Are We An Occupation or Just a Gathering?

“Wall Street Protestors, Occupying Till Whenever”
- NYT headline

The “Occupy Wall St.” model has done what many have tried and failed, it has pushed past the apathy and created a venue for possibility. In cities and towns across the country people are finding one another in situations few ever dared to venture into before. Meetings are being held, food shared and ideas discussed. But as one participant put it - “The fuzzy ultra-left ideal about forging new kinds of relationships through struggle and finding each other and such can’t just be about meeting in space and time, otherwise we could start a bowling league and be done with it.” What the gatherings themselves lack is a coherent substance, a sense of self-understanding. Towards this end, we raise the following questions.

Are We An Occupation or Just a Gathering?

The term occupation is often associated with a few things, namely the idea of disruption of or interference with the flow of goods or capital. When you ask for permission, when you seek a permit, the “occupations” become ‘camping’ and the term becomes a catch phrase.

The original encampment, which has spawned many franchises in it’s wake, has been likened to other movements from around the globe, most notably the Tahrir Square occupations this past January. The major differences between the movement currently emerging in the US and those of the square occupations throughout Northern Africa and Europe is strength. It was not merely the fact that 50,000 people took over Tahrir Square, it was the fact that they would not be forced to leave that made the difference. As a movement they were ready to physically defend the areas they had liberated and attack those trying to destroy it. By deciding on a strategy of “non-violence,” we have cut our legs out from under ourselves. They do not hold Zuccoti park, it is given to them under police supervision, and will be taken away just as easily when the moment is deemed appropriate, i.e. when the police and the mayor have had enough.
When the Occupy Wall St. protestors took their message outside of the NYPD contained area they were attacked. Over 80 arrests occurred when the crowd marched near Union Square. When they tried to cross the Brooklyn Bridge hundreds were detained and received citations. While the numbers swelled after those attacks, we missed a chance to sway the balance of power for just a moment.

That could change if the parameters of conflict were widened, if new avenues were opened to the possibility of physically holding space, not negotiating for its rental. Our individual refusals are small but collectively it is one of the last and strongest weapons we can wield together.

**Are we Anti Capitalists or just Anti Corporations?**

There is a difference between being an anti-capitalist and being against corporations, or “corporate greed” as some have chosen to describe it. Anti-capitalists reach for a world free of the kinds of social relationships that require domination. Landlords and tenants; bosses and workers; police and prisoners. These are relationships inherent to a capitalist system and to the democracy we live under. It is not indicative of a “broken” system for unemployment rates to soar, inflation to reign and wages to continually drop. The money can not even out, congress can not legislate it's way to equality. From where we all sit now, our personal freedoms and any wealth we can accumulate is done on the backs of someone else or at our own expense.

Though it may have acquired new forms, none of the poverty or exploitation we are protesting is unique to our modern age of corporate dominance. Regulating or taxing corporations will not come close to solving these problems, because these institutions are only one part of the vast structure of social relationships called State and Capital.

The future is wretched and marked with the poverty we all feel today. This in and of itself is a cause for indignation. When that rage turns towards petitioning congress for a brighter tomorrow or demanding accountability of corporations, we have already lost.

**The Police are not our friends!**

Capitalism, as a system, is based on a series of relationships between those who have power and those who do not. The police, whether they are a beat cop, a detective or the Chief act as the enforcers of this economic system. They stand between us and the food we need to survive. They evict us from the homes we can no longer afford. Their job is to enforce the laws of capital, the ones created not to keep us safe but to protect capital and ensure the system works as smoothly as it can.

The police who enter our liberated zones, our occupations, are doing so as agents of the State. As individuals they may have families and problems. They may hate their jobs just like the rest of us, but that does not mean they will not do them. If we are to stand together as the proposed 99% we can not allow the thugs and mercenaries of the 1% to pierce our spaces.

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