

# The Mayor and Police Are Not Our Friends!

An open  
Letter to  
Occupy  
Philadelphia  
from fellow  
organizers  
and  
occupiers



# The Mayor and the Police Are Not Our Friends: A Letter to Occupy Philly

As organizers and activists in the city of Philadelphia, we're excited to find ourselves caught up in this vibrant new movement. Few things have happened in Philly since we can remember that have looked so much like a genuine expression of popular power and direct democracy on a large scale. In this movement, we see an opportunity to truly challenge a system controlled by and serving elites. We love this and are full-heartedly engaging in this insurrection!

At the same time, we've found some of the dialogue regarding Occupy Philly's relationship to Mayor Nutter and the police deeply disturbing and detrimental to fighting this system controlled by profit, greed and exploitation. Nutter has come out embracing the occupation that is on the doorsteps of his offices, claiming he too is part of the 99%. During the first night of the occupation, Nutter even received warm embraces by Occupy Philly campers. At the General Assembly, numerous voices stressed that Nutter and the police have come out as our allies. While the mayor has some clear political aspirations and obligations in regards to our occupation, we feel he's already exposed himself over and over as an enemy of struggling communities in Philadelphia and has always worked in favor of the 1%. The mayor has chosen a strategy of appearing to embrace the protests in an effort to ensure that he and his bad policies do not become a target.

Both Mayor Nutter and police chief Ramsey have made careers for themselves by catering to and doing the work of the rich and powerful in ways that have pitted organizers for social justice against him time and time again. Both Ramsey and Nutter have consistently made decisions with brutal (even deadly) impacts on the lives of struggling Philadelphians while giving elites and powerful corporations massive tax breaks, protection and preferential treatment.

This of course may not be apparent to folks who have not followed some of these movements. So here is a quick roundup of just a few of these recent fights:

# The Mayor:

## Nutter Blocks Paid Sick Days Bill

Community organizers and workers in Philadelphia have been fighting for the past year for a bill that would allow workers in businesses with eleven or more employees to earn up to seven paid sick days a year. In a major victory for workers and families, advocates convinced City Council to pass the bill. Mayor Nutter, however, ignoring the views of 71% of Philadelphians, bowed to business lobbyists and vetoed the bill.

Nutter's veto leaves over 200,000 wage-workers in the city in the precarious situation of having to choose between their job and the health of their families and themselves. Mayor Nutter has certainly demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice the rights and health of hard working Philadelphians in order to secure the interests of the business elite.



[Source: Women's Law Project: <http://bit.ly/nuttersicktime>]

## Education Cuts

In this moment of budget cuts and massive teacher and staff layoffs, the Philadelphia School District continues to make decisions to dismantle our public schools — eliminating vital school-based programs, increasing class sizes, and putting forth proposals for ongoing school closures. For the 2011-2012 school year, more than 1,300 Philadelphia public school teachers were laid off and a confidential draft District document (published on June 25, in the Notebook) identifies more than two dozen Philadelphia schools as possible targets for closure. Students, teachers, and concerned Philadelphians have voiced their refusal to let the Dis-

trict, city and state sell-out students, teachers and communities to the highest bidder in order to “balance their budget.” [Source: <http://bit.ly/schoolclosingannouncement> ]

## **Library, Pool and Rec Center Closures**

At the start of the economic crisis the urgency to act became pressing to government officials. Balancing the budget on the backs of poor and working people became the favorite strategy of many of them, including our Mayor. On November 6, 2008, Mayor Nutter put forth his plan to make drastic cuts to public services in the city. Nutter’s plan included the closure of 11 public libraries and 68 public pools. Also on the chopping block were fire stations, drug and violence prevention programs, and hundreds of city jobs.

Communities organized and fought back, protesting at city council budget hearings and at the Mayor’s community meetings. After a hard fought struggle, Nutter was forced to give in to public pressure and back down from some the cuts. Nevertheless, his proposed budget made his priorities crystal clear -- balance the budget on the backs of the city’s poor and working class residents as mega-corporations post recession defying profits.

[Sources: [http://defenestrator.org/the\\_budget\\_we\\_got](http://defenestrator.org/the_budget_we_got) and <http://bit.ly/r2BZST> ]

## **Fire Station Brownouts**

In 2010, Mayor Nutter passed a budget that ordered rolling brownouts for neighborhood fire stations. This means that on certain days, neighborhood fire stations are not open. The mayor claimed that this decision was necessary to close a budget gap, but left corporate tax loopholes and funding for police intact. Already at least 3 children have died because of these brownouts, and scores of others have been injured. Clearly the mayor cares more about maintaining a cozy relationship with big business than protecting the lives of families in Philadelphia.

## **Workers’ Rights in the Public Sector**

Mayor Nutter has illegally refused to engage in bargaining with public sector workers. Nutter has forced city workers to operate without a contract for the past two years, and has repeatedly attempted to eradicate or privatize family-sustaining public sector

jobs.

## **AIDS and Housing**

People with AIDS have died in Philly because they sleep on the street or are crammed into homeless shelters. Though city currently has a waiting list for housing people living with AIDS- it is two years long



and despite meetings, marches and actions by ACT UP targeting the mayor, he has refused to move money in the budget to put people in housing that he knows could save their lives. Nutter knows well that people with AIDS have died waiting for housing on the streets and in the shelters of Philadelphia.

## **Tax Abatements**

In Philadelphia there is a 10 year tax abatement on all new or substantially renovated properties. This means that the huge corporations building new condo developments and the wealthy people who buy those condos don't have to pay any property taxes for the first ten years that they live there. New development drives up property taxes for existing residents, often displacing them from their own neighborhoods while wealthy gentrifiers pay nothing.

# **Ramsey and the Phila PD**

## **ICE and PPD database integration**

In 2009, discovery in an immigration lawsuit leaked that the Philadelphia Police Department had been secretly been sharing their databases with that of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Philly had previously been a city where police were barred from communicating arrest infor-

mation to immigration officials, somewhat protecting the many immigrants who live here from deportation. Upon their arrival Nutter and Ramsey cooperated to quietly integrate the databases resulting in ICE raids and deportations attacking and tearing apart families and lives of some of Philadelphia's most vulnerable residents.

## **Police Violence**

Police in Philly have killed scores of mostly young blacks with impunity under Ramsey's watch. While Ramsey has made public shows of attempting to discipline out of control cops, he's overwhelmingly defended killer cops on his force. Those killed by police with few exceptions are young black men who already live in economically devastated neighborhoods.

Last October a West Philly activist Askia Sabur was jumped and beaten by a gang of cops who cracked his skull and broke his arm. Hundreds took to the streets to protest the beating and demand accountability for the cops who nearly killed Askia. Streets of West Philly were taken over by an impromptu people's court where for hours, residents testified of killings and beatings at the hands of the PPD.



We see the violence against the poorest Philadelphians by the PPD as a significant part of a racist war on the poor.

[Source: [http://www.defenestrator.org/west\\_philly\\_uprising](http://www.defenestrator.org/west_philly_uprising) ]

## **Ramsey and Political Repression**

Many of us know police chief Ramsey from previous encounters. As police chief in Washington DC, Ramsey oversaw and ordered numerous raids, beatings and mass arrests of activists, including a mass arrest of over 600 people at a permitted rally against the war in a Freedom Plaza in 2001. Ramsey also ordered mass arrests of Mumia Abu Jamal (a political prisoner from Philadelphia) supporters, as well as opponents of the World Bank's economic policies. Before DC, Ramsey headed up Chicago's PD and engaged in "spying, illegal raids on gathering sites, routine

harassment and arrest of suspected protesters in public spaces, destruction of activists' video and film" as well as instituting youth curfews, extensive snitching and infiltration programs and expanding CCTV surveillance in poor neighborhoods, all things the PPD has done in Philly as well under his watch.

[Source: <http://defenestrator.org/ramsey> ]

## Surveillance and Repression in Philly

A major element of Nutter's campaign for mayor was to increase police and surveillance in Philadelphia's poorest neighborhoods and institute a dramatic increase in stop and frisk searches. According to the Philadelphia Inquirer: "In 2009, police stopped 253,333 pedestrians, 72 percent of whom were African American. Only 8 percent of the stops led to an arrest."

In response to the recent "flash mobs," Nutter imposed a youth curfew in wealthy mostly white areas of Philly, clearly targeting the black youth. Dozens are facing charges already under Nutter's response.

Instead of pursuing innovative ways to funnel resources, housing and opportunities to where it's needed most, Nutter chose to increase repression of a black population already severely under the gun of state repression, police violence and incarceration.



We know that city governments are strapped for cash and that elected officials have to make tough choices. And we also know that in our experience every time Nutter has been faced with those choices, he has made the wrong one.

Because the mayor has reached out to Occupy Philly, we now have the opportunity to make concrete demands of him. We should use this opportunity (and create more!) to push for the changes that 99% of struggling Philadelphians need. This is not a new struggle. There are existing organizations and communities in this city that have already been working, organizing and calling for these changes for decades.

We can use the space and political pressure created by Occupy Philly to amplify the demands that groups are already making on the city to:

**Fully Fund Our Schools**  
**End Stop & Frisk Policies and the Curfew on Youth**  
**End Police Violence**  
**Stop Attacks on Immigrants**  
**Engage Public Sector Unions**

**Let's do it!!**

