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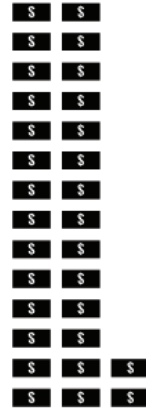
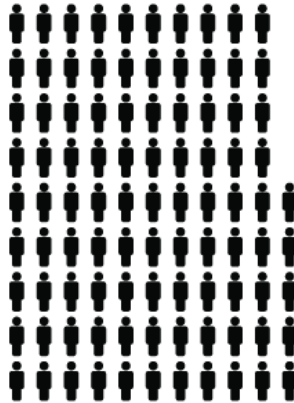
Dancing with Dynamite

by Ben Dangl

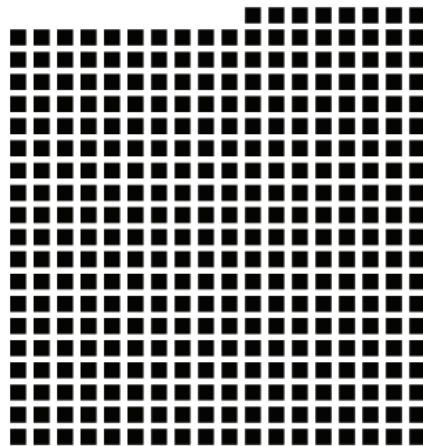
Contextualizing comments and excerpt from the Introduction to:
Dancing with Dynamite (AK Press, 2010)

A PROJECT OF THE AK PRESS TACTICAL MEDIA SQUAD





THE TOP 1% OWN 42% OF AMERICAN WEALTH - MORE THAN THE BOTTOM 95% COMBINED



AVERAGE CEO PAY IS 350 TIMES AVERAGE WORKER PAY - THE HIGHEST RATIO OF ALL TIME



Infographics courtesy of @OccupyDesign | www.occupydesign.org

Things are getting really weird around here.

In hundreds of cities people are finding their voice. And we are all listening. Has the inequality gap just become too intolerable—especially to those 99% who see only a future of mindless toil and crippling debt? Is the democratic system as we know it “broken”? Is it time to repeal corporate personhood as codified into law? Are taxing the rich and dismantling portions of the financial services sector enough to help restore dignity in our lives? Or do we want the works...?

It's times like these that put ideas to the test. The radically egalitarian veneer of the Occupy movement makes us anarchists a bit giddy. General Assemblies coast to coast, and not a vanguard party in sight. (And on the 125th Anniversary of the Haymarket Affair!) Strangers meet as equals, work on common goals, and pursue tough discussions about issues that distance allows to fester. It's like a national teach-in on capitalist economics, governance, class, and other vital topics not usually uttered in polite society. It's also gritty and frustrating at times, but it all feels REAL, doesn't it?

There's a lot of serious, strategic decisions to be made in the coming weeks and months, and as movement publishers, it's our job to try and provide the resources we need to make those sorts of difficult decisions. And hence we've included an excerpt from Ben Dangl's latest book. This short piece introduces the discussions and land occupations taking place in Latin America in the wake of hollow victory at the ballot box. We find familiarity in Pedro Caballero's words “Agrarian reform doesn't happen in the government ministries. It happens in the streets, in the plazas; it happens with land occupations.”

Today's Occupiers have a lot to learn from the recent tensions in Latin America between grassroots social movements and States—particularly the States recently transformed by left electoral victories. The betrayal felt down south isn't dramatically different from that felt here by those who believed “change” could come through the halls of power. As the tear gas settles and the bruises darken it's clear we're all alone—many already knew it, others are learning fast.

The writings and recommended readings included in this pamphlet expand our intellectual horizons as we collectively ponder the fate of this country's people and those outside its borders. Let's talk about a self-managed society, unburdened by capitalism and financiers. Perhaps you do want the works. And AK Press wants you to have them.

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For more commentary and analysis visit revolutionbythebook.akpress.org.

Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America

By Benjamin Dangl

Occupy, Resist, Produce”—this is the slogan of the landless farmer movements in Brazil and Paraguay, and the strategy that guided the occupations of factories, hotels, and other businesses in Argentina following the country’s economic crash in 2001. The following excerpt from *Dancing with Dynamite* traces the story of Pedro Caballero, a landless farmer in Paraguay whose experience is emblematic of other activists across Latin America; when the system failed, Cabellero took matters into his own hands. And that is what is what thousands of activists are doing right now within the Occupy Wall Street movement; instead of looking to the president or the banks for solutions, they are looking to each other.

In addition to examining the precious dance between grassroots movements and left-leaning governments in Latin America, *Dancing with Dynamite* examines these connections between movements in the north and south. For example, the 2008 occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago reflected the strategies of unemployed workers taking over factories in Argentina in 2001, and movements for access to water in Detroit and Atlanta mirrored struggles in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where in 2000, popular protests rejected the multinational company Bechtel’s water privatization plan and put the water back into public hands. The Take Back the Land movement in Florida, which organized homeless people to occupy a vacant lot and pairs homeless families with foreclosed homes, shares the tactics and philosophy of the landless movement in Brazil. Participatory budgeting in Brazil, which provides citizens with direct input on how city budgets are distributed, is now being implemented by communities across the US.

These are just a handful of movements and grassroots initiatives that provide helpful models (in both their victories and failures) for decentralizing political and economic power, and putting decision making into the hands of the people. As the OWS movement has demonstrated, movements for justice around the world share common tactics and philosophies, from Occupy Wall Street to the landless occupations in Paraguay.

Excerpt from the book’s introduction:

The motorcycle thundered off the highway onto a jungle road of loose red dirt framed by trees, families lounging in front of their farmhouses, and small herds of disinterested cows. We pulled up to a dusty store to buy food for our stay in the rural community of Oñondivepá, Paraguay, and asked the woman behind the counter what was available. She nodded her head, picked up a saw, and began hacking away at a large slab of beef. We strapped the meat and a box of beer on to the back of the motorcycle and roared off down the road.

A volleyball game was going on when we arrived in the area where landless activist Pedro Caballero lived. His wife offered us fresh oranges while his children ran around in the dirt, playing with some wide-eyed kittens. The sun had set, so Caballero's wife lifted a light bulb attached to a metal wire onto an exposed electric line above the house, casting light on our small gathering of neighbors. Suddenly, the dogs jumped to action, joining in a barking chorus, and lunged toward the edge of the woods. They had found a poisonous snake, a common cause of death in this small community far from hospitals.

"We are the landless," Caballero, a slight young man with shoulder length black hair, explained while peeling an orange for his young daughter. As a settler on the land, he works with his neighbors and nearby relatives to produce enough food for his family to survive. But he is up against a repressive state that either actively works against landless farmers, or ignores them. "No one listens to us, so we have to take matters into our own hands," he said. Caballero spoke of the need to occupy land as a last resort for survival. "The legal route isn't working, so we have to go for the illegal route, which does work."

Caballero was a long-time friend and supporter of current Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo. He worked on the president's campaign, and held out hope that after taking office, Lugo would implement much-needed land reform for the thousands of landless farmers in the country. Now he believes the president has "turned his back on the sector that gave him everything." But Caballero, along with many other landless farmer leaders, has not stopped his militant actions. "Agrarian reform doesn't happen in the government ministries. It happens in the streets, in the plazas; it happens with land occupations."

He tells stories of the community's many confrontations with Brazilian landowners who are taking over Paraguayan land to grow soy—a rapidly

expanding crop which, through a dangerous cocktail of pesticides, corrupt judges, and armed thugs, is displacing Paraguayan *campesinos* [small farmers] at an unprecedented rate. The threat of this toxic crop, protected and encouraged by the state, literally looms on the horizon for Caballero and his family: beyond his own small farm, a soy plantation is climbing down a neighboring hill toward the river. The pesticides used on the soy are already polluting their local water supply. So far, the community has resisted the encroachment with machetes and community organizing.

Ramón Denis, Caballero's uncle, is adamant that his self-built community will resist eviction. "We will not permit even one meter of soy in our community," Denis said. "In this community we work together. When the community is apathetic, nothing is possible. When the community moves, anything is possible."

The story of Oñondivepá is part of the complicated relationship at the heart of this book: the dance between social movements and states. In this dance, the urgency of survival trumps the law, people acting based on the rights they were born with makes the state irrelevant, and anything is possible when the community moves.

Desperation tends to push people together, and a transformative and irrepressible power can grow from that bond. The situation a majority of people across South America find themselves in today is as dire as it was for many in the US during the Great Depression. John Steinbeck writes movingly of the solidarity that rose from that anguished period in *The Grapes of Wrath*:

The causes lie deep and simply—the causes are a hunger in a stomach, multiplied a million times; a hunger in a single soul, hunger for joy and some security, multiplied a million times; muscles and mind aching to grow, to work, to create, multiplied a million times... The danger is here, for two men are not as lonely and perplexed as one. And from this first "we" there grows a still more dangerous thing: "I have a little food" plus "I have none." If from this problem the sum is "we have little food," the thing is on its way, the movement has direction. Only a little multiplication now, and this land, this tractor are ours.

These words speak of the hunger that pushed people to organize, that pushed them to join unions and fight against exploitative economic systems and ideologies. Decades later, a Brazilian slum dweller, Carolina María de

Jesús, writes of the poverty in her community: “Hunger is the dynamite of the human body.” Hunger’s dynamite can be self-destructive, but it can also force people to take radical, liberating action.

Dancing with Dynamite deals with the dances between today’s nominally left-leaning South American governments and the dynamic movements that helped pave their way to power in Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Brazil, and Paraguay. The discussion surrounding the question of changing the world through taking state power or remaining autonomous has been going on for centuries. The vitality of South America’s new social movements, and the recent shift to the left in the halls of government power, make the region a timely subject of study within this ongoing debate. Though often overlooked in contemporary reporting and analysis on the region, this dance is a central force crafting many countries’ collective destiny.



Image from the Oakland General Strike 11/2/11.

Looking for literary tools to support your occupation?

AK Press recommends these great books:

- ★ *Anarchism and its Aspirations*, by Cindy Milstein
- ★ *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, by David Graeber
- ★ *Uses of a Whirlwind: Movement, Movements, and Contemporary Radical Currents in the United States*, edited by Team Colors
- ★ *Revolt & Crisis in Greece: Between a Present Yet to Pass and a Future Still to Come*, edited by Occupied London
- ★ *Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America*, by Ben Dangl
- ★ *Signs of Change: Contemporary Social Movements, 1960s to now*, edited by Josh MacPhee and Dara Greenwald
- ★ *Conquest of Bread*, by Peter Kropotkin
- ★ *Autonomy, Solidarity, Possibility: The Colin Ward Reader*
- ★ *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, by Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt
- ★ *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America*, by Louis Adamic
- ★ *Come Hell or High Water: A Handbook on Collective Process Gone Awry*, by Richard Singer and Delfina Vanucci
- ★ *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, by David Graeber
- ★ *Wall Street: How It Works and For Whom*, by Doug Henwood
- ★ *Take Back the Land*, by Max Rameau
- ★ *Revolt on Goose Island: The Chicago Factory Takeover and What It Says About the Economic Crisis*, by Kari Lydersen
- ★ *ABCs of the Economic Crisis: What Working People Need to Know*, by Michael D. Yates and Fred Magdoff
- ★ *Field Guide to the U.S. Economy*, by Jonathan Teller-Elsberg, Nancy Folbre, and James Heintz
- ★ *Field Guide to the Global Economy*, by John Cavanagh and Sarah Anderson
- ★ *Great Financial Crisis*, by Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster
- ★ *Parecon: Life After Capitalism*, by Michael Albert

Find them all, plus thousands of other resources at www.akpress.org.

This pamphlet is a project of the AK Press Tactical Media Squad.

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