

SYRACUSE PEACE COUNCIL'S
Peace Newsletter
Central New York Voices for Peace and Social Justice January-February 2015 #840

What an Education Looks Like: The Sit-in at Syracuse University

*Ben Kuebrich, Vani Kannan and
Yanira Rodriguez*

On November 20, members of THE General Body (TGB) packed up sleeping bags and left Crouse-Hinds Hall, the central administration building at SU. After an 18-day sit-in, we move into phase two of our work, representing a growing body of students, faculty, staff and community members who refuse to submit to undemocratic administrative policies that hurt this campus and this community.

When Kent Syverud became Chancellor at SU, he introduced Fast Forward Syracuse, a plan for making wide-scale changes to the university that included restructuring the university's mission and vision, which are guiding statements for university priorities and investment. The statements were drastically altered and removed references to democracy, the university as a public good, community engagement and students from diverse backgrounds. Instead, the new statements emphasize entrepreneurship.

TGB—which began as a coalition of student leaders from over 50 student groups, but now includes campus faculty and staff—was formed out of a convergence of concerns, including the closure of the campus sexual assault advocacy center, the decision not to honor a contract with an important scholarship program, the need to hire an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator, the lack of administrative response to university resolutions supporting fossil fuel divestment, the lack of adequate mental health care services on campus, and reductions in budget transparency regarding faculty salaries. There were also concerns related to a hostile campus climate for students with marginalized identities, demonstrated most clearly in the video of a SU soccer player shouting racist, homophobic slurs.

After a series of protests on campus during the fall of 2014, it became clear that Chancellor Syverud and his administration were not taking student concerns seriously. TGB drafted a document of student grievances, needs, and concerns, and held its first action, the Diversity and Transparency rally, on November 3. Following the rally, students marched to Crouse-Hinds Hall. Forty students stayed the night in the building's lobby and claimed the space by hanging banners that read: "Power Concedes Nothing Without a Demand" and "Is This a School or a Corporation?"

During the 18 day sit-in, students, faculty, and community



A General Body meeting in Crouse-Hinds Hall. Photo: Kim Powell

members moved through the space by the hundreds every day, holding classes, meetings and teach-ins. The visitors included Colgate University students (who recently held a sit-in protesting similar policies) and members of various community organizations. Food donations poured in, particularly over the weekends, when students sitting in were unable to leave the building. Faculty,

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SPC INFO

SPC Steering Committee 2015

Jessica Azulay, Carol Baum, Jack Brown, Rachel Cary, Barbara Humphrey, Ben Kuebrich, Kimberley McCoy, Michael Messina-Yauchzy, Julianne Oldfield, Amelia Lefevre, Simone Richmond, Ursula Rozum, Brian Tackett, Richard Vallejo, Aly Wane, Wendy Yost.

SPC's Peace Newsletter

Editorial Committee: Andrew Miller, Amelia Lefevre, Nikeeta Slade.
Editorial & Layout Coordinator: Amelia Lefevre. **Proofing:** Rae Kramer, Andy Molloy. **Web:** Simone Richmond.

peacecouncil.net

Read the *PNL* online (issues dating to 1936!). See all our projects and events.

SPC Committees & Projects

Bikes 4 Peace: fixing bikes and working cooperatively with youth
CNY Working for a Just Peace in Palestine & Israel: education, action
Ground the Drones & End the Wars: education, demonstrations, outreach
Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation: education, Onondaga Lake cleanup
Fundraising: overall planning to raise funds to support SPC's work
Event Committees: Birthday, Bowlothon, Plowshares
Finance: analysis, reports, budget, general oversight
Peace Newsletter: produce SPC's monthly newsletter

Affiliated Projects & Coalitions

Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse: faith & secular groups
United as One: working for justice in the local justice system
We Are NY: labor and community activists working for the common good
New Yorkers Against Fracking: statewide coalition opposing hydrofracking
GMO Free CNY: works against genetically modified organisms in food
Move to Amend: works against corporate control of the democratic system

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Peace Newsletter

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Article submission criteria: Contact pnl@peacecouncil.net or 472-5478.

Advertising: Call 472-5478 or visit our website for rates and sizes.

Calendar: Submit items for the March-April *PNL* calendar by March 2.

The Syracuse Peace Council (SPC),

founded in 1936, is an antiwar/social justice organization. We are community-based, autonomous and funded by the contributions of our supporters.

SPC educates, agitates and organizes for a world where war, violence and exploitation in any form will no longer exist....

Read the full Statement of Purpose at www.peacecouncil.net.



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Educate, Agitate, Organize: SPC IN ACTION

compiled by Carol Baum

Black Lives Matter

SPC joined other local groups to voice opposition to the failure of two Grand Juries to indict white police officers in the deaths of unarmed black men in recent months. On November 28 we joined the local chapter of the National Action Network (NAN) and the Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse (ACTS) in condemning the Grand Jury's decision not to indict the white police officer who killed Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old black man in Ferguson, MO. On December 5 we joined with NAN and the Center for Community Alternatives to again express our anger and disappointment that a Grand Jury failed to indict the white officer responsible for the death of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man in NYC. At Plowshares we gathered 150 signatures on our "Stop Police Targeting of Black People" petition addressed to Barack Obama and Eric Holder (see www.peacecouncil.net for the petition text).

SPC is part of a community of people opposing police violence nationwide and locally, as well as the increased militarization of the police. Please contact the office if you have ideas or would like to be involved. Black lives matter.

The PNL Goes on Maternity Leave

The Peace Council has said a brief farewell (and congratulations!) to staff organizer Amelia Lefevre while she goes on maternity leave. Amelia, the *Peace Newsletter's* coordinator, expects to be back at work in mid-March. As a result, readers will see fewer *PNL* issues this winter. The March-April issue will be out March 12, and our regular schedule will resume with the May issue. Meanwhile, we will make more use of cybermedia for updates and articles.



Amelia Lefevre speaks at a news conference on December 5 condemning a Staten Island Grand Jury's failure to indict the white officer responsible for the death of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man. Walt Dixie of the National Action Network is pictured at the right. Photo: Ursula Rozum

Just as Amelia begins her leave, we welcome Ursula Rozum back from an extended leave during which she managed the Howie Hawkins for Governor campaign. We are very excited to have Ursula's high level of energy and organizing expertise back in the office. Welcome back, Ursula!

We're happy to say that Michael Messina-Yauchzy, who has been Ursula's leave replacement, will remain on staff while Amelia is on leave.

Plowshares – 44th Year

AND they beat their swords into Plowshares...and fine jewelry, and ceramics, and wooden bowls, baklava, and numerous other wonderful crafts.

For the 44th year, the first weekend in December saw the creation of the joyful, and evanescent "village" of Plowshares Craftsfair and Peace Festival—23 years at Plymouth Congregational Church, 13 years at Southwest Community Center and now

eight years at Nottingham High School.

Fortunately the gods of snow and wind were on vacation, allowing people to come in droves to enjoy the food, entertainment, good fellowship and crafts, created by hand from the artisans of our region. Nothing was "Made in China," and not one battery was required. Approximately 3,000 smiling people passed through the booths of 126 crafters and community groups.

Plowshares has increasingly become a part of the Central New York calendar and is appealing to an increasingly wide audience. The crafters' use of social media brings people who might not usually intersect with the peace and justice community. They hear different viewpoints in a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

Plowshares planning and execution is a nearly year round task, coordinated by a committee of eight people, supported by a small army (if I may use that word) of Syracuse Peace Council staff and volunteers. The Craftsfair occurs in the thick of the basketball season and is only possible with the willingness of the Nottingham High School coaches to share their gym for our weekend. We hope they came to the Fair and "scored" some wonderful

continued on next page

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www.peacecouncil.net • OFFICE HOURS: M-F, 11 am-5 pm

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Michael Messina-Yauchzy: michael@peacecouncil.net

ChanuKwanzMas gifts for themselves and their families.

The Plowshares Committee wishes one and all a healthy and hopefully more peaceful New Year.

– Lanny Freshman

Editors note: Very special thanks to the Plowshares Committee: Barbara Floch, Lanny Freshman, Karen Kerney, Rae Kramer, Andy Molloy, Beth Mosley, Marie Summerwood and Mardea Warner.

Learn More and Get Active at SPC Open House

On Thursday, **January 22**, SPC will hold our Winter Open House from 6-8 pm. Whether you're new to the Peace Council or an old hand, come and learn about our various committees and initiatives for peace and social justice. We'll help you find your own best way to become involved and you'll make new friends who share your values along the way. Light snacks and refreshments will be served. Contact Michael.

Join the Plowshares Committee

As much fun as Plowshares is to attend, imagine how amazing it would be to be part of organizing it! The Plowshares Committee meets all year, much less frequently in the winter and spring, with weekly meetings in the month or two before Plowshares. The committee is known for its sociability and good food, so please give it a try.

It takes a community to create Plowshares. Contact Carol.

Palestine-Israel Committee Moves Forward

On December 11, SPC's Central NY Working for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel co-sponsored "Reflections on The Separation Wall and Judaizing Palestine," a discussion led by Rob Shetterly and Julia Ganson, both of whom were in Israel and Palestine this past summer. On **Sunday, January 11**, from 4-6 pm at ArtRage Gallery (505 Hawley Ave., Syracuse) we will show the film, *Jerusalem...the East Side Story*, followed by discussion. In addition, we are continuing our efforts to bring the

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Questions? Contact Ed or Ann, 315-478-4571

international movement for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) to CNY. Stay tuned for upcoming information about our local campaign. Contact Michael.

Now Is The Time!

Our volunteers and staff work hard year-round to educate, agitate and organize for peace and social justice. Did you know that checks for \$50 or more made out to

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THE General Body / from cover

staff and community members also held solidarity rallies throughout the sit-in, lifting students' spirits when the work became exhausting. Particularly memorable was a visit from the Syracuse Community Choir. Community organizations, SU alumni and parents wrote letters of support to the university. TGB also received messages from students across the country struggling with the corporatization of their own universities, reflecting nationwide trends in higher education.

What We Won

By the end of the sit-in, we came out with several tangible concessions. In addition to stopping the passage of the mission and vision statement, and winning an extension on its comment period, TGB gained:

- an immediate search for an ADA coordinator
- support from administration for a 7% raise in Teaching Assistant (TA) pay for 2016
- eleven more student positions added to Fast Forward work groups
- a meeting with the administration on fossil fuel divestment
- the ability for the undergraduate student president to email the entire student body

We are happy with these results, as they improve some of the most egregious problems on campus. The lowest paid TAs, for example, make just \$13,000 per year, far below a living wage and a slap in the face to teachers at a major university. Syracuse University has not had an ADA coordinator for over a decade. And, while the Chancellor described the Fast Forward restructuring campaign as “prioritizing students,” only six undergraduate students were on Fast Forward workgroups out of 93 seats. We resolved some of these major issues and in the process will be able to say we made SU a more accessible, just, and democratic place.

But these concessions also represent some of the easiest items for the administration to act on. It has been instructive to evaluate the grievances that the Chancellor has refused to address. In particular, not

one demand related to supporting students of color—through curricula, admissions, scholarships, programs, or campus policies—received an adequate response. The Chancellor also has not moved enough on mental health care concerns—for example, there is currently only one psychiatrist serving the 25,000 students of SU and



An insider's view of a meeting of THE General Body inside Crouse-Hinds Hall. Photo: Kim Powell

SUNY-ESF, and the counseling center is not staffed well enough to even meet SU's accrediting agency's recommended counselor-to-student ratio. On these issues, which can be life-or-death, students were heard, but no action has been taken. The lack of action on these crucial student needs indicates that many fears of the university community may prove correct, but it has also galvanized students to continue their work next semester.

What We Built

In response to top-down decision making, we have built a bottom-up social movement. We have begun thinking about this work, which builds coalitions across identities, issues and campus groups, as

intersectional social justice organizing. This has been both successful and messy.

In response to a campus and national climate of rape culture, we created an anti-rape space. In response to a homophobic and racist campus climate, we challenged these ideologies through teach-ins and discussion. While it was not perfect—as the racist, ableist, sexist, classist, homophobic society we live in can seep into our best attempts to create inclusive and conscious spaces—the sit-in hoped to demonstrate to the campus what an institution run on values of democracy and justice might look like.

Because the institution that we want to see is accountable and responsive not just within the walls of the campus but also beyond them, the relationships forged within the space of the sit-in have recently led to organizing around police violence and structural racism. In the wake of announcements that police officers would not be indicted for murdering Michael Brown and Eric Garner, students from TGB organized two marches and a die-in protesting police brutality. Building broader coalitions around concerns shared across Syracuse and the nation is a central goal for TGB going forward.

In the meantime, we are thankful for the love and solidarity that grew over the course of the 18 days in Crouse-Hinds Hall. During meetings, especially as we got together to reflect at night, we often heard students describe the space as feeling more like home than anywhere else on campus. Students talked about learning about injustice through fighting it in the space. Students talked about this being the most educational space they have been in—something we built ourselves, not with but in opposition to the university administration.

You can reach TGB at thegeneralbody@gmail.com and learn more at TheGeneralBody.org. We are currently gathering signatures for an alumni letter. Contact us if you would like to be added. We are extremely grateful for the campus and community support, and we look forward to working together in the coming months. ♡

Ben, Vani and Yanira are members of THE General Body and doctoral students at Syracuse University.

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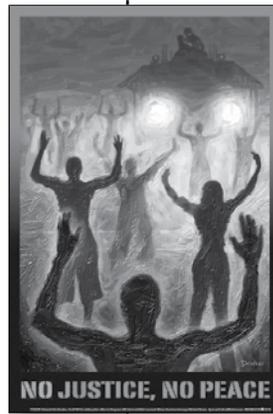
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There’s no time like the present to make your money count for the things you value. Any way you do it, your gift makes SPC’s work possible.

ACTS’ New Task Forces

The Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse is a grassroots, interfaith network advocating for peace and social justice. It also includes a few secular organizations like SPC.

ACTS recently held its Issues Assembly, where it selected issues to be addressed by task forces in the upcoming year:

- Community Violence and Youth
- Pre-Kindergarten Expansion
- Criminal Justice

We are looking for people to represent SPC on these task forces. Contact Carol.

NOON is Bustling

Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation held our traditional Circle of Peace and Justice on Thanksgiving Day at Willow Bay in Onondaga Lake Park. As always, attendance was good and included a couple from the Netherlands, as well as several Onondaga friends.

The Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change Workshop committee is busy developing a plan to offer this participatory workshop locally. The workshop invites participants to experience symbolically the impacts of colonization and conquest on indigenous peoples, and to enter into the story of reconciliation.

Among other issues, NOON continues to look at environmental concerns. NOON supports anti-fracking activities, such as the recent Not One Well rally in Albany at the Governor’s State of the State address on January 7, and expects to have a representative at the hearings on the County Solid Waste Management Plan and the plan to bring Cortland County trash to Rock Cut Road.

NOON’s Steering Committee meetings are held the second Tuesday of the



Zachary Field (front, left) chats with another volunteer at a PNL mailing party. Photo: Michael Messina-Yauchzy

month. If you’d like to come, please contact Carol first for the agenda and background information.

– Sue Eiholzer

Activist Appreciation: Zachary Field

There’s a new face around SPC quite often these days. Zachary Field contacted us in late summer and offered himself as an intern. Since then, Zach has come in for 8-10 hours each week to help with both office and organizing tasks. Whether it’s stuffing envelopes at a mailing party or talking world politics, Zach is eager and on the spot. In addition, Zach will put in additional hours as an intern with CNY Working for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel, a special position funded by a bequest from Joan Goldberg. One committee member wrote in a recent e-mail, “Just want to say how impressed I am with our new intern, Zach. He obviously has a lot of knowledge and interest in our subject and I feel he is a wonderful asset to our group and our work.” Thanks for being here, Zach!

Ground the Drones, End the Wars

Court updates on drone resisters:

- Jack Gilroy (Binghamton) was released from Jamesville Prison the day after Thanksgiving. Thanks to Jack for his work, both in and outside.
- Mark Colville (New Haven, CT) was sentenced to a one year conditional discharge and fines. One of his charges was violating an order of protection, the same charge for which Mary Ann Grady Flores was sentenced to a year this past summer

(she is currently out on appeal).

- Julienne Oldfield (Syracuse) was scheduled for trial December 10 but was told December 9 that it was being postponed. Unfortunately, her legal advisor had already made the trip here from NYC.

- Bonny Mahoney (Syracuse) has a jury trial scheduled for **January 14-15** for her nonviolent actions in April, 2013 with thirty others.

- Trial dates of Hancock drone resisters can be found at www.upstatedroneaction.org/WebCalendar/month.php.

SPC’s local committee has been helping to provide support for the trials. We also recently performed *The Predator* play as part of All Saints Church’s advent reflections. We have learned that the reaper drones piloted from Hancock Air Base will now be using the facilities of Hancock International Airport (a civilian airport), and have started to discuss how to respond. Contact Carol.

Departing Interns: Such Sweet Sorrow!

We will miss our fall semester interns, Crystal Lau and Hasmik Djoulakian, who each brought considerable enthusiasm and strengths. Crystal worked on program advertisements for both the Birthday Dinner and Plowshares, as well as the Plowshares Silent Auction. Hasmik helped with both the Ground the Drones campaign and Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation. When THE General Body sat in at Syracuse University (see cover), Hasmik was there doing great work. Both Hasmik and Crystal brought youthful energy and excitement to the office. We have a feeling we haven’t seen the last of them. Good luck to both of you!

If you are interested in learning more about interning, contact Michael. ☘

