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After the Crest, pt. II

The Rise & Fall of the Oakland Commune

This is the second part in our “After the Crest” series, studying what we can learn from the waning phase of social movements. In this installment, participants in Occupy Oakland trace its trajectory from origins to conclusion, exploring why it reached certain limits and what it will take for future movements to surpass them.

The Rapid Ascent

IN SETTING OURSELVES the sobering task of narrating the decline of Occupy Oakland, we are at least spared any argument about when the high point took place. There might be disagreement about whether the “general strike” of November 2, 2011 deserved that title, but no one would dispute that it was the high-water mark of the local movement and a turning point in the Occupy sequence unfolding across the country.

At that moment, describing Occupy Oakland as the *Oakland Commune* was not just an exaggeration. For a short time, we really were a collective force with the ambition and capacity to transform the whole city and radicalize the national movement. The experience of that day has stayed with many of us, a brief and chaotic glimpse of insurrectionary horizons that closed as quickly as they opened. Remembering this as we go about our daily lives under capitalism has been enormously painful; for many of us in the Bay Area, the last year and a half has been a process of grieving the loss of that moment. This grief was present in all the successive stages of that political sequence. Although the movement continued for months, bringing out thousands of people for explosive days of action, none of the later moments—December 12, January 28, or May 1—even remotely compare to November 2.

Before we can analyze the Oakland Commune’s decline, we have to understand its rise and the various projects in the Bay that helped to foster it. The following narrative is not meant as a total account of all of the elements that combined to form the Oakland Commune, but rather the ones we experienced firsthand.

During the spring of 2011, with a backdrop including the Arab Spring, the European “movement of the squares,” and its faint echo in the Wisconsin capitol occupation, comrades in the Bay Area began a slow process of reconstituting themselves as a force in the streets. This followed an extended period of decomposition and aimlessness. Many of us expected that the wave of unrest sweeping the globe would reach the US eventually, and we wanted to be prepared. That summer, the Bay Area witnessed a series of small but fierce and creative demonstrations. From the native encampment protecting Glen Cove against suburban development in

Vallejo to the riotous protests in San Francisco after police gunned down Kenneth Harding when he avoided a transit fare check, the summer provided several opportunities for radicals from a range of communities to work together.

During June and July, a mix of anti-state communists and insurrectionary anarchists organized a series of anti-austerity actions dubbed Anticuts that got people into the streets to experiment with new tactics and forms of social intervention. These were intended to map out the local terrain of struggle and the various antagonistic social constellations that might participate in future rebellions. Through these small and sometimes frustrating excursions, new march routes and ways to understand the geography of downtown Oakland emerged. For instance, the third and final Anticut action—organized in solidarity with a hunger strike in California prisons—marched from the future home of Occupy Oakland in Frank Ogawa Plaza down Broadway past the police headquarters, courthouse, and jail, holding a noise demo there before circling back towards the plaza to disperse. This small demonstration marked the first time this loop was tried. Months later, during the high-tension moments of Occupy Oakland, that march route became intimately familiar to thousands of people, sometimes repeated multiple times per day.

The rhythm of small and medium-sized demonstrations such as the Anonymous actions against BART police and the one-day occupation of UC Berkeley's Tolman Hall continued throughout the summer and early fall. But it wasn't until momentum began to build nationally after the establishment of the Zucotti Park camp on Wall Street—September 17, 2011—that the full potential of the relationships built over the summer could blossom. Oakland joined the national movement late, on October 10, immediately establishing a sprawling camp in the plaza in front of City Hall—renamed Oscar Grant Plaza, after the young Black man murdered by BART police in 2009. This became a liberated zone, off-limits to police and politicians and organized according to principles of self-organization, free access to food and supplies, open participation in all aspects of camp life, and autonomous action.

In hindsight, it is striking how quickly Occupy Oakland emerged, matured, and reached its peak. Only two weeks separate the beginning of the camp from the first police raid in the early hours of October 25. After the Commune repeatedly resisted attempts by the city administration to assert control over the camp—staging public burnings of warning letters during general assemblies in the amphitheater on the steps of city hall—Mayor Jean Quan authorized the militarized police operation that left the camp in ruins and over 100 in jail.

initial rapid ascent, and ushered in its six month decline, passing the point of no return as the horizons of struggle that led away from the camp hit dead ends in January 2012.

This is the double bind we found ourselves in: the camp was both inadequate and essential. A potential solution to this bind is contained in the concept of the Commune, by which we mean the projected translation of the principles of the camp onto a new, more expansive footing. Occupy Oakland became the Oakland Commune once it took the camp as the model for a project (barely realized) of reclamation, autonomy, and the disruption of capital on a much wider basis: neighborhood assemblies reclaiming abandoned buildings for their needs; social centers that could serve as hubs for organizing offensives and sustain all kinds of self-organization and care; occupations of schools and workplaces. These were the horizons that the Oakland Commune illuminated, in the positive sense, despite its limits. We believe it is likely that future struggles in the US will follow this trajectory in some way, using Occupy's attempted offensives and space reclamations as the foundation upon which something much larger, more beautiful and more ferocious can begin to take shape.

But the questions still remain: what would it mean to actually take care of each other and to collectively sustain and nurture an unstoppable insurrectionary struggle? How can we dismantle and negate the oppressive power relationships and toxic interpersonal dynamics we carry with us into liberated spaces? How can we make room for the myriad of revolts within the revolt that are necessary to upend all forms of domination? The effectiveness of any future antagonistic projects in the US will be determined by our ability to answer these questions and thus transcend the limits that were so debilitating within Oscar Grant Plaza, forcing the Commune away from the very source of its power.

Another wave of struggle and unrest will undoubtedly explode in our streets and plazas sooner or later. Our task in the meantime is to cultivate fierce and creative forms of cooperating, caring for each other, and fighting together that can help us smash through the fundamental limits of contemporary revolt when the time is right. If we can make substantial strides beyond these obstacles, police attacks and jail sentences will be no match for the uncontrollable momentum of our collective force.

Some Oakland Antagonists, August 2013

Later that same day, thousands of enraged people poured back into downtown, charging police barricades around the plaza and braving countless barrages of tear gas and projectiles until the early hours of the morning. Partly because of the near murder of Iraq War veteran Scott Olsen by a police projectile that night, and the dramatic footage of the entire downtown area covered in gas, the next day the police withdrew in a storm of controversy. Exultant crowds reoccupied the plaza, holding an assembly of 2000 people—the largest of the whole sequence—and agreed to go on the offensive with the November 2 strike. The fact that it seemed possible to organize a general strike in a single week indicates the degree to which normal calendar time warped and stretched in those first three weeks. During the Oakland Commune's incredibly rapid yet brief ascent, there seemed to be no limit on what could happen in a week, a day, an hour.

It all came to a head on November 2. Looking back, the scope of that day remains impressive. In less than 24 hours, the strike unleashed all the tactics explored during the entire Occupy Oakland sequence. Flying pickets, work actions, marches, blockades, occupations, and moments of riotous destruction brought as many as 50,000 people to downtown Oakland, many of whom were participating in disruptive acts for what must have been the first time.

People gathered in the early morning under a giant banner, stretched across the central intersection in downtown, reading "Death to Capitalism." From there, the crowds quickly fanned out across the center of the city, shutting down businesses that had refused to close for the day. The camp at the plaza became a crowded anti-capitalist carnival offering music and speeches from three different stages. By early afternoon, as tens of thousands filled the streets, an anti-capitalist march led by a large black bloc smashed its way through downtown, leaving broken windows and graffiti on banks and corporations in its wake. Within a few hours, tens of thousands of people marched on the port of Oakland, shutting down all operations at its various terminals. Finally, as night fell, hundreds of people joyfully occupied the aptly-named Traveler's Aid building a few blocks from the plaza; long empty, it had formerly housed a nonprofit serving the homeless. Within an hour, however, riot police attacked and evicted the new occupation, provoking a night of rioting during which people wrecked most of the businesses and city offices around the plaza, including a police substation.

We were in the middle of something without recent precedent in the US. And yet the day was just a day. There was no continuation, no sense of what might come next. The following morning, after three weeks

of great weather, the first rains of the season fell and the camp lay quiet, foreshadowing the dispirited mood of the months to come. The backlash from the previous day's anti-capitalist march and the more indiscriminate rioting later in the night was intense, as various liberal elements took the opportunity to demonize anarchists and the black bloc, calling for vigilante patrols by pacifists and initiating a reactionary backlash that caused many anarchists and radicals to steer clear of the camp for a few days. The mood shifted from elation to demoralization very quickly, especially given the failure of the occupation of the Traveler's Aid building, which might have opened up new horizons for the Oakland Commune. It was difficult to recognize this at the time, but we had already encountered the fundamental limits of this sequence of struggle. The slow decline had begun.

Days of Action, Horizons of Struggle

ARGUABLY, THE DECLINE had been set in motion in the days immediately before the strike. Up until the raid on October 25, the power of the Oakland Commune lay in the camp itself: in collective activities that linked each day in the liberated plaza with the next, building momentum through consistent interaction around questions of survival rather than activism. When over 600 riot police fired tear gas and flash-bang grenades as they broke through the barricades protecting Oscar Grant Plaza in the dark morning hours of October 25, they were not only attempting to evict the camp, but to break apart the continuity of the tenuous community that we had formed.

This first eviction backfired on them spectacularly. The crowds came back even bigger and called for the November 2 strike—a timely and effective decision. But it also marked the first moment when the energy of the Commune shifted from the daily process of holding liberated space to a strategy built around discrete “days of action.” The day in question was only one week away, and the buildup to it ran parallel with the reconstitution of the camp. But with the historic decision to strike, there was a shift away from the reproduction and expansion of the original oppositional zone. Something was lost in this transition.

The consistent process of eating, sleeping, and organizing with many others in a liberated zone at the heart of a struggling North American city had proved to be a challenge for which few were prepared. At times, the Commune was a veritable inferno—a place of fistfights, constant emergencies, injury, illness, miscommunication, and stress. At other moments, it offered a kind of freedom and beauty unlike anything else. There were times when each person seemed full of limitless creativity, compassion,

state, police, predefined social hierarchies and categories—though the banishment of those things was always partial and provisional at best. This enabled the participants to bypass some of the more tedious ways in which activists develop political projects, equipping people to organize around their own survival, in their own cities, on the basis of their personal experience of oppression and need, rather than according to essentially moral objections to this or that injustice. In the context of this contagious form of revolt spreading through the communal liberation of space, the movement's rejection of the need to issue any specific demands to authorities made perfect sense. Occupy's power came from the proliferation and reproduction of these oppositional zones, not from its political sway.

But if the camp was the source of our strength, it was also the source of the limits we reached, and not only because without it there was no real future for Occupy. At root, the camp was inadequate to the project of finding ways to live together beyond the specious forms of community that capitalism provides. In fact, the Oakland camp was already in a state of degeneration by the time it was cleared, and probably would have broken down on its own eventually.

The camp was no more violent or miserable than the city of Oakland is on any given day. Yet the level of everyday misery, alienation, and abuse that makes up the mundane reality of capitalist society is truly staggering, especially when concentrated in a plot of grass in the middle of an impoverished city. When we liberate urban space in 21st century America, we have no choice but to confront the devastation produced by centuries of capitalism, conquest, and domination.

Inside the reclaimed space opened up by the Commune, rampant interpersonal conflicts and forms of structural violence could not be contained or managed in the ways that capitalism normally does, through the violence of the police, the institutions of the state, or the ready-to-hand hierarchies provided by money and commodities. We had to confront these problems collectively and directly. But to do so adequately would have required the expropriation of resources and space far beyond what was within the grasp of the nascent movement. It also would have required the audacious dedication of participants to transcend their atomized lives and constructed identities under capitalism, going past the point of no return. The failure to overcome these fundamental obstacles enabled power relationships built on patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity to reassert their dominance within the movement while undermining and repressing the vital new relationships that had emerged through the process of struggle. These were the underlying limits that led the Commune away from the reclamation of space that had provided the basis for its

these efforts were still riding on evaporating momentum from the previous fall. In their increasing detachment from each other, they represented the long process of dispersal and decomposition that began with the strike on November 2.

Camp and Commune

AT ITS CORE, Occupy was about occupying. In Oakland and elsewhere, it was about producing a form of life defined by mutual aid, self-organization, and autonomous action. It was about defending spaces free from police, politicians, and bosses, and the necessarily violent conflict between those zones and the surrounding capitalist world on which the camps nonetheless depended. Oakland took this about as far as it could go within the framework of Occupy, establishing a zone that fed and sheltered hundreds of people each day—sometimes thousands—in brazen defiance of the city officials fifty yards away in City Hall and the cops leering from the periphery. For all the hype about social media, livestreaming, and other information technologies enabling this new wave of revolt, the grounding of the struggle in the face-to-face relationships that combined to form the occupation is clearly what gave Occupy its unique potential and created the material foundation for all the political possibilities of the movement. The authorities understood this. That's why they cleared the camps in Oakland and everywhere else, using as much force as necessary to prevent reoccupation.

Once the camp was cleared, the Oakland Commune became a husk deprived of its central tactic and, arguably, its reason for being. This was the reason why the vigil clung mournfully to the plaza despite repeated battering by OPD. It was the reason why the decision was made to claim a building for the movement on January 28. It was why the planning for an autonomous occupation provided the initial impetus for the convergence of feminist and queer comrades in what would later become Occupy Patriarchy. Without something to take the place of what had been lost with the camp, there was little chance that we would regain the expansive prospects of the fall.

The strength of “the camp form” was its ability to carve out material zones of political antagonism that were not organized around petitioning the authorities for concessions through symbolic demonstration but directly providing for our daily needs through the repurposing and reclamation of urban space. This was one of the most appealing aspects of the camp: it offered the opportunity to explore ways of relating and surviving together that did not rely on the usual mechanisms—money, the

and dedication, matched by hatred of capitalism and the state. We could see the experience changing people day by day, hour by hour, and we could feel it changing us. The camp was a place of joy, laughter, and care, almost psychedelic in the confusion it provided to the senses. But mostly, it was a place that teetered on the edge of breakdown, a place in which none of the usual buffers and mediations that mask the daily violence of contemporary America were present. All the misogyny, homophobia, racism, and other poisonous dynamics that form the foundations of capitalist society rose to the surface in this liberated zone, challenging the Commune's ability to sustain itself. We were ill-prepared for the problems the camp raised, though people made heroic attempts to respond to each new emergency.

For this reason, many comrades welcomed the first police raid in hopes that direct conflict with the state would breathe new life into a struggle slowly dying of internal causes. After the raid, people could focus their attention outward in offensive actions like the general strike, away from the overwhelming difficulties of the camp.

The decision to strike was not a mistake. On the contrary, it was one of the better decisions collectively made during the entire sequence. But it inaugurated a half-year period defined increasingly by days of action called for by the general assembly rather than the rhythms of shared experience. This process accelerated after the second eviction of the camp on November 14 and reached its terminal point with the late January call for another general strike on May 1—a strike that never materialized. May Day 2012 ended up being an exciting day of action, but it paled in comparison to the November 2 strike, which had been organized in only a week. The more that the Oakland Commune lost its footing, momentum, and sense of direction, the more it relied on arbitrarily chosen days of action that were increasingly few and far between.

In the shift away from the camp towards spectacular offensives, the actions of November 2 opened up three horizons of struggle, each of which hit a wall over the following months. In many regards, the limits of these approaches were already apparent during the strike.

First, there were the tens of thousands who laid siege to the port. Most would agree that the high point of the day—the action that had the most impact on capitalism and the local power structure—was this blockade of the port of Oakland. However, the success of that action empowered one tendency within the movement to push the struggle away from reclaiming space and disrupting the flows of capital toward a kind of trade union superactivism that later proved to be a dead end.

Secondly, there was the attempt, later in the evening, to occupy the Traveler's Aid building. But when riot police besieged the building, the

participants failed to put up any meaningful defense. It was one thing to occupy public parks and plazas—but another thing to breach the sacred barriers of private property. Comrades had been discussing that trajectory from the beginning, but the failure of the Traveler's Aid attempt indicated that it might remain an unsurpassable horizon.

Finally, there was street fighting and the black bloc. This represented the dream of continuous escalation, in which a proactive offensive of black-clad rioters would usher in a new phase of increasingly widespread militant rebellion, culminating in a full-on uprising. Certainly, November 2 saw some of the most intense street conflicts up to that point, epitomized by the appearance of a large black bloc during the afternoon anti-capitalist march. Yet that night, when riot police were finally ordered to reassert control of downtown Oakland and evict the newly occupied building, this increased street militancy meant little. Police scattered the participants like a bowling ball plowing into a wedge of pins.

Few people were organized into affinity groups capable of acting intelligently and decisively in the face of the highly trained and physically intimidating Oakland police. Inexperienced rioters had the tendency to attack weakly and prematurely, then scatter when the police counter-attacked. In addition, the presence of vigilante pacifist members of Occupy—whose violent assertion of nonviolence underscored the paradox of their position—and amateur journalists too busy photographing the riot to help their ostensible comrades both produced confusion and dissension. As is often the case in the US, comrades were able to carry out attacks on property with relative ease, adopting an effective hit-and-run strategy. But when it came to standing ground or mounting an offensive against the police, the street fighters were rarely effective.

The New Year

AFTER THE CAMP was cleared during the second police raid of the plaza on November 14, many comrades continued along each of these three trajectories, moving ever farther from the camp that had brought them together in the first place.

The labor solidarity wing of the movement, born during the November 2 port blockade, increasingly viewed Occupy as a vehicle for supporting unions and intervening in existing workers' disputes. On December 12, this faction led a day of action to shut down ports across the West Coast (as well as in other scattered locations such as a Wal-mart distribution center in Colorado). This had been called for in response to the wave of repression and camp evictions across the country in late

night fell, OPD called in additional police forces from across the Bay Area. After their first attempt to kettle a march of nearly a thousand people at 19th and Telegraph was outmaneuvered—the crowd dramatically escaped by tearing down the fences the city had recently rebuilt—the police finally succeeded in surrounding over 400 comrades outside the downtown YMCA. The arrestees spent the following days in filthy overcrowded cells at Santa Rita Jail.

Amazingly, those who remained on the streets remained undaunted. They broke into City Hall, burning the American flag and vandalizing the inside of the building in revenge for the police repression. Even after riot police with shotguns chased them off, the night was still not over. An FTP march was quickly organized. In keeping with tradition, participants took the familiar loop through downtown and unleashed rocks, bottles, and other objects at the police station and jail as they passed. The Commune was not going down without a fight.

Yet that was the end. The limits had emerged one by one over the course of January, and there was no new occupation or wave of mobilizations on the way. On January 29, as comrades scrambled to support the hundreds in jail while thousands across the country organized solidarity demonstrations with Oakland, over 300 gathered at the plaza in what turned out to be the last large general assembly. They voted enthusiastically to endorse calls emerging from New York and elsewhere for a May 1 global general strike—a strike that never materialized. Many still hoped that Occupy would reemerge with a spring offensive. But given the bitter defeat in the turf war over the plaza, the implosion of the port blockade campaign, and the failure to secure a new home for the Commune, this seemed unlikely. January was the end. Occupy's window of radical possibilities would soon be closed in Oakland and everywhere else.

Over the following months, people carried out many amazing and inspiring radical projects. Occupy Oakland organized a series of large neighborhood BBQs across the city. The anti-repression committee set an impressive standard for how to take care of arrestees and imprisoned comrades. The SF Commune temporarily held a building at 888 Turk. Insurgent feminist and queer comrades who had come together over the previous months continued a campaign of actions and interventions while writing and distributing propaganda and texts. Clashes and attacks temporarily erupted across the Bay around May Day, while a struggle over an occupied farm emerged in neighboring Albany. Foreclosure defense campaigns successfully held off a series of evictions. For a week, people occupied an Oakland public school that was being closed down.

Yet the chance to regain momentum had passed in January. All of

the union away from the bureaucrats who were eager to diffuse the conflict and cooperate with EGT. But none of this came close to materializing.

In the end, the labor solidarity tendency within Occupy Oakland and the handful of radical Longshoremen allies were no match for the political machinations of those at the top of the ILWU, who coerced the rank and file of Longview to accept a compromise with EGT that kept them on the job while stripping them of many benefits and their job security. This was enough to ease the tension and avert the showdown. On January 27, as the last-minute plans for the following day's attempt to occupy a building were finalized, a confusing statement emerged from the caravan organizers, announcing that the Longview workers had accepted a contract and that this was—in some unspecified way—a victory. This was how the port campaign ended: not with a bang, but a whimper.

The next morning, the final offensive of January kicked into action. Though in many regards it was the most significant day since the general strike, the planned January 28 (J28) building occupation was fundamentally an arbitrarily chosen day of action with all the limits thereof. However, unlike the port actions, this was a massive attempt to return to what had made the Oakland Commune so powerful in the first place: liberating space from capital and the state, transforming it into a collective occupation where people could take care of each other and organize further actions. Even though many remember that spectacular day as one of the most important in their experience as part of the Oakland Commune, in relation to its stated goal, it was a disaster.

In response to criticism of the clandestinely organized occupation of the Traveler's Aid building on November 2, J28 was organized in a radically open structure. Regular "Move-In Assemblies" of over 100 met publicly in the plaza to plan the occupation, while giving a smaller closed group the mandate to pick a building in relative secrecy. This assembly spent countless days organizing infrastructure for the new occupation, setting up guidelines for accountability within the space and planning a multi-day festival of music, speakers, and films. As the day of action unfolded, this ambitious plan was blasted apart in the first spectacular clashes outside the target building—the massive Kaiser Center Auditorium—in what became known as The Battle of Oak Street. It was probably because people believed so strongly in the dream that a new liberated space could emerge from the Kaiser Center and resuscitate the Commune that they fought so hard and with such a collective spirit that day. But OPD had no qualms about transforming downtown into a warzone to insure that private property remained off-limits.

A backup plan later in the day also failed to seize a building. As

November and early December, as well as in solidarity with the struggle of longshoremen in Longview, WA against the efforts of the multinational corporation EGT to break their union, the ILWU. While not entirely successful, the day was still impressive, demonstrating the continuing power of Occupy. As 2012 began, this labor solidarity wing of the movement was busy spearheading a regional mobilization to disrupt the first scab ship scheduled to dock at the EGT facilities in Longview. Many comrades from the Bay planned to converge on Longview in what looked to be an important showdown.

Elsewhere, an alliance of insurrectionaries and comrades from a wide range of working groups that had sustained the camp were organizing another offensive. Regrouping from the failure of the Traveler's Aid occupation, they had called for a massive day of action on January 28, 2012 to occupy a large undisclosed building. This was to become a new hub for the Oakland Commune.

Finally, there was the assortment of radicals and rebels who continuously struggled to hold down Oscar Grant Plaza itself. Some of them had slept on benches in the plaza long before Occupy; some were young locals politicized over the previous months; others hailed from a range of eccentric Bay Area groupings including a contingent of juggalos. The plaza was still contested turf with regular general assemblies, events, and a 24-hour "vigil" that held space, served food, and provided a social venue. The park and empty lot a few blocks away in the gentrifying Uptown district at 19th and Telegraph had also become a second front, following a brief occupation there on November 19 that ripped down the surrounding fences and established a camp before being quickly evicted.

This was the political climate in Oakland on New Year's Eve, as a spirited march left from the plaza for a noise demo. The crowd followed the now familiar loop from the plaza to the police headquarters, courthouse, and jail, where people unleashed a torrent of fireworks before returning to the plaza for a raucous dance party. With hundreds attending, it was powerful demonstration that even without the camp the Commune could still call the plaza home. It was also a celebration of the struggles to come and the next major wave of the Occupy movement, which many believed to be just around the corner. In those early celebratory hours of 2012, it was nearly impossible to grasp how quickly all of these possible trajectories would hit walls. But in January, the limits that first became apparent on November 2 became debilitating, ushering in the terminal phase of the movement.

Oscar Grant Plaza was first to go. Running scuffles between the ragtag rebels of the plaza and platoons of cops looking to scare them off

had increased throughout December, becoming a daily occurrence by the final week of the year. Dozens were arrested. In contrast to previous mass arrest situations, the cops and DA were clearly looking to make examples of the arrestees, who were slapped with large bails, felony charges, and a new favorite tactic of repression: stay-away orders that threatened people with additional jail time if they returned to downtown Oakland. While not as spectacular as police indiscriminately tear-gassing and spraying crowds with projectiles, the most brutal and effective repression of the whole Occupy Oakland sequence arguably occurred during the turf war over the plaza at the turn of the year. Because so many comrades were focused on organizing for the upcoming days of action, those facing the cops and courts in the plaza were isolated, without the support they needed.

Inspired by the success of the New Year's Eve noise demo and hoping to respond to the escalating repression, the Tactical Action Committee (TAC)—a militant group composed primarily of young Black men from Oakland who had been busy defending the plaza and organizing other actions—called for the first FTP (Fuck the Police) march one week later, on January 7. On January 4, after a general assembly in the plaza ended and the majority of people went home, a militarized raid involving dozens of riot police successfully evicted the vigil. This was the third and final raid of Oscar Grant Plaza. A member of TAC was among those arrested in the operation. The rebel presence in the plaza had been successfully removed, and the upcoming FTP march took on increasing significance.

Nearly three hundred gathered at the corner of the Plaza at 14th and Broadway on the evening of January 7. Many were masked up and ready for a fight, feeling that this was the moment to present a coordinated militant response to the successive evictions of the Commune. Led by a massive "Fuck the Police" banner, the march took off once again down Broadway on the loop past police headquarters and the jail. Clashes erupted near the headquarters as a police cruiser was attacked, bottles were thrown, a small fire was lit in the street, and lines of riot police repeatedly charged the crowd. Yet once again, the displays of militancy were just that, displays—ineffective when it came to defending comrades. Fighters were able to get in a few hits on police, but quickly retreated and fled out of downtown in the face of the OPD offensive. Arguing erupted among comrades, as it became clear that the eagerness with which many went on the attack was not matched by any kind of organized defense or coordinated crowd movement. As comrades scattered, leaving the plaza abandoned once again, another wave of arrests ensued with police units picking off isolated street fighters who had been identified by undercovers in the crowd. As with the wave of arrests around the plaza over the previous weeks, the

people arrested at this first FTP march bore some of the heaviest penalties of the whole sequence, with some comrades eventually doing significant jail time.

The first FTP march failed to reverse the rapid decline of the Commune or reassert the movement's presence downtown. On the contrary, it accelerated this decline, signaling to the state that it was now clearly gaining the advantage. This was not the fault of TAC, who continued to hold weekly FTP marches over the following months that were usually less confrontational. Rather, it showed the limits of the uncoordinated and tactically ineffective displays of street militancy mustered by the black blocs of that period. At the time, this series of painful defeats failed to register to many comrades as a serious blow to the movement, even though the authorities had successfully swept the plaza clean and neutralized the attempt to mount a response. Many people were distracted, with their sights set on the upcoming days of action. In retrospect, the new year was clearly off to a bad start.

Planning continued for the convergence in Longview and the January 28 day of action. General assemblies decreased in size and regularity but continued to meet, increasingly retreating to the park at 19th and Telegraph since an increasing number of comrades were prohibited from the Plaza by stay-away orders. The source of the Commune's power, the defiant public occupation of space, was quickly drying up, though the upcoming offensives gave many comrades the sense that another wave of momentum was imminent.

This delusion was shaken when the bureaucrats at the top of the ILWU outmaneuvered the planned blockade of the scab ship in Longview, and all plans for the convergence imploded. Occupy caravans had been organized from Oakland, Portland, Seattle, and elsewhere, while the federal government announced it would defend the scab ship with a Coast Guard cutter. Comrades from across the West Coast were just waiting for word from those working directly with the Longview Longshoremen to initiate a confrontational showdown. But in their determination to reorient Occupy towards labor activism, the tendency that had coalesced during the November 2 port blockade constructed a framework that was completely disconnected from the streets and plazas from which they had emerged. With every step from the November 2 strike through the December West Coast port blockade and towards Longview, these actions ceased to be participatory disruptions in the international flows of capital as a projection of the occupation's power beyond the plaza. Instead, they became solidarity actions, organized only with supporting the union in mind. There was naïve talk about the actions sparking a wildcat strike in the ports, or prying