



# Bridges Still Burning

*an anarchist's account of Occupy Seattle*

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of movements should be exposed and exacerbated, lest the recuperative discourse of representation and reform usurp our momentum.

We demand nothing because they have nothing to offer. If there is a concession power can afford to make its not a threat to its control. By consistently promoting and engaging in self-organized autonomous activity, anarchists in Seattle have continued to fan flames beneath the bridges being built between the managers and the managed, between the City and its subjects. Consequently, the anarchist space has expanded with new comrades and alliances formed through shared struggle. Continued networks of solidarity are being built in momentum for the May 1st global General Strike, and further sustained effort thereafter. The cumulative moments of revolt experienced in Seattle throughout 2011 have set a tone of severity to the struggles we face. With excited uncertainty we await what symphonies may come this spring.

~ X

1/31/12



assaults. The next morning occupiers with members of Seattle Solidarity Network shut down terminal 5 once again, this time on behalf of some rank-and-file ILWU members forced to pay medical costs for on the job injuries the shipyard would consistently contest.

## ILWU

Anarchists and communists met with rank and file ILWU, members of OS's labor caucus and a larger crowd of diverse radicals to organize the port shutdown. The relationship between ILWU's established order and the port shutdown organizers, including rank-and-file members, became contentious after their union head released a statement condemning the December 12th action; even after OS had been given an unofficial go ahead from high up ILWU officials who claimed the need to publicly distance themselves from the action. ILWU local 19 Seattle is notorious for being the most conservative local on the West Coast, and following the ILWU international leadership's line that Occupy was trying to "co-opt" their struggle, goons from local 19 and a few locals' leadership attended an OS event to build solidarity with rank-and file members for an action to block an EGT grain ship scheduled for Longview. A scuffle erupted as union goons moved to interrupt pro-occupy rank-and-file speakers. Union goons were struck in the face for aggressive and sexist remarks.

The ILWU is concerned about its rank-and-file speaking out against the union and in favor of Occupy's actions because they don't want anything to be said that could offend the employer and potentially jeopardize the precious negotiations their authority depends upon. With the looming threat of an Occupy convergence in Longview, EGT seems to have conceded to the ILWU's demands. We have yet to see (and little reason to believe) the solidarity expressed between Occupiers on the West Coast and the ILWU will become a two-way street, though we have demonstrated our ability to shut down the ports, with or without them.

## We Demand Nothing

In many ways, the Occupy movement is a continuation of the student occupation movements of Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 and the anti-police struggles in the Northwest that began shortly after. Occupy has seen an interweaving of the struggles against austerity, gentrification, and the police. Following the ongoing failure to pass a nonviolent resolution through the GA, many recuperative elements of OS have branched off into their own irrelevant sects. The divisions between the self-appointed managers and the uncontrollable aspects

## Preface

*The following text was written in January 2012 shortly after Occupy Seattle's (OS) general assembly endorsed the May 1st General Strike. The events of May 1st are excluded from this account, due to this author's feeling they are two different (though inter-related) stories; that of an anarchist's involvement in OS and the latter a story of the post-occupy milieu that planned for May Day. This is a first hand account of events I witnessed and participated in, and I acknowledge certain (low) key events have been left out. As much of a birds-eye-view narrative I've attempted to tell, this is my own story of OS. Some of the events left out were the siege at the Sheraton Hotel where Chase CEO Jamie Diamond spoke on the eve of November 2nd and the University bridge shutdown coordinated by unions and the OS camp. Both of these events are worth mentioning due to what was a visibly widening gap between reformist and radical participants in OS.*

*I've chosen to use "OS" instead of Decolonize/Occupy Seattle for a number of reasons, none of them being an aversion to the concept itself. Decolonize/Occupy became a tendency within OS, largely acting as a banner for the most radical and anti-authoritarian participants. However, I do not feel it is representative of the uphill battle we (anarchists and radicals) faced within OS against the pacifist and reformist tendencies. And finally, there is a certain tone of triumph and positivity in this text that I would like to call into question. Though these were my feelings at the time of it being written, I find myself in a much more cynical place here today within the post-occupy social terrain. This is due to a number of reasons, but mostly the same tired problems of activism (duty, devotion, guilt, and sacrifice).*

*My intention in writing this piece is to tell a story that others may find engaging and useful. To my knowledge no other full-length account of OS exists. I hope this story inspires those who have not lived them, and reflection in those who have.*

~ x

7/17/12

## Introduction

The lessons learned and comradeships formed through OS began with my experiences in the anti-police demonstrations of early 2011. Sparked by outrage against the police killing of an innocent unarmed man, a sonnet of revolt resonated briefly and softly here in Seattle. Many of those who I met during OS were there in the streets by my side. Heavily inspired by the Egyptian, Tunisian and Greek uprisings, we took to the streets in direct confrontation with the city and police. While dialogue began around better training and citizen oversight, anarchists rejected the very notion of the police's existence. In the breakdown of communication between a public in outrage and an unaccountably ruthless Seattle Police Department, anarchists were able to insert themselves into the fray, exacerbating antagonisms into collective moments of brief revolt.

A somewhat similar course has taken place with anarchists in OS, though not the same immediate trajectory. New friends and comrades acted together and gradually grew bolder, eventually holding ground against police lines, unarrested comrades, and occupying empty buildings. The proliferation of Occupy movements across the globe has been a collective outburst of discontent, seething at the cracks and seams of an imposed social peace.

Anarchists did not coordinate en masse, nor was there any one way we chose to participate with OS. We organized along lines of affinity, with friends we'd known and been in struggle with before, with others we met who shared similar criticism, concerns and desires. Various overlapping groups of comrades worked independently and collectively to push actions in more emboldened directions. We worked to expose the fallacies and contradictions of the popular discourse of the movement through propaganda and autonomous actions. We did this by affirming the generalized outrage towards banks and corporations and extending this analysis toward capitalism and governance in general.

The autonomy and self-organization responsible for the success of the movement was under constant siege and attack from the recuperative left. Without the consistent affirmation of these principles, OS could have easily become contained and nonthreatening, set aside in an unseen plaza near City Hall. A main obstacle to resistance in Seattle is how long it has been contained, leading to a lack of experience and direction in the streets. But what we've been seeing is a deepening of this knowledge together, with new comrades who have met in struggle, defending the camp, occupying buildings, constructing barricades and fighting the police. There are more of us now, and we're stronger for having found each other and acted together.

banner reading "RISE AND DECOLONIZE" led the march.

Although there was a small black bloc of over a dozen, many anarchists decided to participate in what we called a "gray bloc" wearing a mask without wearing all black so as to blend in with other occupiers who regularly wore masks. For many, it was a conscious effort to remove ourselves from the perceivably specialized role of "black block militant" to help encourage direct action by anyone, not just those clad in black. Some of us were unsure where we needed to block the street and faced off against a line of police. An officer was struck with a protest sign and the police pushed at the crowd and grabbed for arrests. Protesters on bikes lined together against police as the scuffle ensued with two arrests and three or four pulled back from the grasp of the police.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to many of us who held the police line, a massive barricade was being constructed around the corner blocking the only access point to the three gates of terminal 18. The barricade was built from debris piled up in a nearby lot. Pallets, boards, cinder blocks and doors were quickly assembled by a hodgepodge of protesters, many youth and anarchists. Having blocked the only entrance to terminal, occupiers began directing the traffic that was leaving from the port. Police attempted to move in and take over, but an entire off-ramp lined with vehicles as far as one could see honked in aggressive disapproval. An aggressive crowd of protesters surrounded and shouted at the police, frightening them away and then resumed directing the departing traffic.

Someone announced that terminal 18 was closed, and that we should move on to block terminal 5. There was a lot of confusion as half the march split off to cross an overpass to its gate. The break-off march headed towards terminal 5 carried cones and roadblocks found along the way to blockade the next entrance. Occupiers stacked debris and linked arms in front of the employee entrance after using a bicycle lock to secure the gate. Riot squads were organizing a parking lot away and threat of mass arrest seemed likely. Back at the first barricade, police had moved in with tear gas and a couple flash grenades to clear the road. Protesters defiantly held their ground, despite already having shut down the terminal. Paint bombs, rocks and bottles were thrown at police who eventually dispersed the crowd and made a number of arrests. The rest of the crowd caught up with everyone at terminal 5, joining up and doubling their numbers for a few hours more hours before it was announced closed as well. The entire day was an overwhelming success, beyond the scope of what I had thought we would be capable of doing. Though we suffered 11 arrests, they were mostly minor charges, save one felony that has yet to be filed for a trumped-up "assault on an officer" charge, standard for anyone an officer



society. Comrades and acquaintances considered the capitalist colonization of daily life, some for the first time in such an in-depth manner, and many more in such an amazing setting. The night felt magical, some of the most meaningful time many had shared together. Conversation at the GA went on as many others settled into the building's vast enclaves of unfinished rooms.

Anxious of the potential for an impending raid and unwilling to give up our position inside, comrades and I communicated with scouts on the roof and outside who reported on the police mobilization at their precinct just 4 blocks away. A dozen police cars, 2 paddy wagons and a SWAT van were assembled and ready to depart. Friends and I got the word as it spread around from multiple sources. The police arrived at 3:41a.m, minutes after we had departed. Police were going to enter from the rooftop but an exit locked from the outside was left open by some who just left. Dispersal orders were given and 16 remained to voluntarily be arrested. Though the occupation lasted only nine hours, we left with another taste of freedom lingering on our palates, hungry for more.



Occupy Oakland called for a blockade of ports up and down the West Coast on December 12th. We imagined a march of anywhere from 200 to 2000 people and tried to plan for varying levels of capacity. The city was covered in miles of posters promoting the event, many organizers handing out leaflets by hand. In the end approximately 1000 marched from Westlake to the port, with about thirty leading the way on bikes while scouting the front. Along the way, a police museum and two banks were paint-bombed and anarchist graffiti appeared beneath an overpass. An incredibly varied crowd of protesters made up the crowd. An anarchist in high school organized walk-outs from numerous schools with dozens of students who participated. An enormous



OS's encampment began on October 1st at Westlake Park, the closest thing to an open plaza there is deep in the city's commercial and financial hub. It has been a gathering point for many protests, from the WTO in 1999, the anti-war movement in the early 2000's, and the more recent outbursts of rebellion around the police murder of John Williams in early 2011. The first days of Westlake saw hundreds of people timidly marching on the sidewalk and protesters mingling with police, shouting down anyone who would insult them. Though skeptical of the demands for reform, anarchists along and communists positioned themselves in the everyday life of the camp, both socially and (anti)politically. We attended the General Assembly (GA), distributed anarchist literature and leaflets, advocated for no demands and participated in work groups, set up process and facilitation and provided Food Not Bombs. Tides of Flame, Seattle's own bi-weekly anarchist newsletter began covering news and analysis of the Occupy phenomenon, offering a critique of the inclusivity of the 99% and aiding to expose the hypocrisy of the predominantly white formerly middle-class men positioning themselves into leadership roles within OS.

## The Mayor and Police

The mayor of Seattle Mike McGinn claimed to support Occupy's message, while at the same time ordering SPD to dismantle its tents, make the most arbitrary of arrests, and cite people for sitting on the ground and using umbrellas. Occupiers were forbidden from sleeping or erecting any structures. Despite this, a determined group of mostly homeless youth and other occupiers held down the plaza for many sleepless rainy nights. After the permit for Westlake

was denied, an offer from the Mayor's office came to move the occupation to a tiny irrelevant plaza near City Hall. A power-hungry minority of reformist activists were quick to heed the Mayor's benevolent offer. Anarchists and other radicals argued vehemently against the permit. Legalizing the occupation would neutralize our resistance by setting a precedent of cooperation with the city that would determine future encounters with them. The proposal to move to City Hall passed, but was blocked and amended so that both locations would be occupied, keeping the GA at Westlake and still unpermitted.

Arguments about the role of the police were common and heated. Having endured sustained attacks and arrests, many occupiers' resentment toward them grew. Insults hurled towards police became more common as people began resisting arrest more openly and defiantly. Police abuse was a cycle of violence and reconciliation. The same pigs who were ripping blankets off of protesters' backs at night while shinning headlights on them nonstop were attempting to mingle with occupiers during the day. The People of Color Caucus proposed a statement of decolonization, and to declare OS a "cop-free" zone. The resolutions passed with much heated debate, but without a means of enforcement police still controlled the park. What we needed most were numbers.

## Night of 500 tents

Our last significant effort of defiance at Westlake was a re-occupation called for October 15th, a coordinated day of action and occupation across the country. Approximately 5,000 people convened at Westlake and marched in the streets. The community that occupiers had struggled for reappeared in a mass festival of experimentation. There were the expected fights, interspersed with conversation and celebration throughout the weekend. There was a GA held in the intersection of 4th and Pine, followed by a march of thousands taking the streets, though waiting meekly at red lights. The camp lasted through the weekend, with hundreds remaining. It was cleared by police in the early morning of the third day, with the remaining occupiers unable to hold the space. We realized we could pull in number. What OS needed now was a camp.

Several confrontations occurred between occupiers and neighbors who were presumably upset over their presence in the house and knew the squatters wouldn't be protected by the police. A pair of individuals tried to force their way into the house. Windows were broken on several occasions, and one incident escalated to a gunshot fired near the feet of the squatters who'd rushed out after a window had been shattered. The legitimate outrage towards gentrification was displaced from the people and institutions responsible onto the poor and houseless squatters. Members of the community who were part of the collective attempted to mediate with others in the neighborhood. Tensions remained, but mostly subsided.

The house received a court order and an eviction notice which were duly ignored. Before dawn on January 11th, residents of Turritopsis woke to the sounds of electric saws and SWAT police with shotguns drawn. They were quickly escorted out and ordered to leave, without arrest. Hilariously sensationalized media propaganda ensued. The lessons Turritopsis discovered in their shared experiment will allow its participants to be more prepared for unexpected potential outcomes of future squatting ventures. From confronting displaced proletarian resentment to an early-morning SWAT raid, the experiences of a once-empty house and the life planted inside of it persist in the polyps that emerged in our continued acts of defiance.

## You Can't Evict An Idea

A march titled "You Can't Evict An Idea" was scheduled for December 2nd, right after an SCCC administrative ruling to evict the OS camp. Anarchists had scouted buildings in the neighborhood and stumbled upon an abandoned cultural center scheduled for demolition to make way for luxury apartments. About 100 gathered and there was a short march to the building. The march approached and the doors opened; possibilities previously unimagined pervaded the vast emptiness of this forgotten place as occupiers rushed inside, excited to explore. Lights were strung up, generators brought inside and a concert took place. Amazing murals and rebellious slogans began to cover the walls. As the concert went on, many synchronized to clear debris and engage in the rapid construction of barricades securing 4 large front windows and a set of double doors

After the concert a GA was held to decide how to utilize the space. People thought aloud about all the potential uses of the building for community space, counseling, arts, dance, work group offices, meeting space, etc. Slowly the conversation moved into a more intimate discussion on the causes of homelessness, racism within the camp, and the roles of private property in



cupy Everything/ No Banks / No landlords." The doors opened and the protest quickly rushed inside, covering most walls with anarchist and Occupy graffiti.

The one cop car that had followed the march parked a block away, nervously awaiting orders. A small assembly was held between march attendees about what to do with the house. With the camp in disarray and an eviction looming, many saw this as the next inevitable phase Occupy's momentum. A group of people decided to move in. A march that had begun as a hastily-planned defiant gesture quickly snowballed into an indefinite occupation. The occupation's numbers grew and fluctuated as it became a social space for many of OS's more radical participants. A revolutionary anti-authoritarian collective was formed by residents and regulars of the house, calling itself Turritopsis Nutricula, named after the immortal jellyfish<sup>15</sup>. Another line was drawn within OS as liberal elements attempted to dissociate themselves from the Alder house due to their belief in the sacredness of private property.

A potluck meet-and-greet took place the following weekend that was heavily promoted in the surrounding area. A hundred or more people came through and mingled that night. For many supportive folks from the neighborhood it was their first experience with OS and they were excited to see the direction it was taking. Although the reception was a hit, not all of our neighbors were so accepting. The mostly white gentrifiers had been exacerbating racial tensions in the historically black neighborhood. Although the occupation on Alder Street was done in collaboration with some members of the surrounding community, others in the neighborhood took offense to the squatters who were accused of being "yuppie gentrifiers" because they were mostly white.



With no prospect of again camping at Westlake, a proposal to move the OS camp to the lawn of Seattle Central Community College (SCCC) was passed. SCCC is on one of the busiest intersections in the city, located in Capitol Hill, a densely-populated and rapidly gentrified queer bohemian neighborhood. On October 29th, a march from Westlake brought the camp to SCCC. Around 50 tents were erected during a raising ceremony, and celebration ensued. Half in costume, occupiers drank and mingled. A mini anarchist neighborhood formed with many tents, a table of literature, wine, revelry and banners facing toward Pine St. declaring "Capitalism Is The Crisis", "Direct Action Gets The Goods", and "Capital Hell Commune."

More than a few revelers noticed a couple drunk skinheads wandering around the camp. One had "zig heil" tattooed on his chin below his lower lip. When confronted and told to leave they replied with Hitler salutes. They were immediately attacked, with flying fists and poles of black flags. Some pacifists put themselves between the anti-fascists and the Nazis, others tackled and attacked us (presumably in the name of their sacred ideal "nonviolence"). A melee of attackers escorted the Nazis off the campsite, who surrounded by pacifists protecting them. Some pacifists claimed that the fascists had a right to free speech, others that they were also part of the 99% and could eventually have a change of heart. Arguments dramatically ensued till dawn broke the following day.



## Antifa

The next day, anarchists and other radicals met to discuss the need for a form of organized self-defense that could watch the camp's perimeter, and we decided to organize under the banner of Antifa. A meeting was called for later that night and acted as a black flag, attracting about 30 anti-racist radicals who were unfamiliar with each other to gather in one meeting. We were made up of punks, commies, queers, anarchists, martial artists, veterans, teachers and youth, together comprising a diverse crowd of militant anti-racists. It was less a work group and more a loose network of affinity for the purpose of self-defense at camp and during events. That night and for the following weeks, black-clad individuals patrolled the perimeter of camp with walki-talkies and black flags.

The role of Antifa adapted to the changes in the camp as the site itself became a place of contention. Issues of drug and alcohol addiction and sexual violence endemic to society became open and apparent, especially in the late hours. Fights began breaking out nightly over homophobic and sexist harassment. As the non-homeless presence of the camp diminished, the anarchist and radical presence also faded. Some members of Antifa had remained, attempting to seek chemical dependency counselors for the worst-off of the addicts at camp. The Nazis never came back, and the perimeter watch faded as Antifa became thrust into more and more interpersonal disputes between campers. Members are still around who stay up to date on white supremacist activity in the city and to provide security for radical-friendly OS events.

## The Chase 5

November 2nd was the General Strike in Oakland, with solidarity marches and events occurring nationally. In Seattle a Chase bank was chosen as the target for a lock-down due to its proximity to camp and a history of sustained attacks against it. Anarchists organized with other anti-authoritarians to coordinate a banner drop over the bank and five individuals locked down with PVC pipes inside the bank as the Oakland Solidarity march approached. The crowd is not large but their response was enormous. Police were hesitant to bring the arrestees out in front of the antagonistic crowd, but protesters waited outside the bank alongside police for over an hour.

When the five were finally dragged out from the bank, the crowd cheered jubilantly and stood in the way of police and around their patrol cars, some laying down behind them. Bike pigs formed a few lines to push people back but they were too proud to move.



Occupiers pushed back aggressively, unarresting everyone the police grabbed. The crowd was pepper sprayed and they erupted, with many thrashing against and openly punching police. In a few brief moments of severe intensity many occupiers shared the experiences of defending each other from the police violence we'd become so accustomed to receiving. The crowd roared through the camp, shouting for support as a few dozen joined and it continued on to Westlake. There the march went on to gather and reflect on their shared plight, faces still red from pepper spray and voices shaking with the anxious joy of rebellion.

## Turritopsis Nutricula

On November 19th, occupiers marched from SCCC to an abandoned house in the historically black and rapidly-gentrifying Central District. The march was one in a wave of building occupations in response to the coordinated repression of Occupy encampments across the country.

Folks gathered at SCCC and a speaker announced the purpose of the march and its intention to "symbolically" enter an abandoned building. Whereas the early days at Westlake had seen hundreds of people timidly marching in circles around the sidewalk, a group of about 50 occupiers now held the street for a sunny two-mile stroll through Capital Hill to the Central District, where residents honked and applauded to chants of "Banks and landlords, we don't need 'em, all we want is TOTAL FREEDOM!" As the crowd approached 23rd and Alder, a banner was hung from the second story of a house that read "Oc