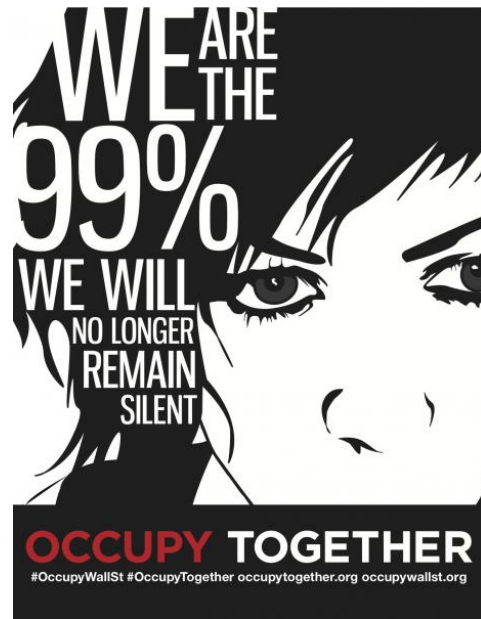


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Capitalism Or Common Sense?



An
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pamphlet



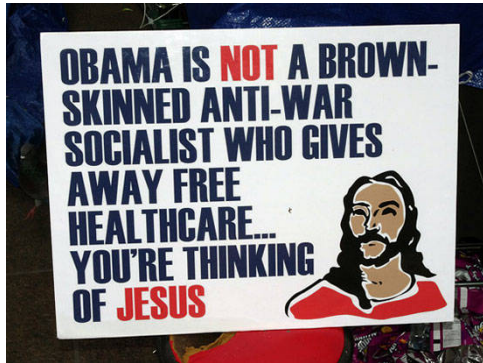
by Pham Binh

Occupy!

Who would've imagined the word "occupy" would inspire millions to take direct action and stand up for the 99% here in America after brutal occupations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine?

Now there's Occupy Pakistan and even Occupy Nigeria.

Occupy is more than a movement, less than a revolution, and long overdue. Occupy isn't about ideology, it's about the 99%, hence why pacifists and insurrectionists, anti-capitalist anarchists/socialists and pro-capitalist libertarians, liberal Democrats and Ron Paul Republicans, vegans and omnivores have come together despite our differences.



Just as Jesus took direct action 2,000 years ago by chasing merchants and money-lenders out of a Jerusalem temple, so today we're chasing "too big to fail" bankers and corporate lobbyists out of government. They've made government "a den of thieves" (as Jesus put it) and it's time to clean house.

Figuring Out the Problem

Occupy's mobilization of people across the political spectrum doesn't mean that our differences will go away or that they don't matter. The medicines we choose depend on our ills.

The libertarians and Ron Paul supporters believe that government interference with the free market is the main cause of the problems facing the 99% today. "Too much socialism and not enough capitalism," they say. Their solutions: end the Federal Reserve, bring back the gold standard (meaning every dollar in circulation should have an equivalent gold bar sitting in Fort Knox), and shrink government (no bailouts, minimize regulations, cut social programs).

Let's imagine what America would be like if we took their medicine:

1.) Ending the Federal Reserve would end the government's ability to set interest rates. This would empower the huge banks like Citigroup and Bank of America to charge whatever they can get away with since they are the biggest players in the capital markets.

Ending the Fed would also put Congress in charge of monetary policy. If you think Congress is a circus now, just wait until clowns like Michelle Bachmann have a say over the money supply.

2.) Returning to the gold standard by making sure that each dollar in circulation has an equivalent piece of gold in a government vault would do nothing to help the 99%. The reason the cost of living keeps going up isn't because there is no gold backing the dollar, it's because the raises the 99% get (if we get raises!) are less than the price increases of rent, gas, food, and health care. If inflation was happening, the price of everything would be going up, but the price of labor (wages, salaries) has stagnated and housing prices have collapsed dramatically, so inflation can't be the problem.

Capitalism's biggest fans have no clue how the system really works. That's no coincidence.

3.) Shrinking/minimizing government is a mixed bag. When the federal government and local law enforcement disregard the Constitution and openly target Muslims because of their religion, shutting down Big Brother should be on everyone's priority list.

And yes, the government has no business bailing out bankers who make huge bets and lose. When Wall Street wins, they keep their profits; when they lose, they hand their losses to us by using their control of government to pour trillions of our taxpayer dollars into their bankrupt, insolvent institutions.

Heads they win, tails we lose.

When we're down on our luck, out of a job, or need a helping hand politicians tell us "tough luck, there's no money! Stop asking for a handout!" Our social safety net catches fat cats but not veterans who today make up 1/6 of our homeless population.

We've got to end the system of socialism for the 1% and capitalism for the 99% where profits are privatized and losses are socialized.





“I am opposing a social order in which it is possible for one man who does absolutely nothing that is useful to amass a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, while millions of men and women who work all the days of their lives secure barely enough for a wretched existence.”
 – Eugene V. Debs

That said, minimizing or eliminating regulations is a truly terrible idea, on par with giving George W. Bush a third term or hiring Casey Anthony to babysit your kid. President Clinton repealed many laws that regulated banking and finance. After that, the size of banks dramatically increased as investment banks gobbled up commercial banks, creating the problem of “too big to fail.”

Too big to fail is too big to exist.

Without regulations, oversight, and government-enforced transparency, consumers, smaller businesses, and workers are at the mercy of credit card companies, banksters, and multinational corporations.

Don't forget, there was a time in American history without the Federal Reserve, when the dollar was backed by gold, and there were few laws governing the economy, protecting

workers' rights, or safeguarding the environment. It was a time of tenements, child labor, sweatshops, deadly workplace accidents, brutal exploitation, and environmental destruction, when the war between labor and capital was lethal for the 99% because the 1% hired armies to drown union organizing drives in blood.

Who in their right mind would want to go back to that?

Cutting government spending by closing schools, shrinking agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency, privatizing Social Security, and firing teachers, cops, firefighters, and postal workers is the worst thing that could happen to the 99%. Greece did exactly that after the bottom fell out of their economy in 2008, and their economy has shrunk every year since: -3.3% growth in 2009, -3.4% in 2010, and -6.8% in 2011.

Greece's shrinking economy is making their debt problem worse with each passing year. The deeper in debt they go, the more cuts Europe's banks demand in exchange for bailouts, the more cuts there are, the more their economy shrinks, the deeper in debt they go. It's a vicious cycle.

Capitalism Is the Problem

Greece is stark example of what capitalism has in store for us in the not-too-distant future. Under capitalism, it is rational for banks to avoid losing money on loans to governments like Greece because profits are priority #1. If those profits come at the expense of Greece's pensions for the elderly, their minimum wage, or other things that serve the 99%, so be it.

What's rational for capitalism isn't rational for us. The more you think about capitalism the less sense it makes.

Take health care. Medical bills are the #1 reason for personal bankruptcy in America. We are #1 in the world when it comes to health care costs but #37 when it comes to delivering quality care according to the World Health Organization. Our for-profit health care system is all buck and no bang, although the CEOs of health care companies are among the best paid of any industry's.

So insurance companies nickel and dime their customers out of benefits, drug makers spend billions to prevent cheaper generics from getting onto the market, and the 99% either get lucky to find a job with benefits or they end up waiting for hours in emergency rooms after it's too late to be cured. Or both.



Health care should not depend on where or whether you work or how much you've got in your bank account.

The result of a for-profit health care system is this: the people who have the least and need care the most are the least likely to get it, while the people who have the most and need the care the least receive the best care and enjoy the longest, healthiest lives.

The 99% live longer, healthier, and for less when we remove profit from the health care system. We get more bang for the buck once the system isn't dedicated to making a buck.

The Common Sense Solution

The encampments we created showed on a small scale what a society not geared around making profits for the 1% could be like. Did we charge people for the food we served? Did we charge rent for tents? Did we make people pay for gloves, coats, and first aid? No! Everyone was fed, housed, and given clothes despite our limited means.

We didn't use markets, we used common sense.

And we did it without creating bosses or rulers from our own ranks, without creating our own armies or engaging in police brutality of our own making.

No wonder the 1% were quick to shut down our encampments.

Were the encampments perfect? Hell no. We had problems that we didn't find good solutions to – sexual assault, drug and alcohol abuse, cliques, racism, sexism, class privilege, and even suicides in a few cases, although Oakland's police chief noted that crime actually decreased in the city during the Occupy Oakland encampment, so we did better on that front too. And we did better without indefinitely detaining and torturing the innocent, launching wars for oil, evicting people with no money, or forcing old people to choose between paying for medicine and food.

Why not replicate that on a bigger scale?



"Call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth within this country for all God's children."

– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

If kids are starving in Africa, why not send them the food they need with no strings attached? Why let over 18 million homes stand empty when there are 3 million people without homes? Why not lower unemployment by hiring people to rebuild our schools, roads, and public transit systems using green energy instead of fossil fuels? Why not put General Assemblies of teachers, students, and parents in charge of schools, curriculums, and standards instead of government and corporate bureaucrats?

Why not replace capitalism and markets with something a lot more efficient and humane: common sense?

Socialism, Anarchism, Communism, Horizontalism, Direct Democracy

The idea of a common sense society is not new. Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet in 1776 advocating American independence under the title *Common Sense*. The revolt of the 99% that is Occupy in America, the indignados in Spain, and the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa is just the latest chapter in a long-running battle for a common sense society

between haves and have-nots, 1% and 99%, rulers and ruled, exploiters and exploited. It's what Karl Marx was talking about in the *Communist Manifesto*.

To overcome and replace capitalism, we have to 1) mobilize and organize tens of millions of people where they live and work and 2) create in those places institutions of direct democracy like General Assemblies that empower people to build a new social order that cracks the shell of the existing social order.

Imagine this happening in every workplace, school, hood, barrio, project, prison, community, and barrack across America and you get an idea of what it would look like to replace the rule of the 1% with the rule of the 99%. This radical extension of democracy would replace the circuses called elections held one day every four years to fool us into believing that Coke or Pepsi is a meaningful and healthy political choice. Instead, democracy would be something we'd live every day, and we'd have a say over all aspects of our lives: education policy, foreign policy, economic decisions, health care, you name it.



This vision has been called socialism, communism, and anarchism. All three share the same goals but differ on how to get there and what exactly a post-capitalist, post-profit common sense society would look like.

Within each of these schools there is a lot of overlap with its "neighbor" – socialists and communists look to the working class as the key social force to overturning capitalism, but so do anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists; both socialists and anarchists have created communal farms based on principles like solidarity, equality, economic democracy, and leaderlessness.

And there is a lot of disagreement within each school as well. No two anarchists agree 100% of the time and get three socialists into a room and you're likely to see four groups form.

The important thing is **NOT** the label, word, or which "ism" we use as an imperfect but necessary shortcut to describe something complex and profound. The important thing is the content underneath the label, the substance.

The other important thing is **what we do** to get to a horizontal, ecologically sustainable world without the oppressive divides between 1% and 99%, between nations, classes, races, genders, sexual orientations, lifestyles, and ways of being. That world is possible, necessary, and unavoidable if we want to survive as a species on a planet resembling today's Earth.

Either we finish capitalism, or capitalism finishes us.

Finishing Capitalism

Capitalism has changed a lot in the past 200 years, but one thing that hasn't changed is that capital still depends on labor, the labor of working people. That is still capital's main weakness. Mobilize working people at their jobs, where they produce and distribute goods and services, and the profits the 1% depend on to buy politicians, gamble on the stock market, and hire lobbyists, P.R. firms, and mercenaries dry up.

That's what makes general strikes so effective.



The huge militant street protests that rocked Egypt in 2011 did not cause dictator Hosni Mubarak to resign immediately. Instead, he granted minor concessions, organized armed gangs on camelback to assault protestors, and announced he would not leave office before his term was up. The military stood behind Mubarak until a huge, uncontrollable strike wave swept every industry, city, town, and workplace in Egypt as millions of people quit work to take to the streets and push for the downfall of the regime. The military then forced Mubarak to step down to save itself from the flames of revolution.

"Better him than us," the generals thought.

Mobilizing working people is **absolutely necessary** to overturn capitalism but it also **not enough**. General strikes are powerful but they are not a magic bullet or a final blow. In Greece, general strike after general strike since 2010 hasn't stopped the Greek government (controlled by so-called socialists!)

from making huge cuts to social services; in Egypt, the general strike that brought down Mubarak was not enough to end the military dictatorship.

This is why mobilizing the 99% to take direct action and create direct democracy is critical. Occupy has been a smashing success because it is inclusive, not exclusive; replacing capitalism with a common sense society will require the same approach.

So yes, mobilize workers, but don't forget military personnel, students, the unemployed, the underemployed, the differently abled, street kids, farmers, small business owners, the religious, the clergy, the homeless, soccer moms, Joe Six Pack, seniors, anyone, everyone.

This is how the Arab Spring succeeded and this is how we'll succeed too.

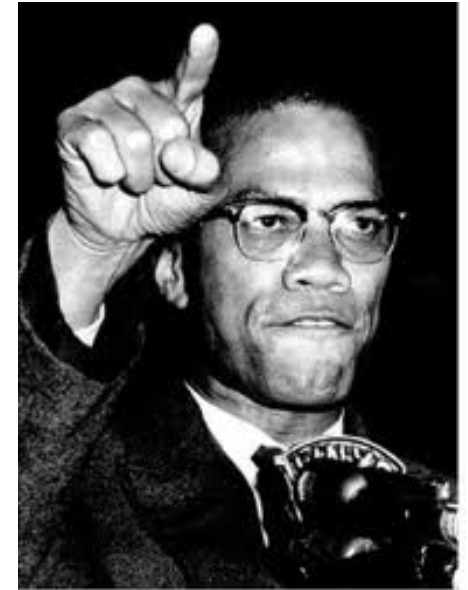
What to Do?

Occupy yourself – get involved in your local Occupy if you haven't already, even if you can't make every (or any) working group meeting or General Assembly. Meetings aren't the most important thing, participation is.

Use this text to organize debates with Occupy's Ron Paul libertarians or start a reading and discussion group. Take direct action and organize with others in some way – reach out and help someone who is in danger of being evicted, or connect with an existing community or neighborhood activist group.

No one can do everything but we can all contribute something.

In the big scheme of things, we need to get a lot more organized. We can't outspend the 1% so we have to out-organize them.



"I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those that do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the systems of exploitation. I believe that there will be that kind of clash, but I don't think it will be based on the color of the skin."

– Malcolm X

To win, we have to challenge the 1% on every front – politically, economically, institutionally, ideologically, culturally, even electorally.



We need political action to match direct action and no, that doesn't mean voting for a Democrat or Republican. **Voting for an Establishment candidate and hoping he/she does the right thing is political inaction.** If only we can represent ourselves, we should run our own candidates on our own ballot lines instead of "demanding" (really begging) Democratic or Republican politicians to fight for us.

People who reject electoral politics are right to fear being co-opted or absorbed and de-clawed by the system. Some people will also object to any tactic that might legitimize a government that orders police brutality to protect the morally bankrupt social order known as capitalism.

For those who think this way, consider this: if we want to shut down the system, what better way to do so than by infiltrating it? If we want no more business as usual, what better way to disrupt the dirty-dealing, lobbying, and maneuvering by putting occupiers right where it happens, in city halls, state legislatures, and Congress? The 1% send their cops to infiltrate and disrupt our institutions, General Assemblies, and working groups, why shouldn't we do the same to them and their institutions?

Decades ago the Communist Party (CP) in New York City won rent control for the 99% through a combination of direct action in the streets and political action in the halls of government. They organized tenant rent strikes, physically blocked evictions, moved people's furniture back into apartments after cops put it on the sidewalk while the CP's city council members fought the powerful landlord lobby and passed pro-tenant legislation.

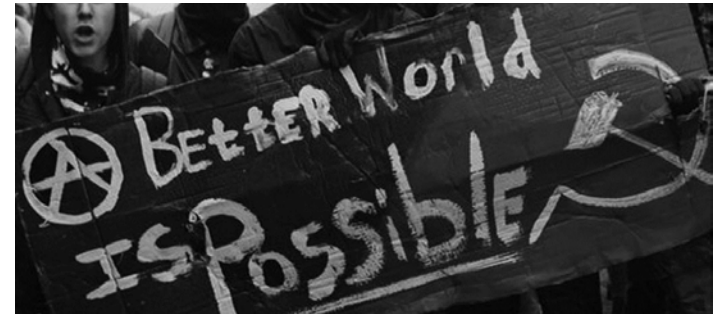
The 1936 Spanish revolution began not with direct action but with political action – the election of the Popular Front, an alliance of socialists, communists, liberals, reformers, radicals, and even some anarchists.

The only way we can beat the system is by working inside, outside, and against the system **all at once**. Political action and direct action, working within the system and outside the system are not either/or choices, just as mending capitalism and ending capitalism is not an either/or choice. We can and must do both.

By every means necessary.

Occupy Your Mind

- *Wall Street: How It Works and for Whom* by Doug Henwood
- *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn
- *War Is a Racket* by Smedley Butler
- *Reform or Revolution* by Rosa Luxemburg
- *The Mass Strike* by Rosa Luxemburg
- *Anarchist FAQ* by Iain McKay
- *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels
- *Malcolm X Speaks*
- *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell
- *Revolution in the Air* by Max Elbaum
- *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* by Cindy Milstein
- *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce* by Slavoj Žižek



Common Sense Web Sites

Tidal – occupytheory.org
Jacobin Magazine – jacobinmag.com
The North Star – thenorthstar.info
Waging Nonviolence – wagingnonviolence.org/
Kasama Project – kasamaproject.org
Occupy.com
libcom.org
thedailyoccupier.net
Unrepentant Marxist – louisproyect.wordpress.com
planetanarchy.net
Znet – zcommunications.org/znet
dissidentvoice.org
independent.org