

MARCELLUS MONTHLY

“All the Fracking
News that Fits”

JULY 2013



SPECIAL Gasland, Part II EDITION



Power and Powerlessness

Gasland, Part II, shows us the connections between fracking and politics, leading us to confront the question “*Where do we get our power?*” (Not electric power, but power to make a difference through our actions.) Last month, that question was brought to life by extraordinary public statements from two prominent men.

First, Dr. Steven Chu, leaving Washington to return to Stanford University, called climate change the ‘biggest problem of the day’, saying “We’re already in trouble.” He also suggested that he will have more influence over the climate crisis as a Stanford professor than he had as Secretary of Energy. It was a sobering glimpse of powerlessness at the top of the world’s most powerful nation.

Then, Rex Tillerson, CEO of Exxon-Mobil, declared moral bankruptcy at the annual corporate meeting. Mr. Tillerson abandoned the industry position that climate action is

unnecessary. Now, he says, it has already become impossible. He made no defense for his company’s role in taking us to this dead end, but he confessed that “*We do not see a viable pathway... that is not devastating ...*” Unable to offer a way out, he promised to go on supplying fossil fuels to keep us all comfortable until the end, asking, “*What good is it to save the planet if humanity suffers?*” We were hearing the leader of the richest corporation in history, facing a global catastrophe, and powerless to speak of any option but business-as-usual.

Mr. Tillerson and Dr. Chu are different by skill, reputation and personality. Yet both of their stories suggest that, in politics as well as in business, we may place too much faith on putting “the right person” into our top jobs. We also need to ask, “*What ‘power’ do our modern institutions make possible, for people inside or outside of them?*” If human beings are to survive on this planet, we will need to understand whether we’ve built institutions that give us power, or that take it away.

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News around the world

AUSTRALIA: The Australian Medical Assoc. urged government to apply “the precautionary principle” to unconventional gas, citing currently “insufficient” data and monitoring to ensure safety. Another report, from Doctors for the Environment Australia, blames “grossly inadequate” oversight for “ill health” and “economic loss” from extraction projects.

PARIS: Citing “considerable” damage already evident from fracking in the U.S., the Minister of Environment and Energy defended France’s 2-year old ban.

POLAND: Farmers maintain a blockade into its second week, to prevent Chevron from drilling a field where (the farmers say) there is no legal drilling permit. A

priest visited protesters to hold mass, marking the first time that the church has joined in anti-fracking activity.

QUEBEC: Citizens accused Quebec’s Minister of the Environment of drafting regulations which violate the intent of a previous moratorium on shale gas.

[The Quebec citizens, «*Regroupement inter-régional gaz de schiste de la vallée du Saint-Laurent*», were recognized with a Pittsburgh City Council proclamation in 2011.]

NEW BRUNSWICK: Protests continued, with six more people arrested at a seismic testing site.

GERMANY: Beverage maker Gehrung-Bunte warned that fracking can destroy the mineral water of the Teutoburg forest, on which their business is founded.

YOU’VE SEEN GASLAND II... NOW WHAT?

**COME TO THE FRACK FORUM!
SATURDAY JULY 20
1 - 4 pm
FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
4836 ELLSWORTH AVENUE
PITTSBURGH, PA 15213**

**WE WILL DISCUSS:
WHAT’S HAPPENING LOCALLY
FACT VS. FICTION
Q + A WITH LOCAL ORGANIZERS
HOW TO GET INVOLVED
CAMPAIGNS + ACTIONS**

*Come out and connect with your community.
We are ALL needed in this fight to preserve
and protect the health and future for all people
across this great state.*

Come to Marcellus Protest’s Next Bi-Monthly Frack Forum!

‘Marcellus Protest’ is a project of the Thomas Merton Center (Pittsburgh, PA): www.thomasmertoncenter.org

We encourage you to print copies of this newsletter and to distribute it freely. You can download it from our website: www.marcellusprotest.org/news.

Power and Powerlessness

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Our first-world system of democratic capitalism is a recent invention, although we revere it as if it were eternal. In a short time, it has become extremely efficient. What it does, it does relentlessly: returning profits to investors, extracting natural resources, and delivering goods to “consumers.” What it does not do – as we never thought it should – is to share what makes us uniquely human: our loves and loyalties, our hopes and dreams, our sense of wonder, and our ability to imagine a future full of promise and danger.

While we’ve been delegating more and more civic functions to this web of private self-interests, it has become more autonomous. It already drafts its own laws and regulations, promotes its own candidates for public office, and argues for its own “rights” in court. In “our system of government,” the roles of business and of politics have now grown so intermixed that we may never be able to separate them again.

This combined political-economic entity also defends itself, like a living thing. If a “foreign body” interferes with its normal functioning, it acts to neutralize the intruder, and it adapts so as to make similar intrusions more difficult in the future.

We’re not looking for sinister motives here, just pointing out that self-preservation doesn’t apply only to biological organisms. But we are coming to a time when the preservation of truly living things may not be compatible with the things that we ourselves have created. When that happens, we can expect our artificial institutions to fight for their own survival. But will we be able to fight for ours? And if we have already abdicated our decision-making to those same institutions, who will wake us up when the time comes for making existential human choices?

Today, all around the world, we see the same pattern: In local groups and communities, people are rising up against extreme energy extraction, while the states and nations crack down for the sake of economic stability. The nearer one is to the summit of institutional power, the more tied to the *status quo* and the harder to live authentically and to speak truthfully.

The path forward is not safe or easy, but others have pointed it out to us. Two thousand years ago, Paul of Tarsus wrote “*We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers*” More recently, Chris Hedges compares our present economic regime to Captain Ahab’s ship, *Pequod*, “... *on a voyage of self-destruction, and no one in a position of authority ... willing or able to stop it.*”

Wen Stephenson writes, of climate change, “*When sane courses of action ... lie outside the limits of political ‘realism’ and ‘reasonable’ debate, conscience compels us to act.*” And Sandra Steingraber has sworn “*If elected officials refuse to defend our land, water, air and health [against fracking], then we will do it ourselves.*”

Robert Jensen recommends that we “embrace our deeper anguish” at this terrible moment in history, “*not to abandon hope, but to affirm life.*” Reclaiming our human capacity for grief and for joy, we do what we can do — not because we are confident of “winning” (whatever that may mean now), but because we understand what it is to live a human life.

For at least a while longer, our institutions will hold the power to punish us for our interference. But the power to save us is not their power. For that, one needs a human soul, which institutions do not have, and cannot give or take away.

Power (to update a slogan of the 1960’s) is the people.

[For original sources of all quotes, click the links in our online edition.]

A Range of Resources

Please check out our ‘Resources’ page at www.marcellusprotest.org/resources, and follow us on Facebook ([MarcellusProtest](https://www.facebook.com/MarcellusProtest)) and Twitter ([@Marcellus_SWPA](https://twitter.com/Marcellus_SWPA)). Here is a sampling of our recent recommendations:

An updated [list of “The Harmed”](#): An ever-growing roster of individuals and families who are suffering and dying.

[The Big Green Fracking Machine](#): How industry insiders control the so-called Center for Sustainable Shale Development.

[United Opponents of Fracking International](#): An information and networking hub for individuals and groups working to stop hydraulic fracturing. (Includes a [worldwide list of fracking opponents](#).)

Upcoming Events in July:

(Full details, with latest updates, and a more extensive list of events, on-line at www.marcellusprotest.org/event_calendar.)

July 11 (Columbus, OH): **Triple Divide screening (6:00–9:00 pm)**. A documentary about fracking’s impact on Pennsylvania. Event details at gasmain.org, learn more about the film at tripledividefilm.org.

July 20 (Pittsburgh, PA): **Frack Forum (1:00–4:00 pm)**. Open meeting for information and organizing. See the inset on pg 1.

July 27 (Butler, PA): **Fossil-free Energy Fair (noon–5:00pm)**. Learn more about renewable energy through speakers, vendors, music and entertainment. Details at [Marcellus Outreach Butler](http://MarcellusOutreachButler).

Updated information on these topics (with links to original sources), along with our calendar of upcoming events, and other resources, can be found at www.marcellusprotest.org.