



The Manitowoc Progressive

The Voice of the Manitowoc County Democratic Party

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November 2011

Occupy Wall Street



FROM THE EDGE OF THE CHAIR

Kerry Trask – Occupy Wall Street

From where we stand the small colony of Occupy Wall Street protestors, currently camped out in Manhattan's Zuccotti Park, may seem almost half a world away. Not only geographically remote, but they also sound like a faint echo from the long-ago protests of the 1960s. By most conventional measures, the Occupy Wall Street participants appear to be part of a vaguely defined leaderless movement of only modest magnitude and strength unlikely to intimidate the corporate elite they seem determined to hold accountable for the mess they have made of this county.

However, to dismiss them as being of little note or consequence would be a serious oversight, for what they lack in numbers and political muscle, they more than make up for in the power of the truth to which they bare witness.

By now everyone in this country knows, with the exceptions of the Tea Party tainted Republicans and most of the super-rich, that the national economy is not working for most of the American people. That is the central reality of our time.

After waiting in vain for the establishment to "get it" and take urgently needed action to regenerate the economy, create more jobs, and restore some hope to our national life, we finally have this modest flare-up of collective anger and moral indignation in Zuccotti Park. The people there, like canaries in our shared mine shaft, warn of impending explosions soon to rock the country.

The rich and their reactionary political flunkies seem oblivious to the significance of such rumblings. Pleased with themselves and doing just fine, they remain confident of their control of the system. And why wouldn't they? Following the bail-outs, hand-outs, and the complete restoration of their

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Monthly Meeting

Monday, November 28th

7:00 PM

**Recall Walker Headquarters
1207 Washington Street
Manitowoc**

Annual Business Meeting

Now is the time for you to express ideas for improvements to make our Party the best ever. An important meeting, so come and learn how the party operates and how we can make change.

Also, an update on how the recall is progressing.

A copy of MantyDems constitution can be downloaded from our website: www.mantydem.com.

***Manitowoc's Goal for
Recall Walker-Kleefisch:
10,000 Signatures***

***Occupy Wisconsin
Recall Walker and
Kleefisch***

Occupy Wall Street

bonus system of sharing the spoils, the richest 20% of the population is left in possession of 84% of all this country's wealth. In fact, the top 400 families now have the same net worth as the bottom 50% of the entire population and the annual after-taxes income of the top 1% has increased by 275% since the inauguration of Ronald Regan. Indeed, not since 1928 has wealth been so inequitably and distortedly distributed within the United States, nor the American people so sharply sorted into winners and losers as the middle class erodes away. And yet the few who have so much insist on still more.

The wealth they have accumulated is not the well-deserved rewards of a meritocratic system in which the best and brightest—or the “job creators” as Republicans like to call them—are rewarded for their productivity and enhancement of the common good. No, the gross inequities of wealth and privilege that currently characterize this society are the deliberately created results of public policies put in place by a political system, insatiably hungry for campaign cash, which systematically redistributes wealth upward to a small, greedy, and unaccountable elite perched at the top of the heap. The system is rigged in their favor so they cannot loose. And politicians, especially those on the right, have become shamefully subservient to the giant, too-big-to-fail corporations and super-rich who finance their election campaigns. With each undeserved tax cut, subsidy, and concession the political system has merges ever more completely with the corporate establishment and grown increasingly indifferent about the needs of the people and the well-being of the country as a whole.

In just the last two years the net worth of the middle fifth of U.S. households has plummeted by 26%, and if we count the millions of people who have only part-time employment and those who have given up on ever again finding work, along with those who have no jobs at all, we are now approaching Great Depression levels of unemployment. Furthermore, we have a record number of Americans—46 million of them—living below the official poverty line (\$11,000 a year for an individual and a little more than \$22,000 for a family of four). In fact, one out of every five of our children now lives in poverty.

But even more abhorrent than this is the betrayal of the promise that has always been at the very heart of the American experience. For virtually our entire history this has been the place (often the only place) where ordinary people had the opportunity to get ahead in the world by their own hard work, personal abilities, and self-improvement. And it was that promise of a fair chance to earn a better life which stirred the huddled masses to cross the oceans to get here and why we have been the most productive people on the planet. But

rates of upward mobility have been stagnant here for the past twenty years and the United States has become far less a land of opportunity than most of the other advanced countries of the world. The promise has become an illusion and the dream is dying.

All of this is symptomatic of a dysfunctional economy and a broken political system which is not working for most of the American people. The Occupy Wall Street protesters bare witness to that, exposing the lies and hollow platitudes of a self-satisfied power elite, and are now being joined in the streets by union members, military veterans, teachers, people of color, and ever increasing numbers from the besieged middle class. Demonstrations have spread to more than 150 cities and campuses and even beyond our borders. What began in the autumn rain of Zuccotti Park may be awakening a sleeping tiger and this country may be approaching a long over-due day of reckoning. ■

Ideas from the 99%

Promulgated in the General Assembly of the Occupy Wall Street Participants where all are given a voice here are some of the ideas

**Jobs For All
Fair Trade, not Free Trade
A Maximum Wage
Democracy
Racial Justice
Financial Transactions Tax
Leash Lobbyists
Regulate the Banks
Make Wall Street Pay
Fight Inequality
Forgive Student Loans
Home-Owner Relief
Stop the Wars**

Why Occupy Wall Street Has Left Washington Behind

By Gordon Lafer

Public discussion of the Wall Street protests has focused on the movement's indictment of the economic elite, but Occupy Wall Street marks an equally profound critique of the country's political system. As the weeks tick by, the protests at Zuccotti Park and across the nation are driving home this profound realization: this is a fight that can't be won by voting. The crisis that most fundamentally shapes our lives cannot be solved through the legislative process. This is not because the agenda is unpopular—54 percent of Americans support OWS, with only 23 percent opposed—but because the system is corrupted beyond repair. This slowly dawning realization is both invigorating—an invitation to engage in the kind of bold, blue-sky strategic thinking that leftists have not entertained for decades—and disturbing, a harbinger of just how nasty the future may get.

What makes OWS different from the mass marches against the Iraq War or at the 2004 GOP convention is not just that it's an ongoing occupation rather than a one-day affair. It's that this protest is not, at its core, voicing an appeal to lawmakers.

The OWS turn away from the political system began with the choice of location—Wall Street rather than the National Mall. It is driven home, above all, by the refusal to encapsulate the protest in policy demands aimed at Congress. I don't know whether the absence of specific policy proposals is intentional or accidental. But I do know that it's part of what lends such power to the occupation and renders its targets so palpably uncomfortable.

The “[demand for demands](#) [1],” *The Nation*'s Betsy Reed has noted, is misplaced. What would our rallying cry be? “The people demand a .05 percent transaction tax on stock purchases held for less than fifteen days”? Everyone knows what OWS is for. And its essential demand is powerful precisely because of its startling simplicity: “You know what you did. You have our stuff. Give it back.”

The movement comes at a time of economic crisis and unparalleled cynicism about government, particularly in the wake of the *Citizens United* decision. Congress's approval rating—13 percent—is the lowest ever recorded.

The protests are also in large part a response to the disappointments of the Obama administration. Indeed, almost every policy demand that OWS might possibly voice has already been proposed, debated and defeated—at a time when

Democrats controlled all branches of government. Members of Congress considered but declined to enact proposals to impose a tax on Wall Street transactions; to limit executive compensation; to fund a mass WPA-style jobs program; to allow bankruptcy judges to mark underwater mortgages to market; to make it easier for Americans to form unions and bargain for better wages; to eliminate tax benefits for companies that transfer our jobs overseas; and to forswear any more NAFTA-style trade treaties. The OWS refusal to articulate policy demands reflects the conviction that any remedies that fit the scale of the problem are impossible to pass—not only in the current Congress but in any Congress we can realistically imagine.

I say this as someone who at this time last year was working as senior staff on the House Labor Committee. I still believe in the importance of that work, because even modest accomplishments at that level can improve the lives of millions. But this crisis calls for more than modest accomplishments.

I went to Washington in 2009 because, like many others, I believed the moment was finally ripe to make progressive changes for working people. But I discovered what we all kind of knew beforehand: if the Republicans are cheerleaders for the 1 percent, most Democrats are quiet collaborationists. I met some very dedicated and hard-working people in Congress. But ultimately the Democrats are too beholden to big money. In last year's Congressional elections, more than two-thirds of all campaign contributions came from one-quarter of 1 percent of the population. Even Democratic candidates got ten times as much money from corporations as they did from labor unions. There is simply no chance that the little people will triumph over big business in this process.

There has been much written about “disillusionment with democracy” in Latin America, as many countries replaced dictatorships with democracy only to discover that their new governments were powerless to address the most pressing problems of poverty and inequality. Democracy is measured not only by the fairness of elections but also by the scope of national life that is subject to popular control. When the dictates of foreign debt or trade treaties put core economic decisions beyond the control of elected representatives, “democracy” becomes a cruel joke or, worse, a spectacle designed to absorb popular frustration while the real deals go down elsewhere. Keep your eyes over here—don't pay attention to that man behind the curtain!

Leaving Washington Behind *(Cont.)*

The OWS moment seems to reflect a recognition that we have joined our neighbors to the south in being ruled by a system that, whatever its other virtues may be, is powerless to solve the most important problems plaguing the country.

It is this realization, even more than the demand for economic redistribution, that makes OWS such a radicalizing experience. Policy demands aimed at Congress implicitly affirm the legitimacy of the legislative process. The refusal to submit demands is a refusal to legitimate an illegitimate system.

In some ways, it's the White House that pushed people to turn outside the system. The administration has long admonished the left not to expect too much. Former press secretary Robert Gibbs famously declared that "the professional left" needed to understand that things like "Canadian healthcare" are simply "not reality." The president repeatedly asks that we appreciate his modest achievements as the high-water mark of what can come from such a limited system. For the OWS protesters to be coaxed back into the legislative game, they'd have to believe that Obama is lying when he says this is the best we can expect. The problem is that the protesters believe the president is telling the truth.

As Barack Obama and Mitt Romney hone their lines, trying to work out a position that sympathizes with the aggrieved while reassuring their donors, the OWS message to both candidates is the same: "This isn't about you. It's between us and them," pointing up to the Masters of the Universe on the executive floors—not the mouthpieces of the corporate chieftains but the actual power.

OWS is clearly inspired by Tahrir Square. Yet Egyptians succeeded in toppling the Mubarak government not because they occupied the square but because their occupation exerted direct pressure on the country's most powerful business interests. As SUNY Stonybrook sociologist Michael

Schwartz has detailed, by shutting down the tourist industry, disrupting construction projects whose financing had already been committed and initiating general strike actions that threatened to shut the Suez Canal, the occupiers of Tahrir threatened the interests of the economic elite—and that is what brought down the regime.

Clearly, something similar—nonviolent action that directly challenges the economic elite—is required here if we're to succeed in making serious change. It's daunting, but there is a precedent. Before there were civil rights laws, people broke the back of Jim Crow by picketing, boycotting, getting beaten and arrested by the tens of thousands, in direct action against the most powerful forces of their society.

OWS has resonated with millions of normally apolitical people across the country who recognize in it the crucible of their own struggles. If the movement moves beyond the occupied squares and into foreclosure defense (as has already begun in Los Angeles and New York) and student debt strikes—if it becomes not only the voice but the arm of those resisting immiseration at the hands of the 1 percent—then it may achieve by popular action what the political system is incapable of accomplishing.

This is the nightmare scenario for those at the top, and the promise of a new day for the rest of us. This is something that could get out of hand. This is Shays' Rebellion without the guns.

One of six articles covering the Occupy Wall Street Movement published by The Nation, November 14, 2011

Gordon Lafer, a professor at the University of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center, is the author of Neither Free Nor Fair: the Subversion of Democracy Under the NLRB.



The Manitowoc Progressive

The Voice of the Manitowoc Democratic Party

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Calendar of Events

- Mon, Nov 28th Annual Business Meeting, 7:00 PM, Recall Walker Headquarters
- Mon, Dec 12th Executive Committee Meeting - 6:00 PM - Pizza Garden
Change Please Note: this is the 2nd Monday
- Sat, Dec 17th Think Tank – 9:30 AM, St James Episcopal Church
Change Please Note : this is the 3rd Saturday

No monthly meeting is scheduled for December. However we hope all will participate in the recall process.

Enjoy the Holiday Season!

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