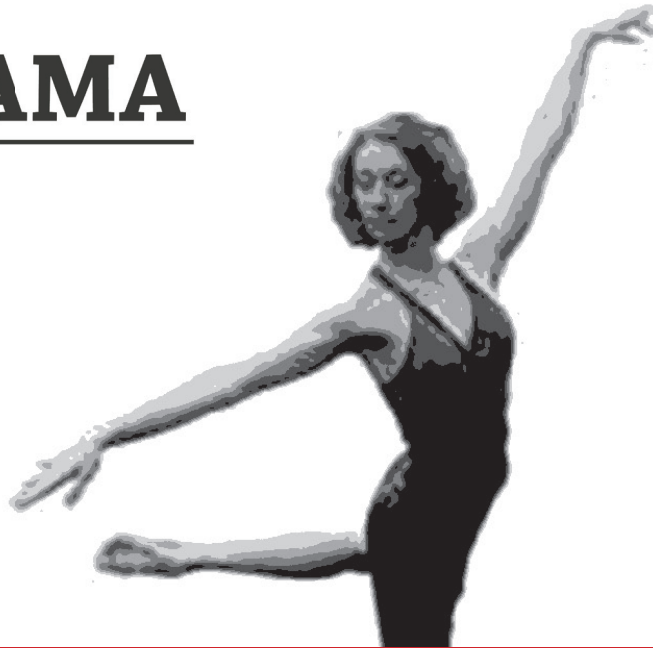




**KASAMA**  
PROJECT



# THE OCCUPY MOMENT

DARING TO DREAM DANGEROUSLY, 2011–2013



# THE OCCUPY MOMENT: INTRODUCTION

**W**ithin moments of its beginning, cynics declared the movement that came to be known simply as “Occupy” irrelevant, dead, or worse. Those of us around the Kasama Project thought otherwise, and many of us jumped right in. Others of us actually came to Kasama via Occupy. For us, Occupy was an incredibly important watershed moment that served as a reminder that resistance to capitalism is possible, and, more significantly, that resistance can, if only for a moment, capture the imagination of a broad segment of the population.

What the long-term legacy of Occupy will be is a story yet to be written. Now long after the smashing of the Occupy encampments, and now that the movement has morphed into a broad milieu of activists without quite the same determination, excitement or numbers of late 2011, a lot of Occupy veterans are figuring out what to make of what just happened, and trying to figure out what to do next. This pamphlet is *not* the necessary last word and evaluation of the Occupy experience: that remains to be written. Instead, it’s a series of writings taken mostly from the Kasama Project’s website as Occupy was unfolding. Here is inspiration, context, intervention, reportage and critique from activists themselves. From communists looking to analyze and motivate. From revolutionary thinkers trying to understand and explain a sudden apparent rupture in capitalism. From dreamers daring to imagine a new world.

Upon their appearance on the Kasama Project website, many of these pieces were discussed and expanded upon by readers in the comments. We urge interested readers not only to engage these articles in new study and discussion, but to go back and read the original discussions they sparked. Keeping that discussion going is one of the ways revolutionaries will be ready for the next rupture we know is coming.

This pamphlet is just the beginning of a necessary process of evaluating what happened and preparing for the future. The articles in this pamphlet just scratch the surface of topics and issues made relevant by the Occupy movement: there are many more subjects to be discussed, many more lessons to be drawn. The discussion needs to continue. What can activists, revolutionaries, *communists*, do to be ready? You can be a part of continuing and deepening that crucial discussion. — *ISH Daniels*

**PUBLISHED BY THE KASAMA PROJECT  
MAY 2013, VERSION 1.1**

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**KASAMA**  
**is a communist project that seeks to reconceive and**  
**regroup for a profound revolutionary transformation of society.**

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# IT IS FIVE MINUTES TO DAWN AND THE WIND SMELLS LIKE FREEDOM

BY MIKE ELY • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA OCTOBER 14, 2011

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It is no longer five minutes to midnight. After Arab Spring leaps to Spain, and Greece, and on to New York's Wall Street, it suddenly feels like five minutes to dawn.

We no longer need assume that there is no time to stop the world going to shit. There is an opening and we are flooding into it.

We are suddenly in a moment that is not marked by exhausted routine protests that speak for no one and speak to no one.

The oppressors (our common enemies) are no longer unchallenged — or more no longer unchallengeable. They are instead rocked backward, confused, bewildered, furious. The billionaire mayor of New York can't clear a tiny park — and suddenly the question is not how to force the occupiers out, but whether he may be forced out of power if he pursues that course.

For so long, all of the things that leave people crying at night: the numbing global poverty itself, the painful loneliness of atomized non-community, the discarding of the old and the young, endless war for dominance, global structures of empire, the ravaging of nature, the manufacture of ignorance, intolerance and bigotry, the rape and casual daily brutality toward women — all of these things have seemed untouchable and permanent.

Now suddenly....a different day is approaching — where we can increasingly see and act in in startling ways, with rippling new impact. Ears perk up. Sights are raised. The pulse quickens. Suddenly we recognize the faces of others — once unknown to us — animated and awake with a common spirit. The powerful look discredited and vulnerable.

Morning is coming.... Go and wake the sleeping ones.

The hope of a radically new society, of abolishing

capitalism, reveals it is far from exhausted. No, it suddenly springs from every pore. These occupations of dozens of city squares are a wind that heralds a coming storm.

This is a mood that produces actual revolutionary movements and dedicated militants of a new truth process.

Advanced, radical and discontented people who felt alone and isolated — suddenly realize they are millions. Allies emerge out of shadows, attracted by each early flame.

Networks congeal almost overnight. New thought jumps from human to human, morphing in each passage, adapting and refining. The forms of expression shake off the old and exhausted... A new generation invents its language from the messaging in the air.

Let's understand what this is. Let's recognize where we stand. Let's embrace the possibilities within the new.

This break in the norm reveals what has already moved into place, and had long been building. And that revelation transforms everything — especially because we all see it together, in common, and recognize ourselves in that picture.

Be relentlessly impatient with this criminal system.

Be lovingly patient with each other — as we find the common language to act and transform.

Listen for the new. And grasp firmly to the truths that have so long been hidden and denied — but that we are now speaking from center stage.

Let's seize the high moral ground (a precious position to hold), and never give it up. And be aware that thugs with suits and video cameras will be coming to snatch that ground away and portray us as fools, or dupes, or barbarians at the gate.

Above all: Let's consciously go for the whole thing!

The change we want is about taking the accumulated

wealth, technology, hard work, science, and connections of a complex global civilization — and finally (finally!) putting it into the service of us all, including the very least and previously powerless among us. It is about the voiceless suddenly speaking, and the wealthy suddenly becoming silent.

This is not about “budget financing” (!) but about power in the most fundamental sense. We don’t want to tax the zillionaires of finance capital — we need to rip their zombie hands from the throats of us all... so we can breathe, perhaps for the first time in our lives. And so we can change the whole direction of the world.

The “freedom” we want is not the individual license promoted by smug Republican ideologues (the freedom of “up with me, you suck”). Instead, we need to seek the freedom of people, together, to shape their common world — an ethos of mutual caring and solidarity. That is the freedom (the ability and possibility) that comes when new power of the people wrenches everything from the very few.

A revolution starts in ideas and mutual recognition. It then moves to the terrain of power.

At this moment: we can get a glimmer of how empires break, and how armies start to unravel. They don’t die on the battlefields, at least not at first — but in

sudden re-allegiances of the young and awakening.

We cannot “take America back” — we never had it. But we can take over our own lives, our own planet and our common future — wrenching them away from sinister and hostile forces.

This moment of occupations is not about some concept of “America” anyway. It is global — because our society, our future and our biosphere are all global. This wave of contagious occupations and manifestations is about who will shape this beautiful blue orb as a whole. And we cannot allow that to be diminished and corrupted by slogans of America First.

The old “American dream” promised each one the ability to climb up upon the others. This new coming dream can be about a global community of mutual flourishing among human beings — about substituting community for the sale of humanity.

Let’s go for the whole thing. Let’s go for the future itself. Let’s save the only earth we have. Let’s aim to wipe out together the poverty of the many and the suffering of the abused.

Here at dawn, let’s envision the day we want, and make that revolutionary vision the center of debate, for once, and perhaps from now on.

# OCCUPY’S TEAR IN THE FABRIC: SEIZE THE DAY FOR THE PREVIOUSLY UNTHINKABLE

WRITTEN BY MIKE ELY • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA OCTOBER 28, 2011 09:06

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I spoke last night with someone in our Kasama project about a pro-Occupy meeting with many local union officials. One thing jumped out at me.

**An emerging truth is now being spoken out loud:**

That Occupy Wall Street is not some progressive “constituency” that unions and others need to “relate to.”

Things have gone far beyond that. This is now a historical moment, a true tear in previous politics,

alignments, possibilities and silence. It is a rupture and an opening where everyone needs to act, based on their understandings and political concerns.

**And the implication of this is profound:** This is no longer just about “go down to the occupations and hook up with what they have created.” The opening is there for many kinds of people to speak — from where they sit in society, about what they see — and to be part

of something new erupting within the power relations of society.

The occupations remain (symbolically, politically, visually) the core of this. Their growth, spread, survival, maturation and defense is an important part of this moment. But (again) this is not JUST an occupation event — it has become a large, open flapping tear in fabric of deadly normal/official politics, in its language, alignment and assumptions.

It means that new things can be said and thought. It means that the old oppressive things can be re-seen by their victims and called out. It means that (for the first time in a generation) alternatives (including alternative societies) are thinkable — and are being thought (!) and debated.

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## RUPTURES IN IDEAS AND OLD POLITICAL LOYALTIES

**A**nd it is not just about the possibility of radical new ideas actually contending on society's main stages, it is also about shifts in power and the previous alignments of loyalty:

The brutal police attack in Oakland gave rise to a reoccupation of the square, yes. But it is also now giving rise to a call for General Strike — which seems (for now) to have some resonance among longshore workers, teachers and others. This is why the brutality against the occupiers of Oakland is not just producing protest and outrage — but a real struggle to push Oakland's now-hated mayor and her police chief out.

Questions of actual power are being contested because large, large forces are in motion — and those new forces are not spoken for, they are not reined in, they are not “plugged in” to the existing apparatus of empire and “the realistic.”

There is something new, at the level of ideas, at the level of loyalties and (very embryonically) at the level of political power (who rules? who decides the framework of the reasonable?)

This moment is literally breaking our history into a “before” and “after” — right before our eyes.

And it is, let it be said, the creation of the people themselves — not great leaders, or great thinkers, or aging left grouplets. This moment may pull forward great leaders and thinkers. It may invent vital new political formations of revolution. It may harden parts of a generation into

militants of a new truth-process. But that is still part of the veiled potential of the “after” — it is still unwritten. And our own actions will decide much about what gets written.

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## A METEOR JUST HIT OFFICIAL POLITICS

**T**he ruling class itself is very aware and very nervous about the potential within all this. They are worried first of all that all the preparations for their 2012 election indoctrination circus have been disrupted (like a meteor hitting a planetoid).

The Los Angeles rebellion of 1992 basically sealed the fate of George Bush 1. I said at the time (using the language of coal miners) that mopey Bush 1 looked “sadder than a broked-dick dog” as he toured the burned avenues of Los Angeles — not in sorrow over the people's suffering and disappointment, but with a deep sense that his sick career had just been incinerated.

And that 1992 “lighting of the sky” in flames, opened the way for many things (among the youth of Los Angeles and California especially!) And (as a collateral outcome within the oppressor's official politics) it opened the way to the slicker Bill Clinton to become president in that election (and carry out their common program of empire expansion, the explosion of prison populations and the breaking welfare's social compact).

The Occupation movement may reshuffle official American politics.

This may cause a chunk of Obama's previous social base to be “energized” in a non-electoral way — obstinate in its discontent and targeted not only on the quasi-fascist right of the Republican core but also at Obama's own corporate and militarist presidency. They may mark the end of Obama — and will certainly mark a Democratic scramble to coopt and divide. (Just watch Rachel Maddow and how her always-enthusiastic support for the Occupation involves a conscious re-defining of the Occupation.)

In one sense, this is large enough that an impact on establishment politics is a given now. Though we don't yet know its diverse forms. And that will play out as that corrupted, exposed and desperate establishment recoils, regroup, responds, demonizes, and generally squirms (with all their money and media power) to coopt.

But that is all mainly collateral damage to us. It is background context for our work. It is the rumbling

among enemies after they regroup from a sudden shock and setback. It is what we study to prepare our own defenses and offenses.

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## THE MAIN ARENA IS OUTSIDE — AT DISTANCE FROM THE STATE

**T**o us, to the rebellious and revolutionary, the questions are posed:

How do the people learn to wield what they have now created?

Do they even realize what they have?

Are there organized forces emerging — capable of thinking the new situation through, and envisioning forms of ongoing refinement and consolidation that sustain this profound political diversion (its networks, themes, militant discontent) as an uncooptable, undigestible new feature of life in the United States?

**And it is global:** It is true that “the whole world is watching.”

We are sending a message to the world — about the nature of this bitter belly of the beast — that hundreds of millions see and understand. We are here! We are with you! We dare to speak and fight!

And that message (sent at the level of unmistakable symbols not rambling credos) will not be forgotten in Cairo, Athens, Madrid, Shanghai, Djakarta, wherever people make their own next calculations of what is possible.

Who now will be infatuated with “western democracy and capitalism” when they plan their own futures? Who will unquestionably believe the ugly Jihadists when they preach that the people of the North themselves are an enemy?

The Occupation ripped the patriotic political gag-order of 9/11 off our faces, and it has enabled people all over the world to hear us — and the global impact is already real.

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## HOW DO WE FLOOD THROUGH A TEAR IN THE FABRIC?

**W**e argued in our “It’s Five Minutes to Dawn” essay:  
*“We no longer need assume that there is no time to stop the world going to shit. There is an opening and we are flooding into it.”*

Now, we want to open the discussion of what it must mean to “flood into it.” The eruption of such tears are very rare — and each generation enters them naive, excited, blinking with new visions — each emerges from them transformed.

People, including those who imagine themselves as “veteran activists” and “conscious revolutionaries,” have often not thought deeply about how everything changes when such a tear happens in the politically normal. “Political” people, just like the larger apathetic population, have been lost in ruts of routine and complicity. And all are being shaken up — and should be shaken loose. The long exhausted suddenly stands before us as the intolerable.

We all need to think (and fight to think) about what it means to act in a historical moment — a moment divides things into “before” and “after.” Above all it means to stop respecting the terms that were imposed “before.” And grasp how the terms (of ideas and power) are changing to potentially redefine the “after.”

Say to everyone — including the recently-liberal or ingrown activist:

“Tear down the political cubicles that once sheltered you. They no longer serve anyone. Think anew. Don’t make reality pry dogmatic ideas from your cold dead fingers. Don’t be impatient to get back to your chosen vineyard of small-scale do-goodism. Think about the horizons and the future. Autopilot in the face of the new is a way to throw away the possible. Don’t waste these moments. Create, don’t preserve.”

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## FROM VOID, TO TEAR, TO THE STILL MALLEABLE NEXT POSSIBILITY

**F**or now this is a tear, forced by people and themes erupting from a previously unannounced “void” of the officially invisible. And what rushes through that tear, what forms it takes, what names it gives itself, that all lie ahead. (And should already now fill our minds and dreams with urgency.)

There is a re-naming process, as new militants redefine how society and its features are understood, discussed and confronted.

I want to return to the points we started at:

The Occupation is not a successful new “constituency” that others need to “ally” with — it is now a tear in the fabric of previous politics. And there are no “others” in this scenario-- everyone needs to act by rushing into the

societal opening in all the ways this makes possible. With force. With courage. With a sense of high moral ground. On campuses, in professional associations, in workplaces, in the hood and the barrio. This is not a successful protest, it is a historical moment.

We now meet and see each other. We who hate the deadening cash culture, the corrupt politics, the infuriating realities of class, the brain-shriveling norms of previous discourse, the no-future breaking of promises, the heartless mechanics of capitalist profit and calculation, the merciless empire and its endless wars, the expedience about human life, the babble that exploiters are “job creators,” and that the poor are just “the losers of globalization.”

Now — be part of ripping it apart. Dare to speak.

And for those of us who are revolutionaries and communists — we can be one key rallying point in an ecosystem of resistance, but only if we ourselves are

listening, and allow our fidelities to be affirmed and transformed (in militant presentation and vision) by the new.

Kasama seeks to build a living communist pole within a new revolutionary movement. From our beginning we spoke about being flexible enough to see and inhabit the ruptures of the new. Well, now comes the test for us all. It is here, and its effects and outcomes will not go away — they will define whatever now comes for a generation.

Seize the day. Seize the hour. Listen, learn, transform — embrace the new, with fidelity to our cause. Represent the future in the present, and the whole within the part. Lead as revolutionaries using a creative mass line. Go and help wake the sleeping ones. Go fuse with the thoughtful new militancy. Embody the possibility and necessity of a radically new world. Above all: Let’s consciously go for the whole thing!

# GREECE: WHERE OCCUPATIONS SPEAK, AND GOVERNMENTS FALL

BY ERIC RIBELLARSI • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA SEPTEMBER 9, 2012

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I recently traveled with a team of young radical reporters to Greece. There, longstanding illusions of Europe as a “progressive and democratic” force in the world are being dashed as the neo-liberal and imperialist projects that are European Union and the International Monetary Fund bare their fangs.

Thousands upon thousands of public sector jobs have disappeared. Half of Greece’s hospitals are slated to close. We met doctors who had not received their pay in over 6 months. Free access to healthcare is being replaced by free market chaos in which people must rely on bribes and brokers in order to even secure basic services. The old social contract of the European welfare state has come to an end.

Factories are closing shop and moving to other countries where production is more profitable. Uncounted numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe, South Asia, and North Africa who came to Greece seeking papers to

enter the European Union now find themselves stuck in a society where the jobs have disappeared — and where swaggering neo-Nazis are mobilized to attack them on the street.

Public agricultural lands that once provided for the people are being privatized. With those privatizations, agriculture is being replaced with whatever industries are profitable to foreign imperialist powers. Greece is entering a process of neo-liberal specialization, in which its economy is to be warped and disfigured to produce whatever is profitable for global capitalism.

These measures have been met with wave after wave of rebellion. Millions are saying no to this trajectory. Institutions, arrangements and assumptions that once appeared permanent and unquestionable have been thrown into the air. The country is in such profound crises that many sense revolutionary potential. Communism is re-emerging as a name of an emancipatory possibility and



road that people can take. Perhaps instead of breakdown, the people will breakthrough. Today, an electoral crisis and the emergence of the radical left have come to characterize Greece in the minds of many people. This is actually the most recent of four moments of intense radicalization in Greek society.

December of 2008 was a winter that forever changed Greece, setting it on fire. The global financial crisis was the kindling, but the match was actually the murder of a young boy, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, by the police. What started as demonstrations and riots in the small sub-cultural community of Exarcheia quickly spread to become a national rebellion. The legitimacy of Greece's ruling parties was called into question for the first time in decades. The left was polarized, with the anarchists and the more creative sections of the communist movement playing a very important role. Meanwhile, forces that claimed to be on the side of the people, such as the old Communist Party of Greece (KKE), found themselves exposed and isolated. This KKE declared that (in their minds) any "genuine popular revolt will not smash even a single pane of glass."

The rebellion among Greek people reverberated and grew. In response to loan and austerity programs being imposed on Greece by the European Union, 2010 became a year of mass protests and general strikes with crowds numbering in the hundreds of thousands. General strikes occurred in industries where labor unions had historically been dominated by the PASOK, a mainstream party that postures as social-democratic as it carries out austerity, and that has played a role of co-option for decades in Greece. The political forces of Greek society were realigning.

One year later, on the anniversary of these strikes, Greece's equivalent of the Arab Spring (and of our own Occupy movement) emerged suddenly and unexpectedly. This "Movement of the Squares" was organized on Facebook by students with no previous political experiences. "People's assemblies" were called, declaring themselves to be the real democracy of the people, and challenging the legitimacy and rule of the PASOK dominated government.

These demonstrations are one manifestation of a rupture happening within Greek society. For decades, the country had been dominated by two neo-liberal political parties, one that pretends to be on the side of the people, and another that does not even pretend. Greece's historical legacy of armed guerilla war led by communists against a Nazi occupation had been reduced to World

War II nostalgia, represented by the KKE and its aging "voters for life." Suddenly, all of this was ripped apart. What people believed was possible changed, and what was actually possible changed. The PASOK government came toppling down. The trade unions it bureaucratized were no longer under its control. The people were in the streets, facing extreme police repression while remaining defiant and unafraid.

The three ruling powers that dominate Greece have been called "the Troika," alluding to the familiar image of a three-horse carriage – in this case pulled by three powerful forces at break-neck speed toward disaster. The three horses of this Troika are the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank. The global financial crisis (fueled by the Troika's own robbery, bubbles, loans, speculation) and the toppling of the PASOK government, all led the Troika impose a special "memorandum." That memorandum was a document demanding extreme austerity and a Greek government overseen by foreign bankers and technocrats.

The combination of a historic moment of crisis and the resulting mass movement of the Squares didn't just lead to a rupture in the politics of the larger society, but also a rupture inside the left. Many Left political forces abstained from this mass rebellion. The anarchist movement split over whether to participate in the Squares Movement, with many arguing it wasn't radical enough to warrant their participation. Dogmatic sections of the Left even protested against the Square, because it wasn't a movement that fit inside their preexisting schema. A young Greek radical described it to me as follows:

"After all these struggles, the people went to the Squares, our 'Occupy movement.' KKE and ANTARSYA [two old orthodox Leftist political trends] would say, 'You must be active.' But when there was a major upsurge of the people, they refused to join. Yet for all of their constant activism, they produce no actual new movement or consciousness or changes in society. But the Squares movement brought profound changes in society."

Meanwhile, participants in SYRIZA, the Coalition of the Radical Left, stood out in making major contributions to the Movement of the Squares. One organization, the Communist Organization of Greece (KOE), a member of SYRIZA, contributed to the development of the movement by creating key initiatives that resolved challenges the movement faced. When doctors lost their jobs because of the austerity, the KOE played a role together with others in organizing doctors

to treat people for free in the occupations. The Squares became a place where migrant workers could come to be treated when the racist Troika government denied them healthcare. When the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn came to distribute Greek flags in the occupation, aiming to infuse ultra-nationalism with the Greek Squares movement, the KOE came with the flags of other countries where people are struggling against oppression, including Egypt, Tunisia, and Palestine. From the very beginning of the Squares occupations, the KOE incorporated the image of a helicopter and the slogan "GET OUT!" – making it clear that all they want from government leaders is for them to get in helicopters and flee into exile. The helicopter image has come to characterize a radical pole of the Squares movement.

As a result of all this, much of the Squares Movement has transformed the landscape of the left itself. Those political forces which were once small electoral coalitions such as the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) in particular, have become major channels of the resistance, political energy, and engagement of millions.

SYRIZA has its roots as a coalition inside of the anti-globalization movement in Greece, before becoming an electoral bloc. In other words, SYRIZA itself represents a diverse set of radical currents and alliances with inevitable disputes between them. Some forces within SYRIZA imagine a Greece liberated from foreign imperialist power and capitalist logic, and see Greece as a possible spark that spreads such liberation to the rest of Europe. They capture their ideas with the slogan "Another Greece in another Europe." Other forces in SYRIZA imagine a series of reforms that make the European Union into a progressive force in the world. Today these diverse currents are united but that is not likely to always remain the case.

For now, the whole of SYRIZA has taken a righteous

stand against the memorandum and the Troika, declaring its intention to shred the memorandum, abolish the technocratic regime, re-negotiate Greece's position in the European Union, to refuse Greece's participation in the wars of imperialism, and to ultimately expel all foreign military bases from Greece. It is a plan which has captured the imaginations and aspirations of millions of people. One third of Greece voted for SYRIZA, and it is said that even more support SYRIZA, but feared that Greece would be isolated from the outside world by the Troika, and plunged into extreme poverty if the Radical Left were to be elected.

The plans of SYRIZA contain many contradictions and assumptions. For example, it is hard to imagine a future where this kind of program is allowed to be implemented peacefully, with Greece remaining in the Euro-zone, and without some sort of show down or confrontation. This road of radical reform was not allowed peacefully in other societies such as Chile. No doubt the different and opposing poles that exist within SYRIZA will become harder to ignore as the situation evolves.

No revolution is pre-determined or guaranteed. Without a doubt, the differing ideas, practice, and methods of the radical left will pose themselves very sharply in the future. But for now, millions in Greece have spoken: they will not go quietly as their society is crushed by ruthless austerity and global technocrats. Our brothers and sisters in Greece are in the midst of an uprising that mirrors the Occupy movement in many ways, yet at the same time it is ten steps ahead of it. Christos, a young student and revolutionary, said to me "Your Occupy Wall Street movement is so important to us. We can see that this thing is even happening in America now." If we are to transform this world, we'll do it together.

# WHEN DO WE DISCUSS POWER? LONG LIVE THE OAKLAND COMMUNE?

WRITTEN BY ABBAS GOYA • INTRODUCTION BY MIKE ELY • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA NOVEMBER 18, 2012

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In their new poster for Saturday, the Occupy Oakland graphics crew (and who else? Oakland's General Assembly?) raised the beautiful and visionary slogan "*Long live the Oakland Commune!*"

What does that mean to them? And to us?

Reactionary columnists have attacked the Occupations for "playing at the Paris Commune, with barricades and visions of power." How do we answer that? How do we build on it?

There has also been agitation discussion of "All power to General Assemblies" — raising the idea that society should be occupied generally, and that a new order could start with the formation of General Assemblies everywhere.

The following essay was submitted by Abbas to Kasama — and (obviously) raises precisely this.

By posting this essay here, Kasama is not endorsing this, nor even raising the slogan... but pointing to the various early glimmers of counter-power being felt and discussed.

*This confronts revolutionaries everywhere with practical and theoretical question:*

Are we speaking to (or even seeing!) the ways our new generation is thinking about new power?

- What is the role for visionary manifestos of dreams? How do they relate to immediate plans?
- What would it mean to inject something into the air, before it can be realized on the ground?
- When and how do we raise the destruction of old power and the creation of new power?
- How do we envision and present our end goals and the transition to new society? Is it just in whispered discussions of one's and two's, or does it deserve space in slogans, posters and banners?
- How do we speak to the glimmers of new power in this moment? How we speak to those bold ones who are asking: Why don't the 99% just occupy everything? What do we say to those aging heads who just think such things are merely naive, or divisive, or impossible?
- How do we speak to the forms, transitions, prerequisites and demands of discussing power?
- How and when does the visionary clash with the practical? When does it invent a new practical?
- How and when does the visionary clash with necessary alliances? And when does it transform those alliances? —ME

## ALL POWER TO GENERAL ASSEMBLIES!

In order to find out what the occupation movement is seeking we need to objectively pay attention to its background, its characteristics, its form of protest, its content, and finally the way it runs its occupied squares. This is a brief outline of the above, which comes to a logical conclusion as to what the 99% want and a resolution to the issue of leadership.

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### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT

The very first characteristic of this movement is its negation. It says no to the capitalist system, as illustrated by its various slogans, such as "End Capitalism", "Death to Capitalism", "This society doesn't work, let's build a

different society”, “Abolish capitalism”, “Another world is possible”, “A better world is possible”, ...

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## THE FORM AND THE CONTENT OF OCCUPATION MOVEMENT

**T**he second characteristic is the occupation form. By mere occupation, the Occupy Movement made a political statement. The occupation has both a form and an anti-establishment, anti-capitalism content in it. Once workers, for example, occupy the workplace, they claim power. Power is nothing but the ability to control. The workers claim power to control production. Occupy Wall Street was inspired by the Al-Tahrir (Liberation) Square occupation in Cairo by which people claimed the political power in Egypt. The occupation of Rothschild in Tel Aviv, and the occupation of Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid were also inspired by the occupation at Liberation Square in Cairo. Occupation is immediately tied to freedom. It is tied to the restoration of power to the people, it's tied to direct control of society by the people. The Occupy Movement revealed its content via its occupation form; the abolishment of capitalist dictatorship and the installation of a free and equal society that is run by direct participation and decision-making by the people.

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## GENERAL ASSEMBLY VS DEMOCRACY\*

**A**nyone who walks by an Occupy community can participate in its decision making body. The decision making process of general assembly (GA) might be long and dragging but we have to look at the bigger picture: The current GA decision making body is the most free, participating form of governing in the world. The GA is a parallel, direct-decision-making system as opposed to the ballot-box-election-parliament-democracy system.

We need to remember that occupiers are the people sitting in tents with absolute minimum resources, everything is done on a volunteer basis. Even the way that the kitchen is organized is iconic to controlling the means of production. The decision-making process being utilized can be considered a snapshot of the world we want to create.

The occupied territories are under constant pressure from the police, mayors, etc. The occupiers are doing the best they can to make the decision making as direct, and

participatory as possible. If society as a whole were run by us, the decision making would be far more effective. In a socialist society we do not need to spend 5 hours a day to make decisions on the maintenance of a camp. If we had access to all resources of a society, the decision making would be as easy as the press of a button on our phone-pad, be it about camping or travelling to Mars.

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## BACKGROUND TO OCCUPY PROTESTS

**T**he cause of current protests are the economic and capital crises. In October of 2008, the first \$700bn business bailout was passed by Congress while at that very moment there were 9.5 million unemployed in the US. These figures increased to \$1.5 trillion in the capital bailout and 15 million unemployed by September 2009.

During this period we had Chicago workers of Republic Windows and Doors occupying a plant (first of its kind in the US since the great depression) in protest to layoffs, Oakland riot ignited as a result of the murder of Oscar Grant, food-bank line-ups (40 million on food stamps as of May 2010), cases such as Heather Newnam, 28, who committed suicide because she was faced with eviction. In February of this year we saw the Wisconsin protests against the cutbacks. The estimated 50 million who have no medical insurance, the unbearable student loans which are a barrier for continued education and/or an unbearable financial burden after finishing an education. These are just a few examples of the kinds of events and situations that are indicative of the current state of affairs for the 99% .

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## WHAT THE US 99% WANT

**A**LL POWER TO GENERAL ASSEMBLIES!

As the current political system belongs to the 1%, it has failed to provide the basic needs of our society such as housing, health care, and education. As a result, our standard of living has deteriorated substantially; the environment is being destroyed; continuous militarism, and the creation of a police state.

We, the 99%, therefore, demand the immediate transfer of power to us. We ask all people to start their general assemblies at their work places and their neighbourhoods in order to take over the power from the 1%. To address the needs of society, our general

assemblies will decide and delegate people based on recommendations of various working groups.

Immediate transfer of power to General Assemblies from the 1%

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## LEADERSHIP

**O**ccupy Movement has no political representation. It negates the system, the way it runs its occupied squares gives us a glimpse to the future freedom and the self governing system. However, none of the occupied assemblies demands the removal of political power. None of them seeks the takeover of power.

Only a political party with an anti-capitalist, socialist vision can link the Occupy movement to its destination by demanding “ALL POWER TO GENERAL ASSEMBLIES” and therefore emerge as the political leader of this movement. A political party is not a substitution to general assembly, nor a general assembly is a political party’s organ. They are different organs of the

same movement. They are complementary to each other.

The mainstream political party’s approach in their attempt to manipulate the movement for the rich; the traditional left organizations in their populism (ie all ideas are welcomed and respected!! including the ideas of the rich) as well as anarchist leaderless approach to the point of suggestion on «banning» political parties (while at the same time they respect all ideas including that of the rich) are doomed to defeat the Occupy movement.

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\*The following is an interesting observation by the Economist: **“OWS is not simply a group of like-minded people gathered together to make a point with a show of collective force, though it is that. The difference is that it has developed into an ongoing micro-society with a micro-government that directly exemplifies a principled alternative to the prevailing American order.**

**The demand is a society more like the little one OWS protestors have mocked up in the park. The mode of governance is the message.”**

# BEYOND DEMANDS...

BY DOUG ENAA GREENE AND JAY JUBILEE • ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE BOSTON OCCUPIER, POSTED ON KASAMA APRIL 19, 2012

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**‘W**e will ask nothing. We will demand nothing. We will take, occupy.”  
— Graffiti from May 1968

*“What are your demands? What do you want?”*

These are two questions frequently posed to the Occupy movement.

According to some, in order to be “taken seriously” and to be “effective” at achieving gains, social movements like Occupy need to put forth a list of concrete demands addressed to the state. Occupy, so far, has for the most part not played by these rules. While supporting particular community campaigns that may include specific demands, Occupy itself remains outside of existing structures as it strives to develop a new mode of politics that breaks radically from the existing system. As well it should.

Why shouldn’t Occupy focus on coming up with

a clearly defined list of immediate demands? Certainly, we could easily enough come up with such a list, one that would include items such as free health care for all, stopping bank bailouts, ending US wars (and closing military bases), and increasing social spending for things that people actually need—like public transportation. There is nothing objectionable about the contents of these demands; in fact, they reflect some of the many reasons that people have become involved in Occupy. The society we seek to create would indeed be one where healthcare and public transportation would be universal rights, where there would be no more wars for empire, and where bank bailouts (and possibly banks themselves!) would be a thing of the past.

What is problematic about such a list of demands is that it tends to create a false picture. For starters, it

presents as separate and distinct, issues that are in reality deeply related, even inseparable. It suggests that progress will come piecemeal; first we win this, then we win that, incremental gains adding up over time until eventually... we achieve a just society. Furthermore, such lists tend to stand in the place of clear explanations of what the fundamental driving force is behind each of these particular injustices that we oppose: namely the global, capitalist system, a system whose very nature, as an effective anarchic dictatorship of the 1%, is to perpetuate social inequalities, economic exploitation, imperialist wars, and environmental devastation, through its endless pursuit of profit at all costs. Such lists tend to keep us from seeing the whole picture, and thus from reckoning with the need for a more radical break with the current social structure.

Some in Occupy say that we should focus on a few specific issues and strive to find practical solutions.

Yet, can we separate the call for increased social spending from ending the wars, from the need to overthrow the rule of the 1% that sets the frame for US foreign policy, without confusing matters and misleading people into a naïve political perspective?

If we understand capitalism, a system where the means of economic production and the social surplus are privately controlled by a few as the problem, then we must find some way to illuminate and to challenge that system rather than only demanding local changes to it.

Furthermore, there is a problem with expressing our politics in the form of demands: demands generally are addressed to the rulers of the existing system. But if we understand capitalism and its government as being the target of our critique—indeed, our enemy— then how can we honestly appeal to these existing institutions to fix our problems? That state, in the last instance, seeks to ensure the continued functioning of the capitalist system—to keep the profits flowing, and to subordinate the people to that unquestionable end. Why should Occupy appeal to a capitalist state as if it honestly could or would end inequality, when that state is necessarily complicit in maintaining this system through its executive, legislature, courts, police, and army? Not only will such an appeal ultimately fall on deaf ears, but by continuing to address this state as if it has the potential to be other than what it is, we risk lulling people into wishful thinking. We risk trapping even our own activity into a vicious circle whereby we continually make demands on the state that we know it can't grant, only to continually have the state

prove (again and again) its “real nature” to us.

Perhaps worst of all we risk exhausting our precious energies talking to the deaf powers that be, rather than talking to people far beyond the walls of government in order to develop new forms of genuine people's power.

Some will argue that we should still come up with a list of demands, “realistic” demands that could be accommodated by the system; they say that winning something is better than nothing, and that people gain courage only slowly, through winning victories. Fair enough. Others argue that we should make “unrealistic” or “transitional” demands on the state precisely so that we can show others that this state—contrary to its democratic ideology—cannot or will not satisfy those demands; all the more evidence to “expose the system.”

The former position assumes that the system is still capable of granting significant reforms—against much evidence to the contrary. The latter point of view assumes that people “can't handle the truth,” that they need to go through this Sisyphusian charade of making demands on the existing state in order to come to see that state as part of the problem rather than the solution. As if big ideas like revolution and the need for system change are beyond the ability most people to grasp. Similarly, this view assumes that the system is not already exposed in the eyes on millions of people, indeed, exposed to the point that many people will not bother much with (what they themselves see as naïve) struggles around immediate policy demands, since they realize that the problem runs much deeper. To the contrary: our ongoing assumption is that millions of people in this country already sense on various levels that fundamental change is needed, that the current system is itself the problem.

To help unite these millions should be our primary task.

If Occupy focuses mainly on demanding only what can be satisfied by the system, we effectively accept the continued existence of that system in advance. Under pressure, capitalism may accept a few reforms that ultimately leave its core operations intact. Certain sorts of demands may even help the system regain its teetering legitimacy, or to reclaim a bit of social stability. But in all seriousness, do any of us really believe that even the most effective pressure campaign can get the existing state to rethink the “sacred” right of private property, or the rule of maximizing profit at all costs? If not, why should we

pretend like we do?

When Occupy refuses to come up with a list of demands, it not only refuses to play by the established mode of politics, but it announces to others across the world that they need not play by those rules either, that that game is rigged, that it is wrong...and that even people here in the “belly of the beast” are gaining the courage to speak what so many of us have known for years. The refusal to “demand” has a content of its own. It says that we demand not a seat at the table to play along, but that we are out to change the game, even to flip the corrupt game board completely. We don’t demand that the system change. We declare forbidden truths about how deeply sick the system is—and we call others to come together to overwhelm it and to replace it with something better. We ask of it nothing. We rather ask everything of our brothers and sisters among the 99%. Together, we must demand our world back.

**W**hile the Occupy Movement has refused to reduce itself to a list of set demands on the system, campaigns have developed in and around Occupy that have made clear demands. For instance, the Occupy the T [*The T is the Boston mass transit—Editor*] campaign demands “No cuts. No hikes. No layoffs” and “A sustainable, affordable, and comprehensive statewide transportation plan that works for the 99%.” These campaigns exemplify both the opportunities, and the dangers of demand-based politics. On the one hand, the struggle around concrete day-to-day concerns, anchored in clear defensive demands has allowed occupiers to engage a broader public of T-riders and T-workers, and to establish themselves as defenders of the 99%. This is all to the good! On the other hand, however, the orientation of these demands towards the state bureaucracy (with its tone deafness to radical ideas) tends to pull back Occupy’s more bold or “utopian” visions in order to allow us to “get into the established conversation” happening in the government and the mainstream media.

We would argue that the proper use of such principles or demands is not in lobbying to get the state to actually accept them, but in initiating broader and deeper conversations and relationships between occupiers and other members of the 99%. We must not confuse such “demands” with our actual goals of movement-building. Where they are a starting point for developing deeper conversation and solidarity, such clear “demands”

play a useful role. But where they tend to suppress such deeper conversations, and where they get us to turn from our fellow T-riders and workers and to look instead to the state for saving solutions, they are a danger. Whatever becomes of such campaigns, it remains crucial that the Occupy Movement does not set its overall horizon as getting piecemeal reforms from the system, but rather continues to hold out the call for a more radical break.

Much to its credit, the Occupy the T campaign declares what is unacceptable, seeks to unite broad and diverse sectors of the 99%, and promises to engage in direct action and to build actual resistance to any T plan that does not meet our minimum standards. In this sense, the campaign is a way to engage masses of people and to raise fundamental occupy principles by “riding the rails” and through shared direct action. To the extent that it helps bring T-riders and workers into the struggle by identifying a contradiction of capitalism that affect them directly, the Occupy the T struggle provides a site to fight for reforms in a revolutionary way. This struggle has the potential to bring up larger questions of the system’s irrationality (economic, social, ecological) and to draw others into the movement, since the T’s budget plan affects millions across the greater Boston area. Ultimately, this MBTA plan is but the latest attempt to make working people pay more for less, so that capitalists, bond-holders, and big banks can continue to see their profits rise.

Occupy has declared its goal to be the creation of a society that prioritizes the needs of all before the profits of a few. This declaration is not directed to the existing structures of power, but rather to people still outside of the movement and abused or abandoned by the system (most T-riders included!). Whatever immediate struggles we engage in, we must make it our main goal to expose the system by its roots and to empower ordinary people to challenge it by their concerted action where its structural problems are produced, where it is most vulnerable, and where the people actually have potential power: in workplaces where our labor makes things run, in neighborhoods where residents far outnumber the bank-agents that come to evict them, among debt-enslaved students whose collective refusal could burst a trillion-dollar bank bubble in an instant, to the riders and workers of our trains and buses, whose collective action could force the State Legislature to its knees. The goal is not so much to get the state to change the situation, but to prepare the ground for the 99% to seize control of these situations ourselves. Imagine the new possibilities

that will appear as we assert the creative, collective power of the 99%!

In short: beyond making demands on the system,

let's occupy its key joints. So we can take the system down, and bring forth something fresh and new.

# THREE REVOLUTIONARY ARCS AND THIS MOMENT FOR COMMUNISTS

BY MIKE ELY • PREPARED TEXT FOR A TALK TO THE PLATYPUS CONFERENCE PLENARY, MARCH 31, 2012

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**T**rayvon Martin is dead. Let's start there.  
He was stalked on the street like dangerous animal and shot in the heart by a crazed, armed wannabe cop.

That's bad enough.

Then all the machinery of this society conspired to protect him. The police chief of Sanford arrived oversee it personally. Zimmerman was never arrested. He was released – obviously no danger to the community – and left to cook up elaborate lies with his father, a well-connected retired judge.

And (in ways amazing to many of us watching) Trayvon was killed again – portrayed as a drug user, wannabe gangster, as the violent aggressor, and someone who should be watched, suspected, and contained.

Or consider this: that in the United States, a central question in the U.S. election has become whether states should, once again, be allowed to criminalize birthcontrol — and if the availability of birth control to young women is only state approval of their right to carry out an immoral lifestyle. And while the Republicans pick over such madness, the Democrats celebrate – because this frees them of any necessity to defend the right to abortion, which is under massive assault by law, propaganda and budget.

Young women are blown away that their private parts and sexual choices are the target of wholesale attempts at reactionary social control.

Well don't be surprised.

If you want a sense of the need for revolution in the U.S. — just look there. Or at the ongoing U.S. and

Israeli threats at Iran. Where the phrase “nothing is off the table” means that millions of Iranian people go to bed each night wondering if they will be incinerated.

**H**uman beings have over and over fought their enslavement – in countless uprisings of slaves and peasants, or by people running away and forming communities in the wilderness, variously called maroons, pirates, renegades or bandits.

Oppressed people do not want to be oppressed. Women do not want to be sold. Slaves do not want to be whipped. Workers do not want their lives crushed.

And yet here we are at a new beginning – where we need to reimagine liberation, and start over. So be it.

In our modern era there were three great arcs that rose and fell — through which people fought for their freedom, and a future marked by equality, empowerment and an end to grinding poverty.

Out of the European struggle against medievalism, there arose a great popular and secular movement for communism, embodied in the 19th century by the most radical and insurrectionary edge of European workers movement.

Then after world war 1 another great arc, the anticolonial wave... India, China, Africa and Latin America. And there too, the most radical edge integrated a vision of egalitarian communism with their drive for development and independence. And I think there was a third arc — of revolution within the revolution.



In post revolutionary societies (and I mean especially: Soviet Russia and China) people fought within the framework of existing socialism to press further, to prevent new oppression... to reach for classlessness and new degrees of liberation.

In many ways, for me, the most radical edge of that was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China — where for the first time in history, literally for millions of debated directly, in its own right, how do we bring closer communism, ...in radical new forms of popular control,

Overcoming of class distinctions, the enslavement of working people to production's traditional hierarchies and to ancient traditions.

Those three great early arcs of modern liberation are now over — the European workers movement, the anti-colonial uprising against imperialist empires, and the revolutions within the revolution.

And we need to strain to understand our new arc — and reinvent a communist presentation for these times, and for future times. It is a theoretical process, and a process of preparing minds and organizing forces.

We have rich past experiences — and that body of philosophical, strategic, and economic controversies and insights.

But the frameworks and conjunctures of those three previous waves is gone. And we can't proceed by looking backward — or transforming past methods into a series of settled questions or models.

Of course the reactionaries crow that the future is over. That communism is dead. But we have a responsibility to make sure we don't blow our next changes, and the organized left we have inherited is often pretty exhausted, pretty grim, and pretty backward looking.

That's the contradiction: a profound need for radical change, and a parallel need for a creative rupture in the ways revolutionaries think and speak and organize.

Let me end with these two points: About respect for novelty and the need for shocking and attractive radicalism.

We should embrace novelty. We need to be nimble and awake.

Most of the left responded to crankiness and hostility when Occupy Wall Street erupted — because it wasn't the new movement or language they wanted. Many on the left went into Occupy to lecture, to complain, to instruct as if the people there were children and just needed to say the words “cap-it-alism” and “soc-ialism.”

Obviously people breaking into political life are filled with illusions, and naivety, and initial utopian ideas.

But this was an eruption at distance from the state of affairs that refused to hustle itself into the framework of official politics.

Second point: We need to speak with a voice that is shockingly radical and profoundly reasonable.

In the republican primary, Rick Perry declared he had three parts of the federal government he wanted to abolish — and when he forgot one, the others chimed in with what they wanted to abolish — Department of education, IRS, EPA, on and on.

How often does the left boldly speak of what it intends to abolish and replace?

In a society that demands radical change, how much has been ceded to the Radical Right?

The future offered by this system is austerity, a sharply tiered society of rich and poor, and that race to the bottom between workers in different parts of the world. And intensifying ecological madness — the destruction of the last old growths, the devastation of rivers and atmosphere, and the real danger of climate change..

Why don't we speak boldly of what we want to abolish?

The CIA, nukes, the Marines, the White House, borders, prisons, schools that are like prisons.... U.S. corporations that are the modern equivalent of SS battalions.

And obviously we are not simply about negation...

We need a politics that represent a forbidden proposition:

That humanity needs to be freed from imperialist empire and the global policeman that enforces it. We need forms of life, production and consumption that are sustainable.

And in exchange for the abolition of mindless waste, automobile culture, suburban sprawl, the dog eat dog of privilege and atomized individuals, of anomie and senselessness, of garrison national borders and gated communities ...

We should help promote a sense of a radically different road: of human solidarity, reenvisioned intimacy without domination, new forms of community,

It is increasingly possible for the first time in human history to really see the whole earth as an integrated whole, and see what is common for humanity as a whole.

What we need to fight toward, theoretically and then in the world of practical politics — is the way that the fight against a world of intolerable oppressions becomes wedded to a road that takes us ending all oppressions.

# EYEWITNESS OCCUPY SEATTLE: “MIC CHECK! THE WORLD! – DOES NOT! – HAVE TO! – BE THIS WAY!”

BY LIAM WRIGHT • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA MARCH 12, 2012

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**P**artially silhouetted forms stood beaming, holding glasses of champagne or some other refined beverage. Sometimes they smiled and pointed, sometimes laughed. The mocking jokes, though inaudible, were visible through panes of glass. The backdrop of the expensive lighting fixtures glistened from the high windows of the Sheraton Hotel.

They were pointing at us. The occupiers.

The scene down below was not so refined. Nor so polished or comfortable. Not with the sporadic arcs of mace and pepper spray. Not with the cops hitting us with their bicycles or our people being jumped by undercover when they reached down to help a fallen comrade. Not with the screams of indignation echoing the rage permeating everything. Not with the calls to “hold the line!” as we forced cops to give ground... defiance one only hears about in stories or dreams. No. Not so refined. But with all the dignity of the world.

This was the scene in Seattle on the night of November 2, 2011. It was the day of Oakland’s general strike. Which just so happened to be the day the CEO of JPMorganChase was scheduled to speak at that pleasant, refined, “suit” hotel. Perfect.

The day began with uncertainty. Did they know our plans? Would they attack us? Would they use pain tactics? Will we be hospitalized? If something happens, will those I hold dear know how much I love them? Will we be successful? What if we aren’t? Is our movement strong enough to work through such a setback?

These thoughts persisted as three of us approached a Chase Bank branch, only a few blocks away from our occupation.

The half-tinted windows made visible two young women, laughing, writing on what must have been deposit slips. Huge tubes of reflective red, silver, and white wrapping paper poked innocently from their large black garbage bag. The clerks and security looked tense, but they didn’t know what we were up to. At least, not yet.

One of our people, a young man with a half-hawk, opened the door. The other two of us walked through.

“Thank you,” the words came out more softly than I had intended.

We walked to the counter, catching the eyes of the women with the wrapping paper. Maybe it was just me but I felt everything in the room get tense. The sterile beauty of soft florescent lighting forced a sense of normalcy. People banking. Money exchanged. Tellers shuffling paper, having something to do with the profits of Chase. Maybe the paper he handled had to do with someone’s mortgage, bankruptcy, or loan. Financialization hard at work. This, the daily reality of plunder and parasitism, of speculation for super-profits at the expense of millions: The spirit of the normal; the spirit of accumulation above everything worth anything, including people was what we were out to disrupt, even for an instant. It felt like all eyes were on us. But it was probably just my nerves.

The five of us converged at the counter. Our arms dove into the tubes of wrapping paper. A foot of slender steel chains fell from each of our sleeves. Fifteen seconds later carabiner mountaineering clamps clicked shut. Our arms were chained together inside the PVC hidden beneath a layer of colorful Christmas paper.

*“Mic Check!”*

*“This bank!”*

*“IS”*

*“OCCUPIED!”*

Minutes later I started to hear militant chants as marchers closed in on the bank from a distance. Hundreds of them surrounded the building. And while the bank had tried to continue business before, with us locked together sitting in front of the tellers’ station, now the bank was entirely shut down. Keys went into the doors, turning to lock out the many.

I heard our statement read on each side of the building. A ‘mic check’ of “The world – Does not – Have to – Be this way!” pierced the glass. “General strike!” roared from the bullhorn. Damn. I felt incredible. We couldn’t have hoped for such success.

We settled in for a long stay. We played word games and made up an elaborate stories. On one side of the building a dance party broke out to revolutionary hip hop. On the other I heard chanting, mic checks, and agitation. All around us, excitement, enthusiasm. There was a sense that we were doing it. We were changing the world. It was tangible and almost palpable.

Eventually, some of the friendly faced cops came in and sawed us out of our pipes and cut our chains. It was okay. We knew we were going to be arrested. For more than two hours we kept that bank shut down. Twice what we thought we could pull off. They stood us up in hand cuffs, preparing for our procession outside, but when we got outside it was a whole other scene.

The excitement and enthusiasm was still there. But it wasn’t alone. Someone from the crowd called out, “Mic check! – Hail! – Hail! – Hail the heroes of the revolution!” Everyone took it up. I’m not one for self-aggrandizement, so I don’t know how I feel about “hail the heroes” thing, even if it was spontaneous and heartfelt. But I’ve never felt such love from such wonderful people. These people, the occupiers, are the most selfless, passionate, and high minded individuals I’ve encountered. It’s contagious. And it’s moments like that one where you really understand how important that is. It seems to me that it is a moral code, an ethics... almost a whole culture in embryo. It’s so radically different from how people are taught to think, live, act, and love. Yet it exists. Right here. As a fracture, a departure, out of which something new is emerging.

We were placed in a cop van, only to have our fellow occupiers start to push and rock. A spray of clear

liquid hit the small windows. The mace was out. We saw someone do a running dive under the van to keep it from leaving with us. We cried out in shock when we thought the van had run over him. He was alright. Even without that sacrifice, what he did, that was heroic.

A small window that looked out the front of the van revealed people laying on the ground linking arms and legs. Occupiers were shoving the bikes back at the cops. I’d never seen anything like this before.

Eventually uniformed enforcers were able to pry enough of our people out of the way to move the van. The last thing that I saw, peaking through those small windows, was the face of one of my comrades, hidden behind a bandana. Our eyes met and his fist launched into the air. The image faded in the distance while we made our coerced journey to the precinct.

I later learned that street skirmishes and shoving matches continued between the hundreds of occupiers and the cops. The police had tried force our people back to our camp. Instead the rebels pushed the cops off the streets, holding intersections and marching up and down Broadway. Those men (yes they were all men) in blue and black uniforms, were defeated. The protesters, now left alone, took the streets. That stretch of pavement was quite literally, for that fleeting moment, theirs. We could win— not some time in the future— but right here and now.

The day was a blur. The adrenaline, the ecstasy of collective action and power, makes what was hours of travel from handcuffs, to process, to cell now seem like minutes.

“Those girls are having way too much fun. They’re in there singing. I haven’t seen anything like this since the WTO,” said a tall white man in a nurse’s coat, long brown ponytail swinging behind him. I smiled to myself. Back in 1999, when the World Trade Organization had tried to meet in Seattle, it too had been shut down by people putting their bodies on the line.

The cold cement walls, the uniform sleeveless red shirts and pants, the cheap plastic sandals designed to be impossible to keep on, the smug police sitting behind counters pushing buttons to lock and unlock doors, the phones that hardly work... They all make you think of this place as an immovable, insurmountable monolith. Or maybe of your own powerlessness.

I was called out to get finger printed. One of the cop’s forensics people asked me, “Did you hear what they’re doing in Oakland?”

“Yah, its fantastic,” even where I was couldn’t keep

me from grinning with excitement.

“No, it’s terrible. I’m concerned about the people of Oakland.” He replied.

“It’s the people of Oakland that are rising up. The only way they can change anything is through shutting down the city. How do you think the eight hour work day was achieved? How about things like breaks? Or revolution?”

“Well what about the baker who just wants to go to work and feed his family?”

Another cop called to him from across the room, “That’s a stupid response!”

Later, while in our holding cell an, older white man walked by. The lines of age and stress told me he must have been in his fifties. He turned his back to us for a moment. When he walked away there was a taped a sign across from us: “Nurses support #OccupyWallstreet.” We saw him raise a fist, looking at us.

There I witnessed, as deep in the belly of the beast one can imagine, the cracks and potential division, even here surrounded by our enemies. In the future, there are fractures and schisms that may emerge even within institutions of the State.

With our triumphant spirit, we got our short-term inmates talking about occupation, about the cops, about the general strike. I joked with a couple of older guys, “It’s time we occupy this cell!” It doesn’t seem very often that the jail cops see their prisoners so jovial or hopeful.

**F**our or five hours later, we were released. As soon as the five of us regrouped and hugged it out, we received word: The CEO of Chase’s speech had been disrupted by Occupy Seattle. He had to end it early and Occupiers were trying to block the hotel exits.

We began our sprint through the rain, laughing, hugging, joking about going straight back to jail. None of us, as far as I could tell, could wait to get back to our fellow occupiers and stand with them again.

We’re back to the Sheraton. Every eye already bleary from the day-long exposure to chemical weapons. New

goggles and masks cover many faces. The spirit was different. The anger of being attacked all day, of seeing our friends and loved ones maced-or-beaten-or both gave it an edge. All those who once said the cops were on our side... well they now had little to stand on. It was undeniable: There, inside that looming hotel was Jamie Dimon, the face of one of the most criminal and insidious institutions in the world, and here, in front of us, were the cops defending them against over a thousand people.

When I arrived, out of breath but relieved, I started greeting people. They were happy to see us, but exhausted and tense. They were on a war footing. Dozens had their arms linked. It was the fallback tactic when facing the cops. All four ways through the intersection outside the main entrance to the hotel were blocked by damp, determined occupiers. The heavy din of honks and shouts from drivers, participants, and supporters alike went on in the background, hanging over everything.

I sprinted to and rejoin the line facing off with the cops. There, in the line with me, were all the people I had just gone to jail with. The five of us, now called the “Chase 5” by those who argue for our defense, grinned at each other, knowing that we had no choice but to stand there. We could feel the world shifting and us as a part of it. There was no way we could walk away.

A half hour passed, with periodic scuffles and mic checks and chants. It was clear that the towering Sheraton Hotel was now empty of any CEOs or equally criminal people. The remaining occupiers gathered and started to march away from downtown, back toward our camp.

I have been involved in attempts to build a revolutionary movement for a number of years. Never before have I left an action feeling like we won a battle. It has always been left in the realm of the symbolic or moral. “We did good work,” as it goes. But as we marched up the long hill, grinning faces moist with mace and rain the people of this new movement cheered and shouted together, “*We are victorious!*”

# MAY FIRST IN BROOKLYN: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WALK OUT

BY NAT WINN • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA MAY 4, 2012

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**A**s the high school students began to climb the hill in Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn, I could hear militant chanting. I could see their signs and banners, but not quite make out the words. These were dozens of young students, overwhelmingly Black and Latino. They were joined by a few of their teachers and supporters from Occupy the Hood and Occupy Wall Street.

As they reached the tall Prison Ship Martyrs Monument, their chant suddenly became clear:

“We make history everyday! By what we do and what we say!”

Some students had marched several miles to this park from Paul Robeson High School on May First — after walking out of school. Their school is scheduled to be phased out when the current freshman class graduates — ultimately paving the way for private charter schools that will go into the already swollen pockets of Mayor Bloomberg’s powerful friends.

The grievances of Paul Robeson students appeared in a YouTube video that went viral — calling out the city-wide school closing and bitterly criticizing their own treatment at the hands of school guards and police. They are speaking about what is happening to youth widely. And they pointed out that this disrespect is part of the same racist social programming that led to death of Trayvon Martin.

I saw them join together in this rally with about 30 students from Brooklyn Tech High School — which is right across the street from Fort Greene park. Brooklyn Tech students decided to march in solidarity with Paul Robeson.

Many of the kids from Brooklyn Tech had their own painful issue to raise: One of their close friends had been murdered by police.

Standing in the rally at Fort Greene Park, one student from Tech explained,

“I know many of us from Brooklyn Tech decide to walk out because of the death of Tamon. We demand justice for Tamon and everyone who is brutalized by the police.”

A young Latino girl, carrying an American flag, spoke up — very bold, very passionate, very sharp:

“Tamon’s death was not an accident. He was not killed. He was murdered!”

Everyone in the crowd shouted agreement.

These students from Robeson and Brooklyn Tech had walked out of school in the face of real threats. At Robeson, they were threatened with ten days of suspension and photographed by police as they walked out.

Yet, they obviously see a bigger picture: The cuts in education mean their futures are literally at stake. They refused to turn inward.

And they chose to walk out on May Day — in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street, and together with people all over the world. That too says something about their dreams and about this moment. The calls and ripples have gone out from Zucotti Park, and these students have answered in their own voice.

Once students converged from the two schools, their gathering blended a speak out with an Occupy general assembly. People rose to share their words — often telling of the outrages they experienced as students, and the aspirations they had for a society worth living in. They spoke, they danced, they read their poems.

One Black student ripped into American hypocrisy, pointing out:

“This country stole the land from other people and now calls these same people illegals.”

One of the white students there was encouraged by

his Black and Latino friends to get up and speak. They chanted his name and finally he went to the front of the rally. He was nervous, even stuttering a little bit. Then he said,

“I’m here cause this country is supposed to stand for liberty and justice for all. But lately I’ve been seeing that a lot of people are not getting any justice or liberty. So yeah, that’s why I’m here.”

As he shyly walked away, as his peers applauded those words.

A young bohemian-looking Black girl read a poem about suffering and poverty and concluded:

“Passion is power, this will be our hour. While we don’t own the restaurant, but work in the kitchen, But how would they fare, if no one washed their dishes?”

One young South Asian woman, with long hair and

dressed in a plaid shirt, sat down at the front of the rally and began playing the song “We are the world” on her guitar. I have always considered this song pretty corny. But when the students began singing along, and clapping their hands, the song took on a spirit different than I had understood. The words “It’s true we’ll make a better day” suddenly captured sentiments we were all sharing on that hill.

When the rally ended, I couldn’t help but feel optimistic about the future of humanity and see glimmers of the society I dream of.

I stopped to talk to that young Latino woman who was so angry over the death of her friend Tamon. I thanked her for her words. She said,

“I’m in this for the long haul. I won’t stop fighting until there is justice for everyone.”

# THE LEAP FROM DANGER TO OPPORTUNITY

BY JOSEPH G. RAMSEY • EXCERPTED FROM “CULTURE AND CRISIS” IN CULTURAL LOGIC: AN ELECTRONIC JOURNAL OF MARXIST THEORY AND PRACTICE, POSTED ON KASAMA JANUARY 11, 2012

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**W**e stand at an exciting juncture. The long suppressed—the scandalous fact of social class—has broken into the open even here in the US of A. A new language is spreading across the body politic, like an infection, or, perhaps, like the cure for one: *Occupy. Occupy. We Are the 99%*. Truths once whispered are now shouted. Ideas kept alive by lonely souls staring into flickering screens are painted across banners and taken up together down main streets. Beside them are poignant phrases that are but the public rendering of painful private horror stories too long swallowed in place of bread. Cracks in the ruling walls can be seen for miles, and below them, in the light that slips through, the buds for a thousand red blossoms are seeking—*finding*—roots.

In the wake of a revolutionary Arab Spring, and a European Summer filled with revolt— from Madrid, to London, to Athens – we have lived through an American Autumn, or perhaps more appropriately, considering the teetering hegemonic position of the US in this trembling

world-system: the start of the American *Fall*. After a long series of compound crises, for the left, for the toiling (and jobless!) masses of the world, and for the planet itself, a radical opportunity is suddenly upon us.

*What will we do with it?*

We are in a moment when projects that once seemed like utopian fantasies now appear on the verge of becoming possible. It is a moment when dominant institutions, built to look Immortal, suddenly look time-bound and vulnerable. (You can see the Financial Towers tilt in the shifting wind.) Just as we enter 2012, a year much discussed and joked about across pop culture as “the end of the world,” it is possible again to imagine the end of capitalism, instead. *Let us make room for this imagining!*

Faced with a movement boasting transparent and horizontal social networks, need-based gift economies, participatory consensus decision-making, mass direct action and radical democracy, and creative, fearless truth-telling, the concrete blocks and glass walls of Big

Finance and the State alike increasingly look out-of-date — grotesque monuments to a top-down, tyrannical, capitalist mode of production that has long outlived its usefulness. “The Beginning is Near,” proclaims the website of Occupied Wall Street. Indeed.

*What ruling institutions in this society could not, should not, be occupied?* The very name of this upsurge suggests its infectious potentiality, its wide if not universal translatability. To speak of occupy is to conjure a challenge: *How can we, how will we (the 99%) take our world back from those who now rule it?*

As this special issue goes “live,” a deep questioning of many fundamental tenets of capitalism is occurring on a mass scale (in various registers), not only within Occupy, but in countless communities across the United States— in taxicabs, at bars, and bus stops, at kitchen tables. The very existence of the occupations has authorized the raising of voices elsewhere, the voicing of truths in places that are built to exclude them. *We must listen closely to these new voices. And meet them where they break through.*

Similarly, for countless occupiers, the experience of collaboration and sustained common work that the occupations offered, and the uncompromising determination they represent, have pulled against the fragmentation, isolation, and cynicism of this terminal capitalist age. Even miles away from an encampment— even weeks after our encampments have been overrun— we still carry in our minds a common space, a spatial symbol of the commons. Our minds continue to be *occupied* by the question of what is to be done. *How can we take our world back?*

**T**he majority of the occupations across the US, of course, have been evicted and dismantled, meaning that tens of thousands of occupiers now are settling into a transitional winter, a time of indoor reorganization and reflection. Though the global winter was up until then suspiciously warm, authorities invoked the prospect of blizzards, evicting us for “our own protection” (even while disallowing the introduction of winterized tents!) “Public safety” becomes an ironic call in the mouth of a state that auctions the “public” to the highest private bidder. The electronic winter wires are humming still though; the Occu-planning continues, as our creative, non-violent guerilla war vs. “1%” enters its next phase. (In Boston there are plans to Occupy the T!)

In the cold of winter though we must not forget,

must keep the flickering flame of occupy alive, confident in the truth that it can and must spread again come Spring (or perhaps sooner!). We must not allow ourselves to forget how in the amazing swirl and swell of not much more than a month, the streets and public commons came to life. To paraphrase Badiou: *Let us dare to believe what we could only believe once.* In the cold of winter we must keep fidelity to this event, even in the absence of sustained camps. Must keep our twinkling (and ourwhen necessary our squid) fingers warm, all the while conducting the mass grassroots investigation and outreach that will make possible the Global Occupied Spring.

Fueled by the suffering and outrage of not just three years of economic superrecession since the onset of the Great Financial Crisis of 2007–2008, but decades — centuries — of misery and mayhem under this system, (in “good times” as well as “bad,”) the Occupy Wall Street movement burst the scene, drawing hundreds of thousands, even millions, into creative forms of sustained discussion, organization, and struggle. Employing a range of methods associated with anarchism, the movement has been international in form: Sparked and sustained by the inspiration of recent revolutionary occupations, from Egypt and Tunisia (which may just have put the stake through the heart of the vampiric ‘War on Terror’ as a hegemonic narrative), to the mass anti-austerity mobilizations in Wisconsin. People who have never engaged in public protest before have faced down police and pepper spray in the streets to stake their claim on shaping the future of this world. Returning Iraq veterans have resisted the police alongside students who were too young to have protested that invasion. (Has Occupy, in touching off the brute spectacle of state violence against the encampments of the anxious and insolent poor become the *Bonus Army moment* of our 21st century Depression?) They have picketed and struck en masse, closing major city ports. They have rallied by the thousands defying and outflanking the riot cop armies of the billionaire Mayor of New York, who some have dubbed, prophetically, “Mubarak Bloomberg.” They have driven back horse-mounted police in Portland. Comrades in Seattle throw their very bodies between the wheels of cop vans, stopping the beast in its tracks. They are dispersed, but they return. In Boston thousands rallied to the defense of Dewey Square, holding the camp for that one more night. . . And so it goes.

Though the media attention lags with the closing of the physical camps, the common sense of this movement

– that the “representatives” in government serve not the people but the big commercial interests, and that these 1% interests have a predatory relationship to the masses of people – has taken hold. Polls have shown broader public sympathy for the Occupy movement than for either the Executive or the Legislative branch of the US government – not to mention the Big Banks. The unfolding Presidential “debates” appear all the more ridiculous, infantile, grotesque against the backdrop of actual debate that Occupy has helped unleash.

These occupations have not been just “protests.” They have become spaces for the sharing of ideas, schools for interrogating the system we are up against, a sustained public presence to keep in people’s minds elsewhere the issues at stake, a site from which sparks fly to incite further rebellion, from the “Hood” and the “Barrio” to the halls of Harvard University. [1]

Occupy has been not just a registering of dissent, but a sustained experiment in reordering social life, one that, in the main, does not seek redress or concessions (nor permission or approval) from the state, or even from “the 1%.” Rather, at its best, Occupy works to expose the ruling elite and their system to the rest of “the 99%,” confident – even audacious – in the truth that if this “99%” can find a way to move together, then all the towering wealth and power of that “1%” (and the 0.1%, in fact) can be overcome.

As a chant at Occupied Boston had it recently:

“We Are Many. They Are Few. When We All Stand Up, What Can They Do?”

With every teach-in, with every march – whether for labor rights, for ecology, against police brutality, against racist deportations, or imperialist war – with every democratic meeting that takes form in the face of the glass bastions of capitalist finance, Occupy Wall Street shames, exposes, and delegitimizes the economic and political establishment. Police brutalizers are mocked in a million internet images.

The creativity that has come forth from all sorts of unexpected places these past months testifies to the material possibility of creating new kinds of relationships and new radical culture, in a shockingly short period of time. Possibilities abound as what Badiou called “lightning displacements” of people from their proscribed social spaces spread. As Lenin once famously wrote, “There are decades when nothing happens. And then there are

weeks when decades happen.” We would appear to be several weeks in to the latter sort of time. *We should dare to imagine what three years of this sort of Occupy time might look like!*

The Occupy movement has become an Event (in something like communist philosopher Alain Badiou’s sense of the term). It has created a major rupture in the prevailing culture and discourse, giving a name and a visibility to an aspect of existence which has long been present and yet largely buried and denied. (Here I think of the child who points out, before all the imperial subjects, that the Emperor has no clothes, thus making an open-yet-hidden aspect of reality all but impossible to ignore: Since not only do we know he is naked, but we know that others know that we know. And this changes the nature of the knowledge. We know we are not alone in our possession of this truth.) At the site of this rupture, Occupy further draws forth militant subjects into the common body of a truth-process, one that has its own unique and irreducible dynamics, even its own new language (including new hand gestures).

However much such subjects may (and must) draw on truths from Marxism and other traditions of revolutionary theory and practice, there is no getting around the fresh particularities of this new political field. As Badiou puts it in *Theory of the Subject* (1982, 2009), “The ‘right ideas’ of the masses, which the Marxist party must concentrate, are necessarily new ideas” (39, my emphasis). Many on the Left, Marxist and otherwise, should admit it: even as our theories taught us that resistance of some kind was inevitable – given this or that (objective) social tendency — we have been surprised by the new and specific (subjective) form it has assumed. *How will we learn the lessons of our own surprise?*

Already the eruption of this movement — perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it an *insistence*, a refusal *to move* on from or to let go of the power of a basic truth — has sent remarkable waves and ripples through US society in particular. The basic and undeniable facts of income and wealth inequality and the consequent inequalities of political power – previously confined to margins, to radical blogs, to Marxist cells, and Facebook posts – now occupy central stages in the newspapers, the magazines, even on mainstream television. The virtues and vices of capitalism are up for open debate in the Letters pages of the widest circulating newspapers. The thinness of the argument for “the way things are” is increasingly on display. The Imperial 1% stand increasingly naked, with



only their armored thugs to protect them.

The door to a thousand conversations — about class, about capital, about resistance, about revolution — have flung open before each us. Discussions and debates about fundamental issues of class power and socioeconomic injustice — the sorts of concerns which have long been the stuff of *Cultural Logic*, but which are often cast to the margins of academia — spread. Let us seize and extend this moment. Let us walk through these open doors, and knock upon others. Let us refuse to come to see this past Fall as some sort of fluke, some exception to the restored rule! Let us consider our broader communities—indeed, the world—our classroom—a classroom in which to learn as well as teach, to listen as well as to speak.

The prevailing rhetoric of the movement — “We are the 99%” — whatever its limits as strict social theory, has plenty that radicals should unite with: it has restored a (dialectical) concept of class to mainstream American discourse, and with it a populist frame that holds great, even revolutionary, potential. The content of the “We are the 99%” banner is not in any static identity of American people,—significantly it is global, not nationalist in orientation. Rather the identity of the “99%” is derived in their common enemy: “the 1%,” against which “We” unite, subjectively, even as our precise class position (or political ideology) varies. The banner’s value is partly in how it points the finger — *which* finger it points I leave to the reader to decide! — at those who control and benefit from an economic and political system that operates at the expense of the vast majority of humanity, not to mention other living creatures on the planet. The language of the “99%” gives the lie to the myth that “we are all in it together,” while insisting that the vast majority of us \*do\* have a great deal in common.

At its radical best, this fresh language points to the causal relationship, to the dialectical unity and opposition between the wealth of the 1% on the one hand and the struggles and deprivation of the 99% on the other. In this way Occupy provides the bare bones upon which to flesh out a concept of capitalist class exploitation on an accessible, mass basis. It thus points beyond the stabilizing rhetoric of “the middle class” — long proclaimed to be the only “class” in America — and excites subjects to militancy and courage precisely because it does so. It is the recognition of what THEY, the 1%, are capable of that makes the construction of a genuine, collective WE

so crucial, so possible, and so necessary. For the 1%, by virtue of their structural position as predatory capitalists, cannot but continue to prey upon us.

But the value of the “99%” notion goes beyond its identification of a clear, class enemy—and its suggestion of class exploitation as a reality of social life. It also evokes the actual and the potential power of the organized and mobilized masses, their (our) ability to overrun the 1%. To overgrow and overthrow them. As one recent Occupy poster put it, “99 to 1. *Those are great odds.*” This symbol thus points beyond the rhetoric of victimization that often predominates in what mainstream US discourse there is about class inequality. It signifies, the suppressed, newly unleashed yet still untapped capacities, not the helplessness, of the long suppressed and oppressed masses.

The statistical abstraction of the “99%” itself, while not without dangers (notably, potential blind spots around class and race stratification as well as ideological contradictions within “the 99%”), also has its virtues. Its very openness and emptiness represent an opportunity for radical intervention. This is not a fixed populism of the wholesome People being infested by some corruptive and impure Outsiders. (Keeping fidelity to the *internationalism* of this event, and this new subjectivity remains crucial.) Even where radical understanding lags, the numeric impersonality points to the cold and structural nature of the problems we face; similarly, it points beyond a simple moralization against “bad” or “greedy” corporations (even as such moralizing language still persists in many places, as do other liberal residuals). Rather than settle the Identity of the movement, the all-but-empty signifier raises fundamental questions, questions that should be ripe for Marxist intervention: *What is the nature of this 1% “enemy”? What exactly separates “us” (the 99%) from “them”? How is this 99/1% split produced and maintained? How did we come this point historically? Do we even need a “1%” ruling over this society at all? And if not, what is necessary to make this 1% no longer necessary and/or possible?* While there is plenty of moralizing about “corporate greed,” there is also quite broad agreement within the movement that what is called for is a major shift in class power, or even more radically, a fundamental changing of the economic game, not simply a lesson in ethics, nor a changing in the politicians in charge of squeezing profit-opportunities from the planetary mess. The 99/1% framing of the movement suggests, at its sharpest, that the ruling elites are not qualified, by virtue of their structural position within this system, to represent the vast majority of people, their

so called “constituents” (let alone their “employees”).

**A**nd yet, of course, like any populism, the Occupy is not without its contradictions, its dangers, its opportunists, its confusions, its competing interpretations, its risks of co-optation or just plain exhaustion.

(An American Winter is upon us, and already radically different ideas about the American Spring contend).

All sorts of debates about the current situation and the nature of the system we are in – its roots, its determinations, its future trajectory – are occurring within this mix; likewise many debates about what is to be done, and how to do it.

Looking toward the New Year, it is my hope that the current issue of *Cultural Logic* can be of use especially to those who are involved in such discussions. I do believe

that the contributions in “Culture & Crisis” can help organizers, activists, and occupiers to sharpen and deepen their understanding of the nature of the system under which we live (at its various levels of operation), as well as to learn critical lessons about past attempts to grasp and to transform this system in a progressive or revolutionary way.

Marxist editors and writers alike can ask for little more than to have their critical work read and discussed in a moment like this, by those who are working both to reinterpret the world and to change it...unless it is to hear these comrades’ reply.

#### NOTES

[1] For a sense of the radical education efforts this editor has been personally involved in, see the website of the Howard Zinn Memorial Lecture Series at Occupy Boston, a part of the Free School University at Dewey Square: <http://www.zinnlectures.wordpress.com> .

# PRECARIOUSLY EMPLOYED BROTHERS & SISTERS IN OUR REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

BY NAT WINN • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA MAY 23, 2012

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**R**evolutionary change calls for strategy. Who should we base a revolutionary movement among? Who are the intermediate allies who might support radical change? What are the necessary types of organization we need and the most effective forms of resistance?

The emergence of mass resistance all over the world since the Arab Spring has brought these questions to the fore for revolutionaries. Things are complicated by a society in great flux. Here in the United States sections of the oppressed have been distanced from production and forced into the illegal economy. Those still employed have had their lives destabilized by things such as the rust belt phenomenon and the pressure to accept lower wages and benefits. Sections of the middle classes (including even

many middle level managers in corporations) have felt their lives taken over by workload and insecurity – even when they have not yet literally been pushed down among the oppressed. So who do we look to in the current situation; which forces are our potential revolutionary cores?

With the emergence of the Occupy movement the hope for radical transformation has come alive. Revolutionary minded people are now dealing with the political activity of large sections of people. Many groups both old and new are beginning to think more about revolutionary agency and are provided with the opportunity to put their ideas and summation into practice around a mass movement whose orientation has been at a distance from the state and mainstream electoral politics.

In light of the new situation it is interesting to study and learn from a debate that has broken out within the Occupy movement over the radical agency. The Oakland-based Bay of Rage blog posted an anonymous article entitled Blockading the Port Is Only The First of Many Last Resorts. Geoff Bailey and Kyle Browne responded to the Bay of Rage post in “The rise of the ‘precariat’?” in the pages of the Socialist Worker .

While a communist perspective may have some disagreements with these poles of argumentation - it is valuable that they are grappling with similar questions.

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## REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECT (SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND)

**T**he working class is not some homogenous thing — unchanged by time and conditions. The young, restless, rootless class that first congealed in early factories was sometimes highly radical — but the political openness of different emerging sections of workers changed over decades. This change was marked by struggle over which sections of the oppressed had the most potential for basing a revolutionary movement around it.

Karl Marx famously argued that there was a then-new propertyless class that was emerging -- exploited by the then-new capitalist class.

That propertyless class was called the proletariat (picking up a term from ancient Rome) and was defined by having “nothing to lose but its chains.” It no longer owned small means of production (as some productive farmers and artisans had previously done). And it was a rowdy, rough-hewn outlaw class – whose almost universally illegal struggles took the form of great lawless outbursts or quiet subversive conspiracies.

That proletarian working class was exploited in production – including increasingly within the capitalist industrial-factory production that increasingly took form during the 19th century. But from the beginning large sections of that class were not directly selling their labor power to exploiters – including proletarian youth not yet old enough to work, large numbers of unemployed, the retired and crippled, and of course sections of women proletarians (some of whom started to work in factories, but more of whom often still slaved in the dreary reproduction of domestic life within the working class family.)

This Marxist understanding viewed the proletariat as

an often desperate class – “Free as the birds” Lenin once said, meaning free to go where there are crumbs or else free to starve.

This “nothing to lose” element was one part of what made the proletariat potentially a class basis for the most radical and revolutionary ideas.

And, at the same time, the proletariat’s connection to the most socialized and disciplined production form in history, was a second element that made them the potential organizer of a whole new system of social ownership: the socialist society with a planned economic life that could form a transition to communist classless society.

Desperation made them potentially revolutionary, socialization made them the potential carriers of a new social order.

Several arguments have stood opposed to this concept:

One rather conservative view viewed the working class as important because it was able to pressure the capitalists well – from its control of economic choke-points at the point of production. Others viewed the working class as important because it “made everything” – and therefore was a kind of responsible class inherently opposed to the recklessness and destructiveness of capitalism.

Another historic argument is that radical change was mainly attractive to those desperate elements excluded from production: that it is the decomposing or declassed elements in society that will make up the core of the revolutionary subject. These include peasants who are becoming proletarianized through dispossession of their land or artisans losing their specialization due to machinery and mass production, or the criminal elements who gathered in the slums of the capitalist world.

The differences between these arguments have become more stark over time because of two phenomena:

First, the colonial system created a great revolutionary wave in the Third World where socialist revolution emerged closely allied to a radical agrarian revolution of the peasantry. In other words it was not the organization of industrial workers in factories that was the defining revolutionary feature – it was the alliances of the oppressed (workers and peasants) forming armies for seizing power.

Second, that same colonial system accelerated a stratification within the working class of imperialist countries. Initially a small highly skilled upper stratum of workers became politically “bourgeoisified.” But over a century, this conservatization affected broader sections of the workers – in the U.S., the industrial workers in

major factories developed a much more stable life in the 1950s (after the turmoil of the 1930s and the global war of the 1940s). In the U.S., the radical activity among working people shifted from the world of factories and trade unions – to the bitter conditions of slums. It was the Black Liberation struggle that stirred significant sections of proletarian people in the U.S. – drawing hundreds of thousands of Black and Latino proletarian youth toward radical politics in the 1960s (as expressed first by the great urban rebellions and “long hot summers” of that period, and then by conscious political organizations like the Black Panther Party.)

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## THE ARGUMENT WITHIN OCCUPY

**B**ailey and Browne from the Socialist Worker want to criticize those forces that posit the existence of a new class composition emerging with a new revolutionary subject, that some call the “Precariat”.

This class is made up of “masses of people who work in unorganized workplaces, who are unemployed or underemployed or precarious in one way or another” as described by the Bay of Rage Blockading... article. (The Bay of Rage Blockading... article does not actually use the term precariat.) This class would have emerged out of the process of neo-liberalism and de-industrialization that began in the 1970s and moved a large amount of manufacturing out of urban areas of the richest countries to developing countries and which began to take apart the social welfare apparatus that provided some stability for large sections of the working classes in the developed (imperialist) countries.

The Bay of Rage Blockading... asserts the following changes as having led to the current phase of capitalism...

“From the 1970s on, one of capital’s responses to the reproduction crisis has been to shift its focus from the sites of production to the (non)sites of circulation. Once the introduction of labor-saving technology into the production of goods no longer generated substantial profits, firms focused on speeding up and more cheaply circulating both commodity capital (in the case of the shipping, wholesaling and retailing industries) and money capital (in the case of banking). Such restructuring is a big part of what is often termed ‘neoliberalism’ or ‘globalization,’ modes of accumulation in which the shipping industry and globally-distributed supply chains assume a new primacy. The invention of the shipping

container and container ship is analogous, in this way, to the reinvention of derivatives trading in the 1970s – a technical intervention which multiplies the volume of capital in circulation several times over.”

The same Bay of Rage article then asserts, for instance, that the subject of the general strike has thus shifted away from the industrialized factory worker and toward this new subject. This new subject is defined by propertylessness in juxtaposition to the working class which is supposedly defined by the fact that it works. This Oakland article posits the agency of this section of proletarians when it states:

“This is why the general strike on Nov. 2 appeared as it did, not as the voluntary withdrawal of labor from large factories and the like (where so few of us work), but rather as masses of people who work in unorganized workplaces, who are unemployed or underemployed or precarious in one way or another, converging on the chokepoints of capital flow. Where workers in large workplaces—the ports, for instance— did withdraw their labor, this occurred after the fact of an intervention by an extrinsic proletariat.”

The Bailey and Browne article argues that the so-called precariat has always existed. They assert that the increase of this new base of precarious workers has less to do with the emergence of a new class than with the results of the war perpetrated on labor by neo-liberalism in the past 40 years or so. Bailey and Browne argue that the working class as such still constitutes the revolutionary subject, detailing aspects of its current composition including the emergence of the huge service sector which includes many women and people of color. It also tries to show how strike actions in recent history only were able to effectively slow down the circulation of capital after the support of labor unions was won.

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## CLASS COMPOSITION

**O**n May First, Brooklyn High School students raised the chant “We make history everyday! By what we do and what we say!” Their struggle and grievances rose from the conditions of Black working people -- but hardly in ways confined to the production or circulation of commodities.

Bailey and Browne pose that changes in the working class are essentially changes of scale and that they are attributable not so much to the emergence of a new class but to the class struggle and the victories of the capitalists in weakening the position of labor since the era of neo-

liberalism.

The pull of the SW argument is to look for those areas where the capitalism looks like it did in its 19th century industrial phase and to look at these spaces as the points where there is the most potential for radical activity that can serve as the basis for societal transformation. In this regard the growth of industrial production is sited as well as the move of industrial production in the US from the Midwest to the Southeast. They also mention the huge service sector as an important part of the working class and posit it against the notion that the proletariat is mostly precarious and also to emphasize what it sees as the still primary role of the working class and trade unions (at a time when one of the largest trade unions in the country is the service workers union SEIU).

The tendency to look at those sections of the proletariat which seem the most disciplined and organized and possess a position in the economy which seem to give it a type of power over the stability of capital flow is an approach precisely that targets the more conservative sectors of the working class. It is a method of class analysis that looks for where things have remained similar to old analysis and it does not adjust and develop its analysis to what is changing, what is emerging and the opportunities for new forms of resistance as capitalism evolves and transforms.

Thus Bailey and Browne can look at the immigrant day laborer as proof that the precariousness of work is nothing new, though it fails to mention how the uncertainty and novelty of being uprooted from the countryside and sucked into meatpacking plants and hotels, being exposed to the wealth around them while still being superexploited can serve as a potentially radicalizing dynamic.

Blockading... on the other hand says that:

“We find it helpful here to distinguish between the working class and the proletariat. Though many of us are both members of the working class and proletarians, these terms do not necessarily mean the same thing. The working class is defined by work, by the fact that it works. It is defined by the wage, on the one hand, and its capacity to produce value on the other. But the proletariat is defined by propertylessness. In Rome, proletarius was the name for someone who owned no property save his own offspring and himself, and frequently sold both into slavery as a result. Proletarians are those who are ‘without reserves’ and therefore dependent upon the wage and capital. They have ‘nothing to sell except their own skins.’ The important point to make here is that not all

proletarians are working-class, since not all proletarians work for a wage.”

There is not much to gain by fighting over semantics, but in a communist view, large sections of the “working class” have always been unemployed and unpaid. And it seems a bit pedantic to assume that only people who “work for a wage” are working class.

For example, retired or disabled auto workers are working class. They don’t become part of some OTHER class when they lose the ability to work. The daughter of a coal miner is working class – even if it was often difficult for many girls to find wage work in much of the U.S. coalfields. Many immigrant women and even immigrant children work for wages or piece rates in the fields – and they are clearly working class by anyone’s definitions. But women who are part of a family of migrant ranch hands are part of the working class – even if some of them are not paid by the cattle ranch, and spends their time in massive unpaid work raising a garden, making food, scrubbing clothes, raising kids, etc. Even most prisoners and people on welfare should be considered part of the working class (as their class of origin and their general property-less state).

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## WHICH PRECARIAT?

It is clear that key changes with the advent of neo-liberalism have altered the composition of the working class in the past four decades particularly within the metro-poles themselves. Because of the opening up markets internationally along with deregulation of constraints on financial and commodity mobility, it has been possible for capital to take back some of the crumbs it had historically given to its privileged working class sections. Thus wages have been driven down, unemployment and non-regular employment have gone up and the quantitative rise in the precarious section of the proletariat has become a fixed part of capital relations in all the more developed capitalist countries.

It is also true that the current global economic crisis we find ourselves in has led to a wave of resistance across the world and that the key elements within this wave have been this precarious element. Part of this precarious element have been young people who traditionally would have been part of the more privileged middle classes but cannot find work due to new constraints on capital investment due to the current crisis.

It is also true however that there are sections of the proletariat who do not work or are underemployed or otherwise thrown into volatile and desperate situations who have not fallen from the ranks of the middle class. One can think of African American people in urban areas who are in a state of near permanent poverty and unemployment and whose struggle for survival drive some into the informal economy. There are also the undocumented and their children( who are very acculturated into US society yet are kept out of participating in society both legally and culturally). What about poor white proletarians who may live in trailer homes and are caught up in a stark sense that they have less and less chance of a way out?

It is a fact then that even among the jobless and underemployed sections of the proletariat there are distinctions to be made and analysis to be done among which sections of the people have the potential to make up a core of a revolutionary movement.

Lenin once famously wrote in the middle of World War 1:

“Neither we nor anyone else can calculate precisely what portion of the proletariat is following and will follow the social-chauvinists and opportunists. This will be revealed only by the struggle, it will be definitely decided only by the socialist revolution. But we know for certain that the ‘defenders of the fatherland’ in the imperialist war represent only a minority. And it is therefore our duty, if we wish to remain socialists to go down lower and deeper, to the real masses; this is the whole meaning and the whole purport of the struggle against opportunism.”

This suggestion “to go down lower and deeper, to the real masses” is something we should take to heart today – when it is even more important and necessary than a century ago.

From a certain view it seems that there is actually a similarity in the positions of Bailey and Browne article and those forces that speak of the precariat as a new potential revolutionary agent.

The similarity rests in the argument that there are sections of the working class who are currently or were “better off” that will become radicalized once their privileges are taken away.

This point may have validity however radicalism does not always go in a progressive direction, and it would be interesting to look at the way in which these formerly privileged sections of the workers or declassed elements of the middle strata actually become radicalized.

Often the anger coming out of such sections is not

so radical. We hear calls to go “back to the good old days”, or to “buy American.” Movements such as the Tea Party come to mind or at best a call for some kind of a new New Deal. Often these patriotic sentiments emerge out of different sections of the people in general terms. For instance bourgeoisified workers who are losing their privileges may be attracted to a new New Deal, where small business people and retired military lifer make up the base of the Tea Party.

One could argue that a section of college grads who have no immediate potential for employment and have accumulated massive amounts of debt has gravitated to a more progressive form of radicalism embodied in its association with the Occupy Movement. This is a fair point and deserves more investigation.

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## DISRUPTING CAPITAL FLOW OR ORGANIZING FOR REVOLUTION?

In the Bay of Rage Blockading... and the Socialist Worker’s Bailey and Browne articles there is a contention on whether the new capitalist relations warrant organizing resistance at the point of production or the point of circulation.

This seems like a false dichotomy. Is political resistance really wedded mainly to competing points in economic life? Doesn’t politics generally, the struggle over power (and revolutionary politics in particular) have a life that is relatively autonomous from economics, from both the production and circulation of goods? There is a subtle assumption in the articles that because a certain section of the proletariat is positioned either at the point of production or circulation that this dictate in a strategic sense how we might determine particular forms of resistance. Too much emphasis is put in both articles about disrupting capital flow. What tactics we might use to do so or what section of the people can do so most effectively?

In short making revolution is not about disrupting capital flow.

We have talked on Kasama about a conjunctural view of class struggle versus a view that is merely structural.

The notion that we organize a section of the proletariat simply because of where it is positioned in relation to capital flow is a structural argument. It sees the class struggle as being decided in the realm of economics.

A conjunctural view sees the class struggle being

decided ultimately in the realm of politics. We base our ideas on what peoples have the greatest potential to be a core revolutionary force on the way its role in society affects its overall world outlook in general terms.

We contend that the revolution will not be won through our effectiveness in merely stopping the flow of

capital. It is necessary to organize a revolutionary core for fighting to defeat the capitalist class politically through mass struggle and ultimately war. It is necessary that in the process of this struggle that this revolutionary force develop its ability to run society and lead society on a communist road..

# OCCUPATION AS POLITICAL FORM

BY JODI DEAN • ORIGINALLY APPEARED ON OCCUPEVERYTHING.ORG, POSTED ON KASAMA SEPTEMBER 27, 2012

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*Original Editor's Note:* Jodi Dean presented the following text as a keynote lecture for the 2012 iteration of Transmediale, an annual new media festival in Berlin. The theme of the 2012 festival was “In/compatibility... the condition that arises when things do not work together.” The section of the festival at which the author presented was titled “Incompatible Publics.” The discussion that followed Dean’s lecture was moderated by Krystian Woznicki and may be read at <http://occupyeverything.org/2012/occupation-as-political-form/>.  
–MW

I’m going to talk today about Occupy Wall Street in light of our theme of incompatible publics. I claim that the occupation is best understood as a political form of the incompatibility between capitalism and the people. To call it a political form is to say that it is configured within a particular social-historical setting. To call it a political form of the incompatibility between capitalism and the people is to say that it has a fundamental content and that this content consists in the failure of capitalism to provide an economic system adequate to the capacities, needs, demands, and general will of the people. More bluntly put, to think about the Occupy movement in light of the idea of incompatible publics is to locate the truth of the movement in class struggle (and thus reject interpretations of the movement that highlight multiplicity, democracy, and anarchism—autonomism). So that’s what I hope to convince you of today.

The movement opened up by Occupy Wall Street is the most exciting event on the US political left since 1968—it’s like, my god, finally we can breathe, finally there is an opening, a possibility of organized mass political action. As in 1968, the current movement extends globally, encompasses multiple grievances, and

is being met by violent police responses. From Egypt to New York, Spain to Oakland, hundreds of thousands of people have responded to capitalist dispossession by taking space, occupying sites that, ostensibly open and public, the process of occupation reveals to be closed to the many and belonging to the few. Also as in 1968, an economic wrong, the wrong of capitalism, is at the core of the political rupture. Recall that in May ‘68, a general strike shut down the French economy. Students occupied the Sorbonne and workers occupied factories. In September 2011, protesters in New York occupied Wall Street. They were inspired by revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, the February occupation of the Wisconsin State Capitol, and the 15 May movement of the squares in Spain (as well as by the occupation movements that in recent years have accompanied protests over cutbacks in education and increases in university tuition in California, New York, and the UK).

That Wall Street was actually the nearby privately owned Zuccotti Park didn’t really matter. What mattered, and what opened up a new space of political possibility in the US, was that people were finally waking up to the ultimate incompatibility between capitalism and the

people—after forty years of neoliberalism’s assault on the working and middle class and after a decade of rapacious class warfare in which the top one percent saw an income increase of 275% (their share of the national income more than doubling) while most of the rest of the country saw an income increase of roughly 1% a year. Instead of continuing in the fantasy that “what’s good for Wall Street, is good for Main Street,” the occupation claimed the division between Wall Street and Main Street and named this division as a fundamental wrong, the wrong of inequality, exploitation, and theft.

Occupy Wall Street’s staging of the incompatibility between capitalism and the people was visible, material, and practical. Visibly, urban camping brought to the heart of New York’s financial district the reality of dispossession. It forced Wall Street to look homelessness in the face, both the homelessness of the New Yorkers that the city had been trying to repress, hide, and disperse and that of those across the country who had been evicted in the foreclosure crisis and left to dwell in make shift tent cities reminiscent of shanty towns and Hoovervilles of the Depression. Materially, the presence of people crowded into places where capitalism has determined they don’t belong was manifest in the array of physical needs impressing and expressing themselves in Zuccotti park—the absence of public toilets and showers, the impermissibility of gas-run generators, open flames for cooking, and the illegality of tents resulted in a series of issues encapsulated in the media under the headings public health, filth, and disease. Practically, Occupy Wall Street—and the police reaction to it—led to the proliferation of police barriers all over downtown Manhattan. Even more important, the daily activities of occupiers strove to bring into being new practices of sociality, new ways of living together, ways no longer coordinated by the capital but by discussion, mutuality, and consensus. Not surprisingly, in the course of these practical engagements, new incompatibilities emerged and were only beginning to be addressed when Zuccotti Park was evicted.

The movement’s early slogan, “We are the 99 Percent,” quickly went viral. It spread in part because of the Tumblr collection of images and testimonials to the hardships of debt, foreclosure, and unemployment, a “coming out” of the closet imposed by the conceit that everyone is middle class, everyone is successful. Conservative politicians bristled with indignation at

what they depicted as the unfairness of the many who were now refusing to accept the one percent’s seizure of an outrageously unfair portion of the common product. Presidential candidate Mitt Romney scolded what he called the “politics of envy.” These privileged carriers of the 99 versus the 1 percent meme couldn’t quite grasp the change in the situation, the shift in the status quo whereby people no longer believed the myths that “greed is good” and “inequality benefits everyone.” They attempted to turn the issue around, making themselves into victims of exclusion and invective, as if the 99% were the criminals, as if our primary condition had been mutually compatible until some malcontents started to cause trouble, as if class war were a new rather than constitutive incompatibility between those who need to work to live and those who have enough capital not to. A fortunate effect of this tactic was the continued accentuation of class division—as a recent poll from the Pew Foundation found, 66% of Americans think that divisions between rich and poor are strong or very strong, an increase of 19% since 2009. Not only is this view held in every demographic category but more people think that class division is the principle social division than they do any other division.

The slogan “We are the 99%” highlights the division between the wealth of the top 1% and the rest of us. Mobilizing the gap between the 1% with nearly half the country’s wealth and the other 99% with the rest of it, the slogan asserts a collectivity. It does not unify this collectivity under a substantial identity—race, ethnicity, religion, nationality. Nor does it proceed as if there were some kind of generic and unified public. It rejects the fantasy of a unified, non-antagonistic public to assert the “we” of a divided people, the people divided between expropriators and expropriated. In the setting of an occupied Wall Street, this “we” is a class, one of two opposed and hostile classes, those who have and control wealth, and those who do not.

The assertion of a numerical difference as a political difference, that is to say, the politicization of a statistic, expresses capitalism’s reliance on fundamental inequality—“we” can never all be counted as the top 1%. Thus, the announcement that “We are the 99%” names an appropriation, a wrong. In so doing, it voices as well a collective desire for equality and justice, for a change in the conditions through which one percent seizes the bulk of collective wealth for themselves, leaving 99% with the remainder.

“We are the 99%” also effaces the multiplicity of



individuated, partial, and divided interests that fragment and weaken the people as the rest of us. The count dis-individualizes interest and desire, reconfiguring both into a common form. Against capital's constant attempts to pulverize and decompose the collective people, the claim of the 99% responds with the force of a belonging that not only cannot be erased but that capital's own methods of accounting produce: as capital demolishes all previous social ties, the counting on which it depends provides a new figure of belonging. Capital has to measure itself, count its profits, its rate of profit, its share of profit, its capacity to leverage its profit, its confidence or anxiety in its capacity for future profit. Capital counts and analyzes who has what, representing to itself the measures of its success. These very numbers can be, and in the slogan "We are the 99%" they are, put to use. They aren't resignified—they are claimed as the subjectivation of the gap separating the top one percent from the rest of us. With this claim, the gap becomes a vehicle for the expression of communist desire, that is, for a politics that asserts the people as a divisive force in the interest of overturning present society and making a new one anchored in collectivity and the common.

Admittedly, the occupiers of Wall Street, and the thousand other cities around the world with occupations of their own, have not reached a consensus around communism (as if communism could even name a consensus). The movement brings together a variety of groups and tendencies—not all of them compatible. Many in the movement see that as Occupy's strength. They see Occupy as an umbrella movement capable of including a multiplicity of interests and tendencies. For them, "occupy" serves as a kind of political or even post-political open source brand that anyone can use. Because occupation is a tactic that galvanizes enthusiasm, they suggest, it can affectively connect a range of incompatible political positions, basically working around fundamental gaps, divisions, and differences. The mistake here is not only in the effort to ignore multiple incompatibilities; it is also, and more importantly in the evasion of the real antagonism that matters, the one that connects the movement to its setting—class struggle. "Tactics as brand" neglects the way occupation is a form that organizes the incompatibility of capitalism with the people and emphasizes instead a flexibility and adaptability already fully compatible with capitalism. I'll say a little more about this.

**R**educed to "tactic as brand" or "tactic as generator of affective attachment," occupation responds in terms of communicative capitalism's ideology of publicity. Communicative capitalism announces the convergence of democracy and capitalism in networked communication technologies that promise access and equality, enjoin participation, and celebrate creative engagement. Occupation understood as a tactic of political branding accepts that promise and demonstrates its failure. Communicative capitalism promises access? To whom and where? It promises access to everyone everywhere but really means to enhance and enable capital's access to everything everywhere. The Occupy movement demonstrates this by occupying spaces that are ostensibly public but practically open only to capital; the 99% don't really belong. Similarly, communicative capitalism promises participation—but that really means personalization; better to do as an individual before a screen and not a mass behind a barricade. And, communicative capitalism promises creative engagement—but that really means user-generated spectacular content that can be monetized and marketed, not collective political appropriation in a project of resistance. So the Occupy movement accepts the promises of communicative capitalism and demonstrates the contradictory truth underlying them. The resulting disturbance—pepper spray, riot gear, eviction—reveals the incompatibility at communicative capitalism's heart.

Yet these demonstrations of contradiction rest uneasily against the acceptance of the promises of communicative capitalism. Like communicative capitalism, the movement also valorizes participation, creative engagement, and accessibility. One of the ideological features of "tactics as brand" is the idea that Occupy is an idea, practice, term accessible to anyone. And then there is equality. In the circuits of communicative capitalism, the only equality is that of any utterance, any contribution to the flow, whether it's a critique of economic austerity or a video of baby kittens. Here, too, the movement can get reabsorbed as ever more informational and affective content, something which may appear on one's screen, and be felt as good or bad before an image of the next thing pops up. At this point, the tactic of occupation is compatible with the system it ostensibly rejects. The same holds for the movement's rhetorical and ideological emphases on plurality and inclusivity. They merge seamlessly into communicative capitalism and thereby efface the economic crisis at the movement's heart. It's already the case that there

are multiple ideas and opportunities circulating on the internet. It's already the case that people can hold events, form digital groups, and carry out discussions. People can even assemble in tents on the sidewalks—as long as they are in line for event tickets or a big sale at Wal-Mart. Communicative capitalism is an open, mutable field. That aspect of the movement—inclusivity—isn't new or different. It's a component of Occupy that is fully compatible with the movement's setting in communicative capitalism. What's new (at least in the last thirty years) is the organized collective opposition to the capitalist expropriation. Particularly in the face of the multiple evictions and massive police response to the occupations, the movement faces the challenge of keeping present and real the gap, the incompatibility, between occupation and the ordinary media practices and individualized acts of resistance that already comprise the faux-opposition encouraged in everyday life.

Thus, it is necessary to consider the gap between occupation and its politicization, that is to say, between occupation as a tactic and occupation as a form operating in a determined setting. The political form of occupation for us depends on its fundamental, substantial component of class struggle as what connects it to its social setting. In this setting, occupation installs practical unity where there was fragmentation, collectivity where there was individualism, and division where there was the amorphous imaginary of the public.

**A**s the occupation movement unfolded in the US during the fall of 2011, it was clear that the occupiers were a self-selected vanguard, establishing and maintaining a continuity that enabled broader numbers of people to join in the work of the movement. Into a field more generally configured around convenience, ease of use, and individual preference—a field noted more for “clickivism” than any more strenuous or exacting kind of politics, occupation installs demanding processes through which protesters select and discipline themselves—not everyone can devote all their time to the revolution. Most activists affiliated with a specific occupation didn't occupy all the time. Some would sleep at the site and then go to their day jobs or schools. Others would sleep elsewhere and occupy during the day and evening. Still others would come for the frequent, multiple hour-long General Assemblies. Nonetheless, occupation involved people completely, as Lukacs would say “with the whole of their personality.”

As the occupations persisted over weeks and months, people joined in different capacities—facilitation, legal, technology, media, medical, food, community relations, education, direct action—participating in time-intensive working groups and support activities that involved them in the movement even as they weren't occupying a space directly.

The continuity of occupation has been a potent remedy to the fragmentation, localism, and transitoriness of contemporary left politics. Occupation unites and disciplines via local, self-organized, assemblies. This “unity” has not meant accord with a “party line” or set of shared demands or common principles. Rather, it's “practical unity” as an effect of the conscious sharing of an organizational form. Unity, then, is an affiliation around and in terms of the practice of occupation. One of the most significant achievements of Occupy Wall Street in its first two months was the change in the shape of the left. Providing a common form that no one could ignore, it drew a line: are you with or against occupation?

Given the collapse of the institutional space of left politics in the wake of the decline of unions and the left's fragmentation into issues and identities, occupation asserts a much needed and heretofore absent common ground from which to join in struggle. In dramatic contrast to communicative capitalism's promise of easy action, of a politics of pointing and clicking and linking and forwarding, Occupy Wall Street says No! It's not so easy. You can't change the world isolated behind your screen. You have to show up, work together, and collectively confront the capitalist class. Protest requires living bodies in the streets.

Virtually any place can be occupied. Part of the affective pleasure of the movement in its initial weeks was the blooming of ever more occupations. The spread of the form spoke to the salience of its issues. Without any coordination from the top, without a national organization of any kind, people asserted themselves politically by adopting occupation as the form for political protest, occupying parks, sidewalks, corners, and squares (although not a state capitol as had been done during the Wisconsin protests at the beginning of 2011). Yet more than political symbolism, the fact that occupation could be adopted in myriad, disparate settings meant that multiple groups of people quickly trained themselves in a variety of aspects of political work. They learned specific local legal codes and shared tactical knowledge of how to manage media and police. Occupation let them develop

and share new capacities.

So, duration and adoptability are key benefits of the occupation form. In contrast with the event-oriented alter-globalization movement, occupation establishes a fixed political site as a base for operations. A more durable politics emerges as the claiming of a space for an indeterminate amount of time breaks with the transience of contemporary media culture. People have the opportunity to be more than spectators. After learning of an occupation, they can join. The event isn't over; it hasn't gone away. Implying a kind of permanence, occupation is ongoing. People are in it till "this thing is done"—until the basic practices of society, of the world, have been remade. This benefit, however, is also a drawback. Since occupations are neither economically self-sustaining nor chosen tactically as sites from which to expand on the ground (block by block, say, until a city is taken), built into their form is a problem of scale.

In addition to these two attributes of occupation as a form, some of the decisions taken in the initial weeks of the Occupy Wall Street movement added to its ability to establish and maintain continuity. Prior to the September 17, 2011 action, activists from New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts and the artist group 16 Beaver met together to plan the event. The consensus-based approach to collective decisions in meetings called "General Assemblies" was adopted at this time (it had already been a component of the 15 May movement in Spain). Subsequent occupations followed New York's lead, calling their meetings "General Assemblies" and basing decisions on consensus. Consensus let the movement claim an inclusivity missing from mainstream politics in that everything had to be agreed to by everyone. Participants were doing more than giving money or signing petitions—they were making decisions on the most fundamental concerns of the movement. The emphasis on consensus also meant that no group or position was excluded from the outset. Breaking with tendencies toward the specification of issues and identities, the movement worked to combine voices so as to amplify their oppositional political force. More superficially, but no less importantly, the hand-signals used to guide discussions toward consensus—upturned hands with twinkling fingers to signal assent; cross-arms to block—became a marker and practice of belonging to the movement. Common slogans, especially "We are the 99%", also linked disparate occupations together into a common movement.

Maintaining and extending this collectivity, this

practical unity incompatible with communicative capitalism, has been and remains a challenge, perhaps the biggest challenge the movement faces. Counter-revolutionary tendencies work with all their might to close or conceal the gap of collective desire for collectivity, for collective approaches to common concerns with production, distribution, and stewardship of common resources. In the first days of Occupy Wall Street, the mainstream media tried to ignore the movement. After the movement was impossible to ignore, after the protesters had demonstrated determination and the police had reacted with orange containment nets and pepper spray, other efforts to efface the fundamental division opened up by Occupy Wall Street emerged. These continue to try to make the movement fully compatible with politics as usual and thus un-threatening to business as usual. They work to reabsorb the movement into familiar functionality and convenient dis-functionality, and thereby fill-in or occlude the gap the movement installs. I'll mention three primary efforts to eliminate the incompatibility of Occupy with the status quo: democratization, moralization, and individualization.

Use "democratization" to designate attempts to frame the movement in terms of American electoral politics. One of the most common democratizing moves has been to treat Occupy Wall Street as the Tea Party of the left. So construed, the movement isn't something radically new; it's derivative. The Tea Party has already been there and done that. Of course, this analogy fails to acknowledge that the Tea Party is astro-turf, organized by Dick Armey and funded by the Koch brothers. A further democratizing move immediately reduces the significance of the movement to elections: what does Occupy Wall Street mean for Obama? Does it strengthen the Democratic Party? Will it pull it back toward the center? This democratizing move omits the obvious question: if it were about Obama and the Democratic Party, it would be about Obama and the Democratic Party—not marches, strikes, occupations, and arrests.

A related democratization advises the movement to pursue any number of legislative paths, suggesting that it seek a Constitutional Amendment denying corporations personhood, change campaign finance laws, abolish the electoral college and the Federal Reserve. The oddness of these suggestions, the way they attempt to make the movement something it is not, to make it functional for

the system we have, appears as soon as one recalls the primary tactic of struggle: occupying, that is, sleeping out of doors, in tents, in urban spaces. In New York, protesters were sleeping in the inhospitable financial district, outside in a privately owned park, attempting to reach consensus on a wide range of issues affecting their daily life together: what sort of coffee to serve, how to keep the park clean, how to keep people warm and dry, what to do about the drummers, how to spend the money that comes in to support the movement, what the best ways to organize discussions are, and so on. The language of democratization skips the actual fact of occupation, reformatting the movement in terms of a functional political system and then adapting the movement so that it fits this system. The problem with this way of thinking is that if the system were functional, people wouldn't be occupying all over the country—not to mention the world for, indeed, an additional effect of the democratic reduction is to reduce a global practice and movement against capitalism into US-specific concerns with some dysfunction in our electoral system.

Finally, an additional democratization begins from the assumption that the movement is essentially a democratic one, that its tactics and concerns are focused on the democratic process. From this assumption democratization raises a critique of the movement: occupation actually isn't democratic and so the protesters are in some sort of performative contradiction; they are incompatible with the democratic public because they are actively rejecting democratic institutions, breaking the law, disrupting public space, squandering public resources (police overtime can get expensive) and attempting to assert the will of a minority of vocal protesters outside of and in contradiction to democratic procedures. This line of argument has the benefit of exposing the incoherence in the more general democratization argument: occupation is not a democratic strategy; it is a militant, divisive tactic that expresses the fundamental division on which capitalism depends.

The second mode of division's erasure, the second attempt to eliminate incompatibility between Occupy and the generic politics of a generic public, is moralization. Myriad politicians and commentators seek and have sought to treat the success of Occupy Wall Street in exclusively moral terms. For these commentators, the true contribution of the movement is moral, a

transformation of the common sense of what is just and what is unjust. This line of commentary emphasizes greed and corruption, commending the movement for opening our eyes to the need to get things in order, to clean house.

What's the problem here? The problem is that moralization occludes division as it remains stuck in a depoliticizing liberal formula of ethics and economics. It presumes that it can work around the incompatibility of the movement with capitalist democracy by ignoring the fundamental antagonism of class struggle. Rather than acknowledging the failure of the capitalist system, the contemporary collapse of its neoliberal form and the contradictions that are demolishing capitalism from within (global debt crises, unsustainable patterns of consumption, climate change, the impossibility of continued accumulation at the rate necessary for capitalist growth, mass unemployment and unrest), moralization proceeds as if a couple of bad apples—a Bernie Madoff here, a rogue trader there—let their greed get out of control. It then extends this idea of corruption (rather than systemic failure), blaming the “culture of Wall Street” or even the consumerism of the entire country, as if the United States were a whole and as a whole needed some kind of spiritual cleansing and renewal. In short, moralization treats Occupy Wall Street as a populist movement, mediating it in populist terms of a whole people engaging in the ritual of repentance, renewal, and reform. It proceeds as if the division Occupy Wall Street reveals and claims were a kind of infection to be cured rather than a fundamental antagonism that has been repressed.

The third attempt to eliminate the gap of incompatibility comes from individualization. Here an emphasis on individual choice denies the movement's collectivity. So on the one hand there is an eclectic, menu-like presentation of multiple issues. Occupiers, protesters, and supporters are rendered as non-partisan individuals cherry-picking their concerns and exercising their rights of free speech and assembly. On the other hand there are the practices and tenets of the movement itself, particularly as it has been enacted in New York: decisions must be reached by consensus, no one can speak for another, each person has to be affirmed as freely and autonomously supporting whatever the GA undertakes. In each case, individualism not only supercedes collectivity, but it also effaces the rupture between the occupation and US culture

more generally, a culture that celebrates and cultivates individuality and personalization. Given that the strength of Occupy Wall Street draws from collectivity, from the experience of groups coming together to occupy and protest, an experience amplified by the People's Mic (the practice of collectively repeating the words of a speaker so that everyone can hear them), to emphasize individuality is to disavow the common at the heart of the movement. It reinserts the movement within the dominant culture, as if occupation were a choice like any other, as if choices weren't themselves fantasies that individuals actually could determine their own lives or make a political difference in the context of the capitalist system and the class power of the top one percent.

Democratization, moralization, and individualization attempt to restore a fantastic unity or cohesive public where Occupy Wall Street asserts a fundamental division, the incompatibility between capitalism and the people. Whether as a democratic political system, a moral community, or the multiplicity of individuals, this fantasy is one that denies the antagonism on which capitalism relies: between those who have to sell their labor power to survive and those who do not, between those who not only have no choice but to sell their labor power but nonetheless cannot, because there are no buyers, or who cannot for wages capable of sustaining them, because there's no such opportunity, and those who command, steer, and gamble upon the resources, fortunes, and futures of the rest of us for their own enjoyment.

The three modes of disavowing division miss the power of occupation as a form that asserts a gap by forcing a presence. This forcing is more than simply of people into places where they do not belong (even when they may ostensibly have a right). It's a forcing of collectivity over individualism, the combined power of a group that disrupts a space readily accommodating of individuals. Such a forcing thereby puts in stark relief the conceit of a political arrangement that claims to represent a people that cannot be present, a divided people who, when present, instill such fear and insecurity that they have to be met by armed police and miles of barricades. It asserts the class division prior to and unremedied by democracy under capitalism. The incompatibility is fundamental, constitutive.

For all its talk, then, of horizontality, autonomy, and decentralized process, the Occupy movement is re-centering the economy, engaging in class warfare without naming the working class as one of two great hostile

forces but instead by presenting capitalism as a wrong against the people. Instead of locating the crime of capitalism, its excesses and exploitation, primarily in the factory, it highlights the pervasive, intensive and extensive range of capitalist expropriation of lives and futures. As David Harvey notes (244) "the city is as a locus of class movement as the factory." Occupy is putting capitalism back at center of left politics—no wonder, then, that it has opened up a new sense of possibility for so many of us: it has reignited political will and reactivated Marx's insight that class struggle is a political struggle. As I mentioned before, a new Pew poll finds a nineteen percentage point increase since 2009 of the number of Americans who believe there are strong or very strong conflicts between the rich and poor. Two thirds perceive this conflict—and perceive it as more intense than divisions of race and immigration status (African Americans see class conflict as more significant than white people do).

**H**ow Occupy Wall Street is re-centering the economy is an open, fluid, changing, and intensely debated question. It's not a traditional movement of the working class organized in trade unions or targeting work places, although it is a movement of class struggle (especially when we recognize with Marx and Engels that the working class is not a fixed, empirical class but a fluid, changing class of those who have to sell their labor power in order to survive). Occupy's use of strikes and occupations targets the capitalist system more broadly, from interrupting moves to privatize public schools to shutting down ports and stock exchanges (I think of the initial shut downs in Oakland and on Wall Street as proof of concepts, proof that it can be done). People aren't being mobilized as workers; they are being mobilized as people, as everybody else, as the rest of us, as the majority—99%—who are being thoroughly screwed by the top one percent in education, health, food, the environment, housing, and work. People are mobilized as those who are proletarianized and exploited in every aspect of our lives—at risk of foreclosure and unemployment, diminishing futures, increasing debts, shrunken space of freedom, accelerated dependence on a system that is rapidly failing Capitalism in the US has sold itself as freedom—but increasing numbers of us feel trapped, practically enslaved.

I want to close with the slogan "Occupy Everything." The slogan seems at first absurd: we already occupy everything, so how can we occupy everything?

What matters is the minimal difference, the shift in perspective the injunction to occupy effects. It's a shift crucial to occupation as a political form that organizes the incompatibility between the people and capitalism. It enjoins us to occupy in a different mode, to assert our presence in and for itself, for the common, not for the few, the one percent. "Occupy Everything's" shift

in perspective highlights and amplifies the gap between what has been and what can be, between what "capitalist realism" told us was the only alternative and what the actuality of movement forced us to wake up to. The gap it names is the gap of communist desire, a collective desire for collectivity: we occupy everything because it is already ours in common.

# TRIBUNES OF THE PEOPLE

BY DOUG ENAA GREENE • ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE BOSTON OCCUPIER, POSTED ON KASAMA FEBRUARY 3, 2013

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It has been more than a year since the beginning of Occupy Wall Street. This single moment spawned similar encampments across the country from Boston to Oakland. Anyone who was there during the opening days remembers the carnival atmosphere, the mutual flowering of ideas and the feeling that anything was possible. For myself and so many others, the Occupy Movement was a rupture with the limited horizon of possibilities that capitalism imposes upon us. It was in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, "the explosion of freedom, the rupture of the established order and the invention of an efficacious and spontaneous order."

But now the encampments have been dispersed, the momentum of Occupy has stalled and fatigue has overcome many activists. In times when the horizon is not easily pointing to victory, how are we to maintain our fidelity to the ideas of Occupy? It is here that we should ponder these words of Slavoj Žižek in a teach-in at OWS: "We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal lives. Will there be any changes then? I don't want you to remember these days, you know, like "Oh, we were young and it was beautiful." Remember that our basic message is "We are allowed to think about alternatives." If the taboo is broken, we do not live in the best possible world. But there is a long road ahead. There are truly difficult questions that confront us. We know what we do not want. But what do we want? What social organization can replace capitalism? What type of new

leaders do we want?"

If what Žižek said is true, and I think it is, then what do we need to do now? What hard work should we take up? Well, the Marxist philosopher Istvan Meszaros said that the great challenge of our historical time is to develop a hegemonic alternative that is capable of overturning capitalism and that means developing mass communist consciousness. To those who say that such a strategy is premature, Meszaros answers as follows: "The hegemonic alternative to capital's rule implies the need for an irreversible revolutionary transformation. Naturally, the "realists" always pontificate that such strategy is "premature" and should be postponed to the arrival of "more favorable conditions." But what could be less premature than an uncompromising radical intervention in the historical process, given the conditions of the greatest possible danger that we must now face? Or, to put it in another way, when could such intervention be considered not premature, if not under the urgency of our own historical time?"<sup>1</sup> That being said, I would offer this answer to Žižek's question: we need a communist party or an organization playing a similar role with the guiding ideal of being a tribune of the people, in order to move forward.

Yet capitalism will not drive itself to destruction and be replaced, nor will opposition to its destructive tendencies lead to its replacement unless those who suffer its effects and who offer resistance to it are able and willing to subordinate their individual wills to that of a collective

will (a communist party) that can bring real freedom or communism into being.<sup>2</sup>

A communist party, acts as a mediator which draws together different sections of the working class (who have differing and uneven levels of consciousness) and it forges a united opposition to its opponents, and draws them together and makes them conscious the history of their struggle and the party formulates the strategy and tactics that will serve the long-term interests of the working class.<sup>3</sup> The party is not only a teacher, but must dialectically play the role of pupil by listening and learning from the people.

**T**hat being so, how does a communist party relate to Occupy? Well, Occupy was not just a place where you could have fun, celebrate and listen to music. Occupy was an event that said, “we won’t accept the status quo and we’ll do something about it.” It acknowledged the failures of capitalism (banks got bailed out) and the class struggle (99% and 1%), in uneven and differing ways. Occupy also cuts a hole in the ideological unity of capitalism that there is ‘shared sacrifice.’ This is a new political subject coming forward. At Occupy we saw people who were active, carrying out the day-to-day work of maintaining a camp, bringing in food, printing leaflets and linking up with other struggles.<sup>4</sup>

Occupy is doing the work of a party on a certain level: it seeks to maintain a continuity of oppositional struggle that enables broader numbers of people to join in a movement. In so many words: it builds collectivity.

As we know, building this new collectivity is not something guaranteed. There has been a great deal of division in Occupy (on issues such as race, gender, demands, etc.). There has also been the fragmentation of the movement that has resulted following the evictions of encampments which deprived the movement of the space where this new collectivity was being formed.

The movement has drifted apart in many other directions, some of which are clear dead ends. For one: many Occupiers have embraced a form of lifestyle politics which posits individualistic and moralistic solutions (buy organic foods, grow your own gardens, barter, go vegan and don’t shop at Walmart) that are elitist and can be easily reabsorbed into the dominant system. Two: others in Occupy have settled for working within the Democratic Party and accepting the crumbs of reform they offer even as the Democrats promise more war and protection for big business.

I would go as far as to say that these two choices are what Alain Badiou would define as evil. Badiou says “that evil is the moment I lack the strength to be true to the good that compels me.” So what does this mean? Well, Occupy was a politicization of new subjects. The rupture of Occupy (or any rupture) shows that it is not enough to have just new subjects, but that we need to develop the political consequences of that rupture.<sup>5</sup> And that means building a party which not only assets the division of capitalist society by the class struggle, but politicizes a part of that division (the working class, 99% or the people) with theoretical clarity of the totality of the revolutionary struggle, and bring consciousness of the tasks at hand.<sup>6</sup>

Now a communist party is based on the ‘actuality of revolution’ in the words of Georg Lukacs. The actuality of revolution means that revolutions do happen (Tunisia, Egypt)<sup>7</sup> and that politics is radically open.<sup>8</sup> More than that, there is no single road map that we can follow to certain victory because a revolution is a shifting and chaotic event. Yet a party should know that the revolution will not be completely knowable in advance and thus be prepared to face the unknown. And that that means we can not defer decisions, actions and judgments that are necessary to the situation at hand because to do so would be fatal. We need discipline and preparation for the rapids of revolution which will help us to navigate, adapt and learn its ever changing currents.<sup>9</sup>

What structures does a party need to face the actuality of revolution? I think that we can learn a great deal, positively and negatively from Occupy in this regard. Not only did Occupy maintain a continuity of struggle that allowed many people to join, it also valued democracy (or horizontalism). Yet horizontalism was often carried to such a fault that any discussion of vertical structures was ruled out. And I would argue that we need some form of vertical structures in addition to horizontal ones in order to coordinate, organize and expand our struggles to the national and international levels. And in building the necessary vertical structures, developing leaders; we equally need to the develop the appropriate forms of accountability and recall.<sup>10</sup>

A party is not just about coming together, it is also about sticking together and making sacrifices for the sake of others and we need to do that in collectively built and tested organizations. And as I said in a previous talk, it is only via collective class struggle that we can hope to make a revolution that can overthrow capitalism and institute communism. Furthermore, it is only by passing through

struggle, through revolution that the proletariat can develop its consciousness and the solidarity necessary to win. As Marx said to the workers, they need to go through a struggle “not only to bring about a change in society but also to change yourselves, and prepare yourselves for the exercise of political power.”<sup>11</sup>

**W**hen a capitalist crisis comes, that does not mean revolutionary consciousness will automatically be produced. What it does mean is that there has been an opening in which people are more receptive to our ideas. And we should take full advantage of that opening. I think that we should view the people as eager to hear and be inspired by our message of communist revolution. We want to learn from the people, who are often ahead of us in their willingness to fight and grasp ideas. And what we want to do is to draw more people into the movement and expand our circles of action to attack every manifestation of capitalist exploitation to hasten its overthrow. Revolutions are contagious. People can be inspired by heroic fighters, bold ideas, mass struggle and perform miracles. Ultimately, I believe that the communist message will be heeded because it is needed.

Now following the scholar Lars Lih (one of the foremost authorities on Lenin), I'd like to touch on five characteristics that Lih said Lenin identified as essential to a party leader or revolutionary organizer:

1. Comes forth from the people;
2. Earns love and respect from the workers, due to his or her complete devotion to the cause;
3. Always maintains links with the advanced workers;
4. Works hard to instill in him or herself the necessary practical knowledge and flair;
5. Sees their particular local and national struggles linked to the international revolution.<sup>12</sup>

Now before I conclude, I'd like to read three quotes from Lenin that hammer home many of the points of this talk. In the first, Lenin is addressing fellow revolutionaries whom he believes are behind the struggle of the people, who are ahead of the party's agitation: “We must blame ourselves for falling behind the movement of the masses, for we have not been able to organise indictments of these despicable things in a broad, clear and timely fashion.”<sup>13</sup>

In this second quote, Lenin is admonishing revolutionaries to not be pessimistic about what a dedicated revolutionary can achieve in serve to the communist cause: “You boast that you are practical, but

you fail to see what every Russian practical worker knows: namely, the miracles that the energy, not only of a circle, but even of an individual person is able to perform in the revolutionary cause.”<sup>14</sup>

And this final quote from Lenin is actually one of my favorite things that he ever said and it sums up my whole talk: “the Social-Democrat's ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.”<sup>15</sup>

So I believe that in order to maintain our fidelity to the ideas of Occupy, then we to need to give those ideas flesh by giving them an organized body so they can have a practical effect in the real world. So my answer to Zizek's question of what happens the day after is this: we need to organize and politicize the consequences of the rupture by building a communist party who's guiding ideal is a tribune of the people.

#### *ENDNOTES:*

1. Istvan Meszaros, *The Challenge and Burden of Historical Time: Socialism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), 435.

2. This paragraph is drawn largely from Stephen Perkins, *Marxism and the Proletariat: A Lukacsian Perspective* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), 170. For an elaboration on the Lukacsian perspective on the communist party, see 169-181.

3. *Ibid.* 170

4. Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 213.

5. Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso Books, 2010), 227 which is quoted by Dean, 2012, 213.

6. This argument is drawn from Perkins, 1993, 179 and Dean, 2012, 245.

7. Dean, 2012, 240.

8. “This means that the actuality of the proletarian revolution is no longer only a world historical horizon arching above the self-liberating working class, but that revolution is already on its agenda.” Georg Lukacs, *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of his Thought*, Marxist Internet Archive.<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1924/lenin/ch01.htm> [Accessed November 1, 2012].



9. Dean, 2012, 241.

10. Dean, 2012, 226 and 238.

11. Karl Marx, "Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial in Cologne," Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/revelations/ch01.htm> [Accessed November 10, 2012].

12. These five points are drawn from Lars Lih's discussion the qualities that Lenin says a communist revolutionary leader should possess. See: Lars T. Lih, "We must dream! Echoes of 'What is to Be Done?' in Lenin's later career," International Journal of Socialist Renewal. <http://links.org.au/node/1980> [Accessed November 1, 2012].

13. See Lars Lih's discussion of this quote at Lars Lih, "Scotching the myths about Lenin's 'What is to be done,'" International Journal of Socialist Renewal, <http://links.org.au/node/1953> [Accessed November 1, 2012]. The original

quote can be found in Vladimir Lenin, 'What is to Be Done: Burning Question of Our Movement,' Marxist Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iii.htm> [Accessed November 1, 2012].

14. See Lars Lih's discussion of this quote at Lars Lih, "Scotching the myths about Lenin's 'What is to be done,'" International Journal of Socialist Renewal, <http://links.org.au/node/1953> [Accessed November 1, 2012]. The original quote can be found in Vladimir Lenin, 'What is to Be Done: Burning Question of Our Movement,' Marxist Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iv.htm> [Accessed November 1, 2012].

15. Vladimir Lenin, "What is to Be Done: Burning Question of Our Movement," Marxist Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iii.htm> [Accessed November 1, 2012].

# OCCUPY, THE PARTY

BY JODI DEAN • APRIL 2013

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One of the many accomplishments of Occupy Wall Street was its reopening of the question of political organization. At a time when the contemporary left was in such disarray that the only thing it could agree on was its own nonexistence, Occupy focused attention on the practices and possibilities of coming together in common struggle against capitalism.

Consider the discussion of demands. OWS went round and round between specific demands, impossible demands, no demands, the premature nature of demands, etc. Contra Adbusters' call for 'one demand,' there of course was never one demand. Many people within and around the movement (myself included) construed the absence of demands as a weakness, a problem, or even a symptom of the impossibility of any kind of political convergence among the multiple interests and positions that came together in occupation. The debate over demands notwithstanding, in their early weeks in Zuccotti Park, occupiers announced a "declaration of occupation." The declaration took the form of a list of grievances and a statement of principles of solidarity.

These general statements don't make much sense when viewed in terms of movement politics. They are too broad, too amorphous. They don't designate a single field of issues. Rather, they establish the set of ideas that

bring people together, that provide a common basis for anti-capitalist political struggle today, in a complex society riven by multiple forms of exclusion, oppression, and privilege. These ideas incorporate a body of and in struggle, a militant political body like a fighting party. To limit them would be to stunt or deform that body.

What else was happening in those early weeks? The formation of multiple working groups. Some were concentrated on operations. Others focused on political issues like alternative banking, education, and foreclosures. Again, this suggests a party not a moment and not a movement.

A party focuses on operations as well as multiple issue categories on which it formulates a position and struggles for outcomes. Or, better, a party is an apparatus for formulating positions, developing strategies, and fighting for outcomes. It is a form for thinking things through, working things out, and struggling together.

To be an effective apparatus, a party has to concern itself with its own operations. Hostility toward party thinking, fear of centralism and vanguardism, as well as a generalized mistrust of leaders and hierarchies prevented this sort of step from being taken.

Such fear and mistrust was justified. It made sense given the compromise and failure of both the mainstream

and the sectarian parties of the last decades. Occupy as it continued operated primarily in ways that attempted to build trust, confidence, and capacities. The most recent inspiring steps coming from Occupy participate in this building. But, they are losing what made Occupy so inspiring: it's large, general, proto-party energy.

Strike Debt and Occupy Sandy are important, admirable. They seem, though, to be rooted in the sense that Occupy's failure was its broadness, its absence of specificity. In response, they are more focused, essentially single issue groups that have a hard time either extending themselves or in providing a naming a particular issue or crime in such a way as to hegemonize the political field. Strike Debt is working on this. It is well aware of the importance of this move. Yet its focus on debt seems more like issue politics than anything else, as is clear when its goals are presented as a debt jubilee. There is nothing wrong with this idea, but it is an issue for a movement, a component of a platform, not a positive idea that can name a political subject.

One of the reasons we may be stalled is that too many of us believe that the party form is outmoded. Some think that any party ultimately becomes dictatorial. Others think that the social and economic changes wrought by extreme unfettered capitalism have eliminated the setting that made the party plausible.

There are good reasons for both views. Criticisms of the party are co-extensive with its emergence. They have been applied not just to communist, socialist, and workers' parties but to democratic parties as well. As the German social theorist Robert Michels argued in 1911, "he who says organization says oligarchy." Parties seem always to devolve into a separation between leaders and followers. Moreover, parties in party seem more likely than not to betray their members and look after their own interests. The more powerful they are, the more damage they do.

But, this does not mean that parties are immutable. Parties are comprised of their members. Those who make a party, can make it the party they want. We can install requirements that offices be rotated, that people who take leadership roles step back after they have stepped up. We can limit the number of years people can be members.

The possibilities here are multiple, if people think that working together in common struggle is worth it. Really, if a powerful party can do damage, shouldn't we want to direct that damage against capital?

What about the changes in our contemporary setting? It is true that the last thirty years have seen multiple and severe setbacks in working class struggle: there have been attacks on unions, the movement of industries off-shore and down south to avoid paying union wages, bankruptcies that eviscerate pension agreements. Additionally, contemporary workers are more likely to change jobs than were workers forty or fifty years ago. Ever more workers employ various sorts of flex-time. Fewer people are in the paid workforce; persistent unemployment has made many of us grateful for the jobs we have, especially if we have mortgage, credit card, or student loan debts to pay. These are but some of the factors that make waging political struggle from the position of the proletariat seem not just difficult but more fundamentally the wrong place to start.

Of course, the socialist and communist parties of the last century were not comprised exclusively of workers. They were organizations in which people from various classes came together in opposition in class struggle against the bourgeoisie. Differently put, these parties adopted the position of the proletariat as the class opposed to capital; they were neither identical to the class nor confined to members of that class. They concentrated the force of the people and directed against capitalism. In some places they won—but not for long as the organized power of capital came back against them.

The question for us now is whether we are stronger together or apart. If our protests are local, momentary insurrections or occupations, is that enough to do any significant damage to capitalist power? Or will we remain surrounded and doomed to defeat?

Anyone persuaded that the capitalist class will not cede its position without a fight, anyone persuaded that climate change can only be addressed collectively, anyone certain that the practices of immiseration and exploitation will only continue must agree that if we don't fight together, we don't fight at all.

# WHAT THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT DEMANDS... OF EACH OF US

BY JOSEPH RAMSEY • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA JUNE 6, 2012

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**T**here has been considerable debate in and around the Occupy movement concerning the question of demands. I wrote up the following after reading an article (published a few months back) by Jodi Dean and Marc Deseriis called “A Movement Without Demands?”

I was particularly inspired by their idea that demands need not be addressed narrowly to the existing state or power structures, but that they can, could be, and perhaps should be addressed to ourselves and to each other. To other members or would-be members of our movement.

Without the physical camps to unite us (at least for the moment), perhaps there is a role for such collective internal demands in helping our movement to keep focus and to sustain faith in the possibility that it has helped to open and make visible.

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## WHAT THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT DEMANDS... OF EACH OF US

**T**hat we work to defeat and to overthrow the rule of the 1% (and the 0.1%) over our lives, our society, and our world;

That we devote our lives to ending the oppression, domination, and exploitation of people both near and far;

That we defend what remains of public space and the public sector against neoliberal attempts to privatize or destroy it;

That we stand up for freedom of speech and assembly, of dissent and public protest as rights which no law-maker can revoke;

That we work for social egalitarianism: the radical redistribution of wealth, the transformation and/or abolition of oppressor institutions, the dismantling of unaccountable hierarchies, and the revolutionary

democratization of society;

That we live out the practice of egalitarianism in our own movement and in our own lives, seeking to build others up as our equals, not to subordinate or instrumentalize them as tools or inferiors;

That we seek to unite the many against the few, behind an inspiring vision of global human emancipation;

That we work to expose, to challenge, and to shut down wars abroad and militarism at home, and the imperial and fascistic apparatus that sustains them;

That we devote ourselves to exposing, resisting, and halting the ravages of an ecocidal carbon-burning capitalism before it cooks the climate to the point of rendering wide swaths of our planet unlivable;

That we work to expose, oppose, and defeat racism, homophobia, sexism and other reactionary and oppressive ideologies and practices wherever they rear their ugly heads;

That we seek to give voice to the voiceless and hope to the hopeless across our world;

That we help to inspire courage, trust, and solidarity amongst those exploited, alienated, excluded and oppressed by the current system, so that we and they can turn our collective weakness into strength;

That we work to expose the farcical nature of our 1%-dominated, so-called “democracy,” even as we may utilize what is left of this state apparatus to tactically leverage the needs of our movement;

That we keep our commitments and promises to one another;

That we are honest and accountable in our interactions whenever we are representing the movement;

That we approach with suspicion and skepticism the overtures of those representatives of existing 1% power structures that seek to co-opt our movement, even as we

are constantly on the lookout for friends and allies in unexpected places;

That we put the greater good of the people and the movement ahead of our personal interests, even as we recognize that only through such a movement can our individual talents be fully realized, and vice versa;

That we work each day to help raise our own awareness as well as the consciousness of those around us concerning the world situation, and the fundamental changes that are necessary;

That we inform ourselves about the current dangers and crises facing our society and our planet, and that we seek to understand not only the news and the facts, but the fundamental forces driving the situation forward, and the future trajectories these forces imply;

That we seek to cultivate a tactical flexibility and creativity that can adapt to the shifting situation;

That we develop a long-term strategic plan for actually building the movement that we want to create, for actually achieving the changes we want to see;

That we cultivate an honest and humble self-critical attitude in evaluating the successes and failures, the strengths and weaknesses of our movement, its theories and its practices; that we are willing to alter our theories and practices in light of evidence and reflections we gather from the world;

That we seek to become citizens of the world, not just of any single city or nation;

That we sink roots in our local communities, in our workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, families, and other institutions, becoming attentive students of others' lives, as well as supportive allies, and where appropriate, leaders of just struggles that emerge;

That we are kind and patient with one another in the movement, working to understand deeply even those with whom we disagree, knowing that those who may be wrong on nine issues may teach us something valuable on the tenth;

That we demonstrate courage as well as wisdom in the face of threats to ourselves, our communities, our work, and our movement;

That we seek to cultivate the fullest humanity in ourselves and in others alike;

That we work creatively and tirelessly to bring into being a society that is worthy of human beings, and in which all human beings on this earth are given a life worth living;

That we commit to the long haul, as the fight ahead is sure to be as extended as its outcome remains uncertain.

That we sustain one another in this great collective endeavor, cherishing each thinking, fighting spirit in these dark times.

# APPENDIX 1: SITES OF BEGINNING PART 1: ARE COMMUNIST OPENINGS STRUCTURAL OR EVENTAL?

WRITTEN BY MIKE ELY • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA NOVEMBER 18, 2010

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**L**PA writes on something that preoccupies me:  
An historical example: Mississippi Freedom Summer (1964) was an example of a moment that concentrated a world of contradictions. The grinding and sparks arose from deep contradictions and lit the darkness. People streaming to Mississippi as “organizers” were forged into something new — and in many ways, their work and experienced forged the times we lived in. They became a model of “outside agitator” that inspired the best of a generation.

And it is worth noting that many radical forces did not go to Mississippi — they abstained. That includes Malcolm X’s forces and also much of the “old Left.” They could not foresee its power. They felt it was a distraction from their ongoing work and commitments. They largely missed a breaking point and a turning point that defined subsequent history.

It meant that what emerged was often unmarked by them — which was both good and bad.

A different historical example: A decade later, at the other end of the 60s, i.e. in the early 1970s, there had arisen a new communist movement of about ten or twenty thousand youth. We dispersed ourselves from campuses (precisely!) into surrounding communities and factories — and we thought that the simple addition of “ourselves + the oppressed” would equal a new popular revolutionary movement.

It followed a structural conception of opportunity (even though everything that had produced us was so very evental). And the reality was that for the vast majority of those young communists entering the factories nothing happened. Zero.

There were not conditions for eruption everywhere, and we could not just force them to emerge by our will and work. And this is true even though people were oppressed and discontent (as they are today all around us).

Mao quips you can’t pull a sprout to make it grow.

Our highly structural view of class and of radical potential was mistaken. And we should (today) learn the lesson of that — or else we may repeat it with far fewer and more fragile forces.

A third historical experience: My personal experiences “going to the working class” (in the 1970s) were (ironically) different from most members of the New Communist Movement — because my particular small team of communists went into one of the few places that did erupt, i.e. the coalfields — which saw the largest wave of uncontrolled working class struggle in the last half century.

But that exception was precisely contingent and its reasons for existence were external to us. It was not because of the quality of our work, or something that could be reproduced or exported to other working class sites. Some sections of the RCP, especially the more trade unionist circles, did try to promise precisely such reproduction in the buildup to the 1977 National United Workers Organization (NUWO) conference. They were peddling illusion (including to themselves).

I recently read a paragraph posted in the anti-revisionist archive project from the Revolutionary Union’s national pamphlet on the 1974 Boston busing controversy. It starts:

“The U.S. workers movement is surging forward. Every day our ranks swell, our unity strengthens, and

our political awareness of our great revolutionary tasks further develops. And with each passing day, the need for us to further deepen our unity and awareness becomes even greater, as the collapsing monopoly capitalist system comes down on our heads.”

This reminds me of a quip Alain Badiou makes about a leading Maoist group in France (the one he chose not to join):

“Almost everything put out by GP propaganda was half untrue — where there was a kitten, they described a Bengal tiger.” (from Richard Wolin’s *The Wind from the East*)

Often our movement fantasized what would happen — and then (prematurely) announced it was happening.

And even in the coalfields, where there actually was such militant struggle of many thousands of workers over a several intense years — the mix did not prove fertile ground for communist recruitment or beliefs. It was Jerry Falwell and Ronald Reagan who politically dominated that particular Appalachian playing field by 1980, not us.

That too is a lesson worth summing up — so we don’t reinvent the same illusions again.

#### Investigate and Concentrate

To be clear: That doesn’t mainly mean that we should not do communist work where we are — where we live and work. It doesn’t mean we shouldn’t go deep among the people. How can we not?

But I am (tentatively) speaking against simply dispersing into our communities in particular ways with particular expectations — to merge with whatever is spontaneously happening there. Those kinds of dispersal

form a pre-event for liquidation (and have done so many times).

The work we do should be connected to a common revolutionary approach that may not connect in all communities — and may find footing only under unique circumstances (initially).

I’m studying the communist philosopher Badiou these days. Our study group just touched on his chapter on the Paris Commune in “The Communist Hypothesis” which digs into — precisely — one of his exploration of how unique events rupture the old. And (as I mentioned before) Bruno Bosteels’ essay “Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics” in *Positions* works on the Maoist approach to active focused investigations in a way that had me buzzing.

We need to do serious investigation (collectively) of places to concentrate — we need to feel our way along the faultlines of this society to identify where best to dig in — because (and this is serious) not all places or moments are equal. And in Part 2, I will discuss this in regard to finding particular kinds of advanced cohorts.

In addition, we should be flexible and alert for new things suddenly on the wind, especially for those that could be earth-shaking — for “our Mississippi” — and which will need us able to perceive, adapt and move. Such things may take strange forms that are hard to interpret, and they can come and go before communists even have the wisdom to see and respond. (The characters in the movie *Dreamers* almost miss the days of Paris May 1968 completely — cuz they were just wrapped up in something else.)

# APPENDIX 2: SITES OF BEGINNING PART 2: NODULES OF THE ADVANCED

WRITTEN BY MIKE ELY • ORIGINALLY POSTED ON KASAMA NOVEMBER 19, 2010

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Let me start here: I listened to someone explain the formation of the Zapatistas. The process involved understanding that there were nodules or pockets of the very advanced in very particular conjunctural places among the oppressed people.

And those nodules — concentrated in particular regions, and in this case, within the Catholic lay structure — involved the emergence of literate, energetic and very radical circles within the people themselves, who were able to “hook up” with organized revolutionary intellectual forces (from outside) in ways that are mutually transformative.

I think that the previous communist movements have not been able to find or connect with such advanced forces (in the U.S., in several decades.) I think our previous communist movement was perhaps able to “see” them sometimes, but not know what to do with them.

Particularly: I don't think our movement was able to transform itself in order to fuse with the advanced (in those specific moments over decades where they emerged and the movement ran across them). Certainly our movement was not able (through and with them) to develop a partisan connection to the broader people (which would need to happen in the course of powerful moments of struggle).

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## SEAMS OR VEINS?

Let me sketch a mining metaphor: Coal is a sedimentary layer of fossilized wood — so it is concentrated in a seam that spreads over a large area. You can dig straight down in southern West Virginia — and any hole has to pass through the major horizontal coal seams sooner or later.

But rock mineral mining is very different: diamonds,

gold and silver exist in nuggets that are embedded along the fissure lines in the hard rock in the crust — in occasional and irregular cracks where lava once forced its way upward. You can go to Nevada and randomly dig a hole straight down and are very unlikely to hit a pocket of gold or silver. You have to find those old fissure lines, and follow the veins of quartz along those fissures, and explore them until you find the nuggets and nodules.

I'm saying that the most advanced forces in society are not simply a “layer.”

Of course, in any situation, anywhere, you can find relatively advanced and relatively backward — but that is a different matter. Those people advanced enough to (1) connect with a revolutionary movement, and also (2) help connect that movement to sections of the people are rare in the U.S. — and are dispersed in cohorts along social fissure lines where they have experiences special pressures and heat.

And if you just go “dig a hole” where life has placed you — looking to connect the revolutionary movement to people there randomly — you are unlikely to trigger a process of fusing socialism with the people, because the necessary ingredients for initiating that fusing are not evenly distributed everywhere.

The location of such cohorts of people is not necessarily geographic. In 1994 the anti-immigrant Proposition 189 gave rise to a radicalized section of Latino high school and college students scattered across the state, part of a larger radicalization that has gone on among second generation immigrant youth. In the 1960s, something was happening among Black students and workers that made it possible for the Black Panther Party to suddenly “go national” and gather thousands of members (seemingly overnight) — Black students had been forming “black power” organizations everywhere

and developing training as militants and organizers. Returning Vietnam vets were such a force in the 1970s — as many returned embittered and conscious, and in networks of co-thinkers.

Connecting well with such networks before they disperse takes very active work, creative fusion, communist training... and a bit of luck.

To be clear: I talk about cohorts — using the old Roman word for bonded co-fighters, a brother/sisterhood that emerges (including generationally).

In political work, we often run across very advanced and communist people as individuals — whose special life experiences have brought them a particular consciousness. And that is a good thing. But often the few recruited by previous communist organizations have been the relatively rootless — who are able to adapt themselves into a rigid pre-existing structure, and who were generally not able bring that structure into deep connection with broader sections of people or help transform that structure in needed ways. The RCP summed up that when it trained occasional communists from “among the masses” they often went back “home” to have great difficulty hooking back up or communicating what they now understood. The RCP’s hope of developing them as levers shows that this process will hardly be easy. The point remains, however, the advanced who emerge in important cohorts, and who in their interactions — with each other and the communist movement that some of them may join — can (potentially) help creatively press forward the process of fusion.

We have to seriously talk about how that can happen. Since we don’t yet know how to make that work — and since the actual details of that need to be worked out in practice, in the concrete, in the act.)

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## LINKING PARTISAN COMMUNIST WORK WITH STRATEGY

**C**hicanofuturet is righteously passionate about representing communism among the people. He argues hard with those among us who think that can’t be done. And many of us have a deep unity with him on this point — a unity that goes beyond words into practice. Promoting communism, talking creatively and coming from within are extremely important parts of our communist work.

But let’s also situate those necessary discussions Chicanofuturet has among the people (discussions

of communism’s accomplished past, of our common inherited ideas, of our visions of radical change) within a new strategic plan for an actual movement (a communist movement with a partisan base among the people).

How do we communists arrive (among the people) as the beginnings of a movement (in the present, within this situation) — not merely as a disembodied idea about either the distant past or the distant future)? How do we organize a communist base (and a larger revolutionary current) among the people?

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## WHERE THE GAPS HAVE NARROWED

**O**ne issue (I believe) is that there is a large gap between thinking of the relatively advanced in most places and the ideas that defined a communist movement.

And further there is a relatively large objective gap between the activity of the relatively advanced in most places, and the forms of engagement that the previous communist movement allowed.

People from among the oppressed have had great difficulty bridging those two gaps — becoming communists (in the way that we chose to model it).

And I think we need to find the places and ways to close that gap: by finding those distinct sites (in space and time) where the advanced are actually open to our vision of a revolutionary movement, and by creating a movement that can creatively connect with such forces.

This will need a mutually transformative process, and a resulting fusion will mark the beginning of a new kind of “subject” — and give shape to the kind of communist movement we create. It will (in some ways) mark its real appearance.

And I think that contact-and-fusion needed to be initiated by now-scattered communists doing new deep investigation into the highly complex geology among the people.

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## THE PROBLEM WITH FORAYS

**L**et me put it this way: Talking to the people is not enough. I have been in countless “forays” to talk to the people about communist politics. I was part of an organized trend that did exactly what Chicanofuturet describes — nationally and daily for many years in many cities.

Door-to-door in housing projects, dorms and coal camps. In demonstrations. In campus talks. Weekly newspaper with communist agitation. etc. And over and



over, lots of people express interest (and respect). Probably hundreds of thousands of people. That is important to note — communist politics has been controversial, but not automatically been self-isolating. It has always found interested people in significant numbers.

But then.... there has remained those gaps — and an inability of more people to make the leap from a kind of interested “listening” to an organized and partisan participation. The interest has not ever congealed as a partisan base or network.

And for me the question is: How do we bridge that gap (from the interested to the networks of organized partisan participants)? What are the stages of that process? What are the adjustments in form and speech that would help? What are the forms of organization that would move from “energetic propaganda sect” to an organized network of revolutionized working people themselves?

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## CONNECTION WITHOUT MUTUAL TRANSFORMATION

**A** historical example: In our ten year project in the U.S. coalfields (during the 1970s) — we only recruited one person who was a native coalminer (even though we worked closely with dozens, perhaps hundreds of men and women over those years).

This brother was unusual in many ways — including in that he had left the coalfields and worked with the farmworkers union in California etc. — and in other ways had become opened to a large world of ideas and organizing outside the immediate world of the coalfields.

Years later I went back to West Virginia, and met with him on a writing trip — and he said to me,

“I wanted socialism and I wanted to wage the class struggle — but really 80% of what the party was talking to just went by me. I had no idea what all that was about, or why it mattered.”

That speaks to weaknesses in our work more than it speaks to his weaknesses. And I’m saying that some of this is objective — that the political life among working people in the U.S. and the general level of political discourse in the U.S. leaves even the most radical and discontent people rather distant from discussing the complexities of radical transition.

And some of it is subjective — i.e. it speaks to the rather particular conception of “being a communist” that dominated the communist trend I was in (including its always-marked “fetish of the word”).

Part of the problem here was that we connected with the people, but there was not enough mutual transformation. As individuals we communists transformed by adopting some of the local workingclass culture (dress, speech, lifestyles, etc.) — but as a movement we did not remake ourselves to be able to fuse with the advanced — and through them connect politically with the people more broadly.

For one thing, we need a movement radiating its ideas — but that isn’t over-intellectualized. And we need a movement capable of listening and seeing — and then continually transforming itself (without losing its goal, and the road to radical change). That is a very hard mix.

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## A METHOD OF STARTING

**O** bviously there is an element of uniting a critical mass of revolutionary forces to even initiate an organizing project. Some people have impatience frustration that our discussions (here on Kasama) are mainly among those already socialist. But in fact we need to have some regroupment of revolutionaries — along common lines and ideas — to start anything. And in many ways, we have barely started that process (and the necessary theoretical reconception).

As a key part of initiating practice: I think we need to look closely at the most advanced among the people — because they are the link to everything else.

Some think of the advanced as a layer dispersed uniformly among the people (along the interface between the oppressed and oppressor). Some think our main audience is the intermediate (or typical) worker who is not (yet) socialist or political.

But, by contrast, we need to see radicalization as conjuncture followed by contagion. Those advanced capable of fusing with a communist movement (and being its links to larger communities of people) emerge in circles and scenes — in a conjunctural way along often unappreciated fissures. They are formed in moments, and come in waves. They try to change the world and often sink back into the grayness out of frustration.

We need a serious discussion of “where are the advanced, who are the advanced, what do they believe” — that is based on organized investigation among different sections of the people.

What we learn and decide will determine what we do, where we go, and what we say — and how our movement appears when it is born.



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