businesses!

We welcome Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County, our newest certified Living Wage employer!



Advocacy Center
Alternatives Federal Credit Union
Ancient

First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

GreenStar Cooperative Market

Home Green Home

Hospicare and Palliative Care

Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County

Ithaca Carshare

Ithaca Health Alliance

Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services

Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency

IthacaMed

Jeffrey Feirman Building and Renovation

Jewel Box

Jillian's Drawers

Loaves and Fishes

Money with a Mission

Morris' Men's Wear & Morris Too

Multicultural Resource Center

New Roots Charter School

Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine

OAR: Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources

Ongweoweh Corporation

PPM Homes, LLC

Renovus Energy, Inc.

Shade Tree Auto, Inc.

Significant Elements, A Program of Historic Ithaca

Singlebrook Technology

Snug Planet LLC

Sparks Electric

Sprague & Janowsky Accountancy

St. Catherine of Siena Church

St. John's Church

St. Luke Lutheran Church

Stone Quarry House Bed and Breakfast

Sunny Brook Builders

Sustainable Tompkins

Taitem Engineering

Taughannock Aviation Corporation

Temple Beth El

The Frame Shop

The Strebel Planning Group

Tompkins Community Action

Tompkins County

Tompkins County Public Library

Town of Ithaca

TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)

United Auto Workers Local 2300

Upscale Remodeling Corporation

Ward & Murphy (Law Firm)

Wisdom Productions

ASI Renovations

Autumn Leaves Used Books

Black Box Computer Consulting

Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating

Boyce Thompson Institute

Buffalo Street Books

Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga

CFCU Community Credit Union

Colonial Veterinary Hospital

Community Dispute Resolution Center

Community Foundation of Tompkins County

Contemporary Trends, Inc.

Cornell Child Care Center

Custum Construction

Day Care & Child Development Council of Tompkins County

Downtown Ithaca Alliance

Finger Lakes ReUse

First Baptist Church of Ithaca

First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United Church of Christ

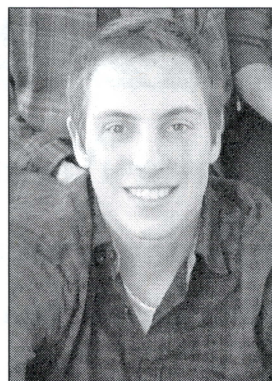
The Tompkins County Workers' Center is a Project Partner with the Center for Transformative Action

Our Intern, Paul Upham

I'm originally from the Boston area, but I've spent the greater part of my past four years on South Hill studying Politics and Legal Studies at Ithaca College. In that time, when I haven't been in Ithaca taking classes, I have been back in Boston working.

I've worked as construction laborer, interior and exterior painter, and recently I've spent my summers working for a moving company, which is no picnic, but thanks to a good employer, I've been able to remain happy there. I've lived through the frustrations of being a laborer who gets shorted on hours or overtime pay, and I also understand how much of a detriment a workplace injury can become.

Luckily, I worked for a company that still keeps its employees as a priority. With that being said, not everyone is as lucky as I have been with having a fair employer, in fact most people are not, and are left to face these problems alone. Since I've arrived at the Workers' Center, I've heard several stories of employers committing legal and ethical violations that have been at the expense of their employees.



Paul

Unfair labor practices by employers are not a new issue to me, but until now, I have not been able to witness these situations first hand. In the world we live in today, the employee is often taken for granted, and treated as merely a means to a profit-gaining end. And by doing so, big business has contributed to many of the social and economic

problems that our working class citizens face today. But when left divided, men and women in the working class are often left marginalized, and unable to address these problems.

The Workers' Center is one of few places that actually stands up for the working class, and takes on these problems directly, every single day, and that is the very reason that I was drawn to it. I want to do everything I can to help the Workers' Center in its battle for workers' rights, and a living wage, and along the way I hope to meet some great people, and hopefully have them join our cause too.

I Want to Get Involved in the Fight for Workers' Rights!

\$_____ individual Annual Membership

Due=One Hour's wage or \$7.25 if not working

During the next year, **I'LL BE THERE** at least five times for someone else's fight, as well as my own. Contact me with Rapid Response Alerts.

signature

Your name (please print)

Home street address

city

state zip

phone(s)

email

Send to: TCWorkers' Center, 115 The Commons,
Ithaca NY 14850

You'll receive a laminated card in the mail or at a meeting. Great to have you with us!

is a member of the **Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC)**

During the next year, **I'LL BE THERE** at least five times for someone else's fight, as well as my own. If enough of us are there, we'll all start winning.

TC Workers' Center, 115 The Commons
Ithaca 607-269-0409 www.TCWorkersCenter.org

I'll be There...

...standing up for our rights as working people to a decent standard of living

...organizing working families to take strong action to secure better economic future for all of us
...fighting for secure family-wage jobs in the face of corporate attacks on working people and our communities

...supporting the right of all workers to organize and bargain collectively in the workplace.

Winter Membership Potluck

Saturday December 3 5:30-7:30

bring friends, family and a dish-to-pass!

Beverages provided.

@ the Workers' Center

115 E. MLKing St/ The Commons

2nd floor above Autumn Leaves Used Books



Questions? Try the Workers' Rights Hotline! 607 269-0409

TC Workers' Center

115 E. ML King Street

The Commons

Ithaca NY 14850

TCWorkersCenter.org

