

Why the Occupied Wall Street Movement Scares the Democratic Party

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Fueled by a long simmering anger over the economic crisis, the continuing enrichment of a tiny corporate elite who brought this crisis on, and the lack of any political voice for the great majority of people, the Occupy Wall Street Movement has spread to hundreds of cities across the nation, mobilizing hundreds of thousands in an undeniable display of strength. The growing involvement of unions in these developments both testifies to how broad this discontent is and its potential power to mobilize and organize millions. The 99 percent have had enough, and growing numbers are now taking to the streets to make an impact.

We are witnessing the birth of a social movement that has the potential to win economic justice. Having only recently exploded onto the scene, there are many directions this movement may take. The only certainty is that, since the conditions that fueled it are not going away any time soon, it is, at the very least, a harbinger of larger struggles to come.

Some have argued that the Occupy Wall Street Movement has a relationship to the Democratic Party similar to the Tea Party's relationship to the Republicans. This is wrong on several counts. The Tea Party and its message was cooked up, funded, and molded by corporate interests such as the Koch brothers. It attempted to mobilize people by tapping into their fears of where the country is going while dressing up a corporate political agenda in populist rags. There was never a doubt that this would eventually strengthen the far right in the Republican Party who quickly identified with the Tea Party's cause.

Relations stand very differently between the Occupy Wall Street Movement and the Democratic Party. This movement has no big Wall Street interests channeling funds into their organizing activities. By targeting economic inequality and injustice brought on by Wall Street's rule, the movement has placed itself in direct opposition to the largest financial contributors to and policy makers of the Democratic Party. While Democratic Party politicians may mouth support for some of the issues that have united the movement, any measures they can effectively promote will not come close to adequately addressing working peoples real needs.

To understand why that is the case requires that one follow the money. All the community organizations and unions combined cannot come close to matching the wealth of the corporate elite. The Democratic Party is a machine that has been built and is maintained by funds from their deep pockets. If any Democratic politicians seriously do try to support measures that address workers' needs that the Occupy Wall Street Movement is putting on the table, it will be at odds with the Democratic Party's purpose. Of course, Democratic politicians will continue to voice support for issues raised by the Occupy Wall Street Movement, such as taxing the rich, but they only do this during election campaigns or when they know that there is no chance of passing any relevant bills.

In an attempt at damage control, President Obama recently acknowledged that the Occupy Wall Street Movement "...expresses the frustrations the American people feel..." However, he still used the press conference to justify his massive bank bailouts. This is typical of President Obama, betraying his occasional populist posturing with policies that enrich the top 1 percent at the expense of everyone else.

President Obama's recent support for a 5.6 percent tax on millionaires and the American Jobs Act will be spun as examples of his attempts to address the anger that gave birth to the Occupy Wall Street Movement. However, such claims cannot withstand serious scrutiny. The 5.6 percent millionaires' tax is a paltry amount when compared to the overall enrichment the corporate elite has enjoyed under Obama's administration. With American companies sitting on \$2 trillion in cash rather than investing in job creation, Obama's tax the rich gesture is peanuts. Much of the \$447 billion slated for the American Jobs Act is in the form of corporate tax give-aways, and a large amount of its funding will come from cuts to Medicare and Medicaid. At best it will result in the creation of 2 million jobs while there are 24 million unemployed and underemployed.

But aside from its paltry status, Obama's millionaire tax increase will only fool those who have not had time to pay close attention. If Obama were serious, he would have introduced this measure when the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress. By waiting until the Republicans control the House to raise this proposal, when it has no chance of passing, Obama is revealing that he is simply playing politics and campaigning for the next election; he is parroting popular measures without having to worry about alienating his wealthy supporters since they all know the proposal is dead in the water.

Given all this, President Obama's prediction that the Occupy Wall Street's frustration will "express itself politically in 2012" appears to be wishful thinking when it comes to a flood of support into the voting booths. Many of the participants in this movement were enthusiastic supporters of candidate Obama in 2008. The bitterness of their disappointment cannot be forgotten and it is unlikely that they will embrace him again.

The Occupy Wall Street Movement needs to remain independent of both Wall Street parties and corporate cash. While many participants, especially the unions, will endorse Democratic candidates in 2012, this movement should not allow itself to give into the habit of endorsing "the lesser evil" and restricting its activities and demands according to what corporate candidates say is possible. It must continue to speak to the experience and needs of working people with mass united action rather than be diverted by knocking on doors for the Democrats. The history of social movements in this country shows that getting caught up in the Democratic Party leads to paralysis, entropy, and even the death of hope of bringing about significant change.

As the Occupy Wall Street expands to include unions and greater numbers of unorganized workers, it will be necessary to find specific concrete demands that the majority of working class people are ready to unite and mobilize around at this time. Demands focusing on government funded job creation, taxing the rich, no cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, and ending the wars are a likely good start, because all of them have huge support, according to the polls.

If the Occupy Wall Street Movement is to grow, it will also have to transform itself. In the process of bringing in greater numbers, firming up greater unity with unions, and organizing larger actions, it will have to perfect its democratic practices, develop organizational

structures on a national and local level, as well as put forward a leadership structure that is transparent and completely accountable to the general membership. In the process of evolving into a democratic movement, it will be possible to create an alternative to the parties of Wall Street and corporate America, that is, a Labor Party that fights on behalf of the vast majority.

While such an outcome may not be likely at this time for the participants of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, the logical course of its struggle may compel it to move in this direction. If so, it will be the product of a process that has the power to fundamentally change the political and economic structure of this nation.

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