

Open Letter To Occupy London from Two Working Class Old Buggers

Talking 99%

Although hugely problematic in its conception, if we are to talk of being 'the 99%' then we could be talking much more amongst ourselves. Not just at the sites of Occupy London but everywhere else.

Exemplary from within Occupy has been the support for the Electricians struggles in London - joining pickets, marches and occupations. This has been a genuine cross-contamination of struggles with lessons to be learnt by all from both. It's not that workers struggles take precedence over other fights but right now the Sparks action is one of the most inspiring and dynamic and demands solidarity from all. That some folks from Occupy can recognise themselves in this struggle and some Sparks can recognise themselves in Occupy is brilliant! The same could be said of the reciprocal solidarity now being done with the Cleaners.

Activism 1%

When a Occupy London Day of Action (1) is announced to '*Occupy Everywhere*', the result remains as small as its announcement. An intention is posted on the Internet that circulates willy-nilly, finding politicians or activists but not extending much further and with very little real notion of how a call to '*Occupy Everywhere*' could be put into effect. What is the slow work of building step by step such a day aside from just calling for it? (2) This maybe because these activists' actions are often conceived within activist parameters and usually performed in a vacuum with other activists. By 'performed', we mean that the action has to be *seen* by its participants, or by some vague idea of the public or lastly by the media as if this is in some way a meaningful political act. Less important is whether the action has any efficacy.

This is not to say that everyone involved with the many initiatives at Occupy works like this. However there does seem to be a more visible-than-most activist component that exhibits the worst tendencies of these self-contained stunts and symbolic actions that carry over still from the various Anti-Capitalist movements of the 2000's.

Like other Days of Action, such as N30 when the

offices of *Xstrata* were occupied to highlight some rich person or another, the D15 Day of Action went to the Carlton Club to dance on the pavement as this is where rich Tories hang out. For most people, this is hugely uninteresting. *Who does not already know that corporations are rampaging through the world or that banks are ripping us off or that some business people, bankers and MP's are rich or that the rich will not give up their money and they know it. That much is obvious.*

Any Old Action?

What could spend some time being re-thought is the idea of what constitutes an 'action' and whether the obsession with the symbols of the system are actually the most worthy of our attentions.

It serves no real purpose as an 'action', as something that is trying to advance ideas and struggle, to temporarily occupy a rich guy's office or to dance outside a Tories Club. Or to stand outside a Vodafone store or Top Shop to announce that these businesses don't pay their taxes. Or to go to Parliament as that's where the budgets and new laws get passed. These sites are not the places and occupations of the everyday of the 99%. At best they may be sites for popular sentiment but with little chance for real content or movement. In the main they are sites contained within a closed circuit of power. These are sites of silence and thus they are not our sites.

So when is an action a ritual or a lack of imagination and when is it actually incisive and strategic? What are the stakes for those taking part and what are the consequences involved in these 'actions'? Are there stakes? Are there consequences?

Occupying A Politics of The Everyday Again

What might be better would be to spend time going to sites that are the actual everyday places of those surviving and/or resisting this current capitalist nightmare. Occupy London can only be at best a kind of base camp seeking out other sites rather than merely *being* the site itself.

One of the best lessons (re)learned in the 2000's and existing within Occupy is that music, playfulness, costume, puppets, portable sounds systems, irreverence, anger and humour (thus the mobile Carnival) creates the pre-conditions for a more communal open politics than any

shouty, hectoring protest with the usual baggage of slogans and demands.

Taking such a carnival of good tunes and props and ideas, anger and joys to any local Job Centre would initiate some good chats with folks at the sharp end of the benefits regime and be a lot of fun.

Taking the carnival to a giant Tesco or Asda to listen to what people, families, shoppers might have to say about high prices, taxes, the economy, would be interesting. Or taking the party on a tour of the ever-expanding chains of Payday Loan shops, BrightHouse, Cash Converters, pawn shops and so on.

Taking a day to organise with or alongside the Electricians to take the party to picket in a carnivalesque fashion Balfour Beatty or to working sites. The next Sparks-agreed date of 9th January 2012 would be good for this!

Taking the party to cop shops the length and breadth of London's high streets to talk to people about police violence, racism, justice, the law, safety, crime etc.

Taking the fiesta to schools and colleges in Hackney or Lewisham or Tower Hamlets to talk about education, cuts in course and staff, work, life...

Taking the Carnival anywhere where real life is subject to tensions and contradictions that seek some collective resolution.

But taking the Carnival only if we are prepared to ask questions and hear and reflect upon what is said in response

Which actions already happen everyday at these places? In what ways do claimants already help each other and what can be said about that? What politics is already underway in the supermarket with the cashiers, the shelf-stackers, the customers? Which subversions, which contradictions and which conservatisms are played out in Academy schools? On a picket line of Sparks and supporters which casual conversation places the same two people at the same fight against Murdoch in 1986, against the Poll Tax in 1990, against the fascists in 1991, against the Criminal Justice Bill in 1994? In which everyday spaces is politics a movement and in which extraordinary spaces is it just a scene? What are the politics that happen around the playground in the park, the gentrified high street, the early morning office cleaners, the

local street market, the Trades Council meetings, the rent office...

It's not that we should be seeing these activities and places as sites to recruit people into being activists where doing politics is placed into some kind of separate sphere from the everyday experience of it. We are not experts in tactics of struggle above the general knowledge, experiences and plain common sense that can be found at any of the above sites. We can't think of much worse than the notion that the world will be changed by an increase in the number of liberal or radical self-considered activists as opposed to people generally active against power and wealth. There is no cause to fight (*hydro-electric dams, climate change, animal rights, tax avoidance etc*) that is not eclipsed by recognising ourselves first as our own greatest cause and that what we do in our own struggles contains our solidarity for all others in struggle around the world. If you ain't got your own struggle then what you struggling for?

A Movement Is Made Up Of Questions

We are not in the business of going looking for the answers from people that compliment our ideas and practices as if these are the 'right' answers. It's so much more inspiring to shut up what you know for a minute and listen to what other people are saying, what they know and what they have learnt from their experiences even if it messes with your head. That's a good mess! It's more that talking to people at these sites creates a public space for listening, learning, agreement, argument, contradictions, working through and so on. It attempts to create a space to see what is possible from the unknown and not just from what we may know already. This is where the 99% is and this is really the space for occupying politics again, moving from Occupy London to Occupy Everywhere, for real.

Merry Christmas Everyone And A Happy New Year...

Two Former Miserabilists December 19th 2011

1) *The notion of a temporary Day of Action is always problematic from the get-go because every day is a day where action needs to be taken by most to survive but we can put this aside right now.*

2) *See, for example, 'The Kittens Action' (on Occupy Oakland website) spreading the word on the ambitious and focused West Coast Port Shutdown on December 12th*