

INDYPENDENT READER

toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old . . .

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It's a beautiful night in the Inner Harbor, for the first time in a long while. As I type this---under a freshly hung cardboard sign declaring this folding card table the beginnings of a media center, people are making the square their own. A precocious seven year old, doing what has to be the best homework assignment ever, wandered up to ask me what I was doing here, and I explained, as best I could, what was going on, why we were unhappy, and what we wanted to do about it. If you haven't already done so, try explaining the crisis to a seven year old; it's probably the best thing you might do to sharpen up your analysis.

Someone's joined me, drawn by the lure of the newly installed power strip, to get cracking on some graphic design. I can't see a single police officer from where I'm sitting---I know they're here, probably reading over my shoulder from one of the glass-walled buildings surrounding the plaza, but surprisingly, I don't care. I'd rather look at the dozens of people camped in the midst of an impressive collective arts and crafts project, stenciling out signs, patches, banners, painting five

gallon buckets into drums. Or at the free food being served at the other end of the park, or at the kids who normally hang out here, skating, dancing, talking. Like I said, a beautiful night.

A little further towards the busy intersection of Pratt and Light Street, a dedicated and more serious crew holds down the banner display, inviting drivers to lay on a little solidarity as they drive past. A few minutes ago, a post-office truck gave a rousing horn salute to our little encampment: more than most, they know exactly how much this crisis is manufactured---they're the latest sacrifice being offered to the insatiable god of austerity.

We're waiting on the march against the youth jail to finish up---from what I heard, at least half the people took off to protest in solidarity with the black youth who have been at the forefront of struggles against the crisis and its concomitant official responses of austerity and repression. While the so-called middle class may have lost its shirt in 2008, the majority of Baltimore City has been dealing with a much longer crisis. Even before being disproportionately hit by the collapse of the house of cards built on the predatory lending that continued Baltimore's disgraceful tradition of racialized real estate, these kids were dealing with a city and state that would rather lock them up than fund their schools.

Maybe, if everything continues to go beautifully, all the people who marched to the youth jail site will return with all the people who had organized and participated in that action, and we can all sit down together in a long, frustrating, tense, and magnificent general assembly and have some long overdue conversations about our city and what we want to do about it. And maybe we'll hold this space and keep having those conversations for as long as we can. For right now, a street performer, who didn't know what exactly was happening here a few minutes ago, is graciously sharing his PA, which he even coincidentally has a permit to use here, with an impromptu speak out that's taking shape before the general assembly kicks off at 8PM. We'll see where things go!

The sun has set now, and all you can see if you look up is the megalithic bank logos glowing on the tops of the buildings that tower over this little scrap of public space; I'm going to keep my eyes on the people around me instead.

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