

Occupy Wall Street

A Report from A Front That May Soon Be Shut Down

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Global Research, September 25, 2011

25 September 2011

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Before you read on, watch this: a video from the base camp of the #OccupyWall Street protest that is now in its seventh day. It's called "No One Can Predict the Moment of Revolution." (The video was produced by Martyna Starosta and her friend Iva)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwWInp75ua0>

These are the faces of a wannabe revolution, more than a protest but not yet quite a major Movement, The spirit is infectious perhaps because of the sincerity of the participants and their obvious commitment to their ideals.

Occupy Wall Street is more than a protest; it is as much an exercise in building a leaderless, bottom-up resistance community with a more democratic approach to challenging the system where everyone is encouraged to have a say.

But saying that also leads to a conflict between my emotional identification with the kids that have rallied in this small park/public space on Liberty Street to exercise some liberty, with a despairing analysis that wishes this enterprise well but harbors deep doubts about its staying power and impact.

This privately owned park, devastated by debris on 9/11 and then rebuilt by a real estate magnate who named it after himself, is also a place that is under 24 hour surveillance from a hostile New York City police Department which has put up a fence on one side of the park, and brought down a spy tower from Times Square to track the participants from on high, sprinkled infiltrators into the crowd.

By the time I left, late on Saturday afternoon, the police arrested 70 people who had joined a march that went from Wall Street to Union Square, New York's traditional gathering place for political rallies for nearly 100 years.

You can watch it all on a live stream.

<http://www.livestream.com/globalrevolution>

In many ways this is a 2011 style protest modeled after Tahrir Square in Cairo. It is non-violent, organized around what's called a "General Assembly" where the community meets daily to debate its political direction and discuss how it sees itself. There are no formal leaders or spokespeople, no written down political agenda and no shared demands.

They focus on using social media. Twitter is their megaphone.'

They have no soundsystem. When participants want to make an announcement, they yell “Mike Check” which is repeated by the whole crowd. They also repeat the announcement, a few words at a time so everyone can hear it.

This bottom-up anarchist sensibility and ideology conflicts with the mass mobilizations of old where an organization issues a call and a coalition of groups carries it out.

I ran into some of yesterday’s movement leaders, Leslie Cagan who ran United for Peace and Justice and organized the massive anti-Iraq war protests and marches in New York and Washington before and after. She was as intrigued as I was about this gathering of the committed. She found the focus a bit vague but seemed willing to give it a chance to grow and learn by making its own mistakes.

Other 60’s activists like Aron Kay, known as the “pie man” for all the famous and infamous people he pied in the face to protest their crimes and misdemeanors—including Andy Warhol for dining with the Shah of Iran—was also showing his solidarity by turning up and squatting in the park.

Lower Manhattan on a Saturday is usually a Mosque less Mecca for tourists visiting Ground Zero, a crime scene if there ever was one. It is a symbol of a national failure to defend this country as well.

It’s also the place where the 911 Truth Movement shares its findings weekly about what “really happened” with visitors

Just a few blocks away is another crime scene: Wall Street, which symbolizes an ongoing economic failure. In this past week, access has been limited and in this free country of ours protestors could not parade in front of the NY Stock Exchange, another privately run financial institution. That led Yves Smith of the Naked Capitalism blog to opine, “I’m beginning to wonder whether the right to assemble is effectively dead in the US.”

Many banks like Chase doubled their security forces and put up fences to protect themselves from the people the NY media has labeled “kids and ageing hippies.”

The panic in the exchange is mirrored in the insecurity in the streets where surveillance cameras, private police forces and NY cops defend the bastions of privilege.

The police went on the offensive Saturday with mass arrests of activists. Scott Galindez filed this report on Reader Supported News, “ While the live feeds were up I witnessed a very powerful arrest of a law student whose parents were recently evicted from their home. He dropped to his knees and gave an impassioned plea for the American people to wake up! There are reports of police kettling protesters with a big orange net, at least five maced, and police using tasers.”

There were also reports of the use of mace, tear gas and pepper sprat which hit, two old women. We are so used to these storm trooper tactics that most expect them. There had been fewer arrests last week although the police seem to now have identified key organizers and are singling them out

On Saturday, police gave out a notice saying that it is now illegal to sleep in the park. They then put up a sign on a park wall. I watched a member of the police command, a “white

shirt" named Timoney, marched into the park and gruffly ordered the communications team that spends most of its time tweeting out the latest news, to take down some large umbrellas the activists were using to protect their computers from rain.

The police consider these "structures" and prohibit them. Earlier in the week, they arrested people for using tarps to protect their gear. (They don't see the irony in that term given the way the TARP law bailed out the banksters.)

Many of the people in park believe the end may becoming with the police eager to end what they see as a Woodstock on Wall Street complete with topless teens and long haired

militants. This assemblage clearly affects their macho

Identity as upholders of law and order, as they define it. The probably agree with the right wing Red State website that calls the protesters a "menagerie."

I wouldn't rule out mass arrests once a provocation, theirs or the protests, provides the pretext.

Will the Occupy Wall Street collectives be able to continue to occupy a zone that has been occupied for years by the greedsters of the finance world?

More importantly, will the issues they are trying to draw attention to, however symbolically, be taken up by others?

Will it take more cracked heads or even a police killing to move New Yorkers to support a campaign to rein in Wall Street?

Where are the unions and New York's progressive democrats and organizations? Why aren't they in the streets?

Why don't they realize that economic justice issues are essential to transforming this oligarch driven country?

I having been calling for years for more protests on Wall Street to put the issues of Wall Street crime on the agenda, But with media barely covering this "occupation," with the activists being denigrated for their youth and inexperience, will this one have the impact I was hoping for.

It seems unlikely.

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