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The Occupy Movement

Four Nuisances in Occupy

Burn Shit

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November 5, 2011

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is doing either, or if they are, their attempts seem a little watered-down. In fairness, Occupy Oakland has made the most progress towards actually turning the occupation into a real Event, and this is partly due to the wildly disproportionate repression the (initially) peaceful encampment received from the police.

The practical/organisational forms of the occupy movement (radically democratic, horizontally-structured) seem to be more radical than the content (reformist 'demands', social-democratic leanings). The non-hierarchical, organic structure is laudable, with general assemblies as the sole decision-making bodies, but to be effective, the occupations need to become more than just political campsites.

Apologies for not being completely overjoyed at the prospect of new generation of activists demanding (in the main) a return to some sort of pre-cuts-pre-monetarist-pre-Thatcher-pre-Reagan-pre-deregulation-capitalism, and imagining a kind of socially responsible, welfarist free market to replace the rapacious capitalism of late. Perhaps I'm jealous not being in the place where it's all apparently 'happening', but my sympathy is stretched with a movement that has consistently tried to appeal to both, 'left and right, liberal and conservative', de-politicising class warfare and shouting, 'Forget your politics, YOU ARE THE 99%!!!!!!!11!! #OWS'

1. A Growing Obsession With Demands

The New York Times quotes one occupier; 'We absolutely need demands... power concedes nothing without a demand.' The Occupy Seattle website has a number of policy polls for demands ranging from, 'universal education' to 'end corporate personhood.' Astonishingly, many of the NYC protesters see fit to work towards a set of ultimatums for the politicians in Washington to consider. With unparalleled political naivety, some think it best for their representatives in Congress to take final responsibility for 'fixing' capitalism. It seems many protesters cannot shake their attachment to existing power structures.

2. The American Dream and 'Nice' Capitalism

Picture it now: The mind-numbing, six-hour general assembly of earnest campers wrangling over the pros and cons of reforming the banking system. Searching for a consensus to draw a plan for a nice new capitalism 'with a human face', one regulated more effectively by the state. Underlying much (not all) of the Occupy Movement is a strange sort of American Dream narrative and the idealised notion of a pure, moral and non-parasitic capitalism. The idea that a once-fair and equitable meritocracy has been corrupted by a tiny few who've taken things too far. Still wedded to the basic tenets of capitalism and representative democracy, many of the Occupy protesters aren't demanding anything that's particularly radical. 'NOT AGAINST CAPITALISM, JUST AGAINST GREED!' – as if the whole machine didn't thrive on an avaricious drive to make a profit by any means, masked by useful euphemisms like 'ambition' and 'entrepreneurial spirit'. In a *Huffington Post* article entitled, '*The Occupy Movement: Not Anti-Capitalist but Anti-Fundamentalist*' Richard Stacy writes, 'There is not a problem

with capitalism, per se, and very few protesters are claiming as such. The problem is the variant of capitalism we have been pursuing for most of the last 30 years.' Oh yes. How can we forget those rosy days of Wilson and Callaghan, when the Labour Party actually meant the *party of labour* and actually represented the interests of the working masses (or is that the 99%)? Do people actually have such a misplaced fetish for that era of big government social democracy? Do they think back to those days as if the liberal West was the land of milk, honey and stable class relations?

This liberal-welfarist-social-democratic sycophancy is based on a total misreading of capitalism's historical evolution. At the risk of talking some Marxist dialectical bilge, the Keynesian post-war consensus was a political-economic model that suited one particular stage of capitalist development. New conditions (not least a long period of stagnation and the beginning of the process of globalisation) gave rise to the neo-liberal, monetarist model, which allowed unregulated capital to move across borders freely and expanded credit to stimulate a stifled demand and flat-lining real wages. All these systems are just different variations on the same putrid and debased theme, just stages in the evolution of a morally bankrupt system that has an unfortunate self-adjusting mechanism guaranteeing its survival through countless crises thus far.

3. A Shit Slogan

We Are The 99%. All our grievances and frustrations watered down into a vacuous, simplistic, twitter-friendly slogan. Just as vapid as 'Yes We Can' or 'Keep Hope Alive'. Is this an attempt to quantify the class struggle? A handy little formula to explain inequality and income disparities? Unfortunately, our problems have surpassed, 'the 1% versus everybody else'. Power is more entrenched and it cannot be delineated or re-

duced into a neat little mantra or pyramid diagram of societies' 'power structure'.

During France's Red Terror, Marat drew up an exact list of around 36,000 names, claiming that all the problems of the French people could be solved virtually overnight if the 36,000 were guillotined. This claim at least would have made more sense in his era of autocratic leviathans and the absolute omnipotency of Church and State. At least then there was a definite, discernable line of authority heading steeply down a feudal pyramid, but I'm not so sure that this is the case now (or even if it was then). It's not so black and white between the powerful and powerless; the monolithic institution/elite vs. the rest of the world. Power is more diffuse. It manages to worm its way into all relationships and practical endeavors, a crisscrossing web of coercive and manipulative connections that reproduce themselves through individuals – our job is to grasp this and minimise its hold over us. If I'm wrong then fuck it, lets just hang the 1% and be done with it, and enjoy the rest of our lives without these parasites.

4. What are they Occupying?

Looks to me like they're sleeping in a park or on a bit of concrete outside a church. A protest can either be a media-spectacle that 'raises awareness', or it can actually pose a real threat to the State if it challenges it *directly*. Are these occupations about establishing 'Temporary Autonomous Zones' or 'Spaces of Hope', self-governing and independent of traditional power structures and the State, that could potentially lead to a situation of 'dual power' that negates the State's hegemony, or begins to construct 'the new in the shell of the old'? Or are they oppositional attempts to disrupt (or just question) the status quo without establishing a positive alternative? Both would be fine, but I'm not sure that Occupy