

Don't Just Occupy Wall Street – *Shut It Down!* Build for an Indefinite Nationwide General Strike!

The Occupy Wall Street protest movement is growing in New York, spreading to other cities, and most importantly, starting to draw support from organized labor. Finally, the frustration of working people is being expressed in a way that is forcing the complacent union bureaucrats to take notice! Another long-term protest started in Washington D.C. on October 6. The cry “From the Arab Spring to the American Autumn!” is starting to echo nationwide.

Revolutionary workers urge the entire working class and the oppressed to take direct action against the corporate plutocracy. We honor and applaud the protestors in New York who have stood up against brutal police repression and returned day after day to the scene of the capitalists' crimes. But even as we support the spread of this movement and the ongoing action in the nation's capital, we owe it to our fellow workers to temper that support with a reality check.

The Problem Is Capitalism, Not Just Corporations

On September 30, the NYC General Assembly issued its first programmatic document, the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City. The Declaration correctly identifies many of the problems plaguing working people in the US and worldwide, but regrettably stops short of identifying their root causes, and fails to put forward a program that can permanently do away with them.

The Declaration blames the damage to the planetary environment and the economic crisis on the fact that “corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments,” and “do not seek consent to extract wealth from the people and the Earth,” and points out that “no true democracy is attainable when the process is determined by economic power.”

What the Declaration fails to recognize, at least explicitly, is that the evils perpetuated by corporations are not a moral question of greed or recklessness, and cannot be cured simply by placing greater restrictions on corporate behavior, eliminating “corporate personhood,” or removing the influence of big business from the political process. The problems we face are **built into the structure of the capitalist economic system**, which places the means of production in private hands, and uses the promise of private profit as the sole incentive for using those means to produce the goods and services people need.

Corporations are just one possible legal form of private ownership of the means of production. More broadly, the structure of capitalism includes corporations and other private businesses; finance and investment capital; and the state (that is, the government). **Capitalism, not solely corporations**, is causing the devastation of our environment; the poisoning of our food supply; the deprivation of universal access to housing, education, health care, and other basic human rights; the manipulation of our minds through the media; the corruption of any semblance of democratic process; the evisceration of organized labor; and the pursuit of control over fossil fuel resources through war and military occupation. It is **the capitalist state** that has executed innocents like Troy Davis and still threatens to do the same to Mumia Abu-Jamal; it is the

capitalist state that has condemned hundreds of thousands of young Black and Brown men to prison for decades or for life; taken the lives of countless others on the streets at the hands of the police; and elevated the interest of “homeland security” over our civil liberties, as well as the rights and lives of the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. It is **capitalism, driving the actions of the corporations**, that has put tens of millions of Americans out of work; robbed countless millions of their homes and life savings; and driven 46 million Americans, most of them children, below the poverty line.

We cannot be truly anti-corporate without being anti-capitalist. We cannot solve our economic, environmental, and human needs problems, bring peace to the world, or create a genuinely democratic political system, if we do not recognize and act upon the simple fact that what lies at the root of the world’s problems is **capitalism**. The result of centuries of capitalist rule has become clear: capitalism drives repeated crises of overproduction; high unemployment; drastic misallocation of vital resources; cutbacks in public services and benefits; homelessness, hunger, and lack of access to health care; and the accumulation of obscene wealth in the hands of the few, while the masses are left to battle one another for the scraps from the bosses’ table. Calls for reform measures like “tax the rich” foster the illusion that the social problems of our country (not to mention the global economic crisis) can be solved even under capitalism, by getting wealthy people to pump more tax dollars into government coffers. This begs the question: whose government, and whose interests does it serve? Do the “tax the rich” proponents really expect us to believe that governments controlled by the plutocracy – as they inevitably will be under the capitalist system – will spend increased tax dollars on meeting the needs of workers, the poor, and the oppressed? If that were what they wanted to do, they could do it without increasing their own taxes, by calling a halt to their ruinously expensive, criminal imperialist military adventures in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan; ending aid to Israel and other repressive foreign governments; and ending the billions of dollars spent annually on various forms of corporate welfare.

Of course “tax the rich” reform cannot work. This worldwide economic collapse – which, make no mistake about it, is a depression, not just a “double dip” recession – is much deeper than even the most liberal Keynesians will admit. If the capitalist class could dig themselves out of this hole by simply spending public funds to put people to work, they would. But today it is so hard for the capitalists to make a buck in the market, they have replaced productive activity with what they call “financial services,” which basically means gambling on speculative bubbles for profit. Equities, real estate, and commodities all have gone through their bubbles as capital chases from one popped balloon to the next super-inflated sector.

To meet the needs of workers and ordinary people, and maintain a healthy economy, the resources of our society must be put to work producing real goods and services, not paper profits from gambling. But capitalism is no longer capable of investing in industrial production in developed countries, because workers’ relatively high standard of living in those countries means more profit can be made elsewhere. Thus, the only way to direct our resources back into providing real goods and services is to take capital out of the hands of the speculators.

Today big capital moves freely across borders, moving funds from the industrialized world to the neo-colonial world, where production at the lowest wages possible inflates Wall Streets profits, leaves the local workers in Dickensian conditions, and all the while abandoning the industrial

and manufacturing base in the “first world” which previously afforded the working class the means to view itself as “middle class.” The “free-market” today can no longer afford both the profits demanded by the owners of capital and the comforts the misnamed “middle class” has come to expect: a job with benefits, a vacation, a semblance of health care, a defined pension, half-way decent schools, affordable public higher education, affordable gasoline and home heating oil. The tendency of the rate of profit to decline and the rise of competition from China has put the squeeze on the corporate bottom line and they, in turn, have “no choice” – their fiduciary responsibility is to the bottom line and the next quarterly statement.

If we allow the labor bureaucrats and other forces that just want “reform” (such as MoveOn.org, October 2011, and the American Dream) to take control of this mass movement, they will sidetrack it into petition campaigns and support for “liberal” Democrats, leading to the same demobilization of the upsurge that happened to the Wisconsin State Capitol occupation when the craven, pro-capitalist union bureaucrats refused to take up the masses’ call for a general strike. Reform measures like taxing the rich or prohibiting corporate campaign contributions **will not and cannot** solve the problems capitalism inherently creates. Reforms have been enacted in this country and elsewhere many times, as a result of mass pressure, but when the capitalists start to see their profits eroding, they always fall by the wayside: witness the erosion of the union movement over the past four decades; the sharp decline and partial privatization of our public education system; the repeal of progressive income tax rates; and the current attacks on benefit entitlements and environmental regulations. We cannot let this movement be diverted into electoral politics and business as usual. Rather, it should develop a program of demands and tactics that will lead to the formation of a popular, democratic workers’ movement that can plan and prepare for an indefinite general strike!

In order to cure a disease, doctors eliminate the cause, not just the symptoms. In order to fix the problems in our economy, our environment, and the world, we need to **eliminate the cause** – the capitalist profit system – and replace it with an economy based on human needs, not quarterly profit. If we do not develop a program that unites us in an overt struggle against the capitalist system itself, the Occupy Wall Street movement is doomed to eventual demoralization and defeat.

How to Defend Our Movement Effectively

The Occupy Wall Street movement describes itself as a “leaderless resistance movement with people of many colors, genders and political persuasions,” and proclaims that it is “encourage[s] the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants.” Similarly, the October 2011 website pledges “a culture of resistance” based on “direct nonviolent action.”

As the protestors in New York have already learned – at the cost of many unprovoked and unwarranted beatings, and arrests – mass protests, even when nonviolent, are often met with a violent response by those whose job it is to protect and serve the rich and powerful. And make no mistake about it: the more successful they are – the more they threaten the power of the elite – the more violent the repression will become. During the labor movement of the 1930s, the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and the antiwar movement of the 1970s, the nonviolent efforts of the masses to stand up for themselves and demand their rights were met with brutal

countermeasures. History demonstrates that if mass resistance continues to grow and strengthen, the capitalist state and its allies will not hesitate to take lives in an effort to demoralize and defeat it. Remember the Memorial Day Massacre of 1937! Remember Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner! Remember Kent State! Remember the numberless lives lost in the Arab Spring!

In assessing the Occupy Wall Street movement, we must ask how long a “leaderless resistance movement,” particularly one committed to nonviolence, can survive and persist in the face of attacks of this magnitude? We are cheered by the recent news that a few members of the armed services have joined the protestors and pledged to protect them, and that the transit workers’ union has refused to participate in transporting arrestees. This is a start, but not enough.

Revolutionaries do not advocate or initiate isolated, meaningless acts of aggressive violence such as looting and vandalism. Such behavior only brings on state repression, and gives the capitalist-controlled media an excuse to condemn the underlying message along with the messenger. As we saw during the protests in Britain this past summer, however, when the poor and oppressed, especially youth of color, are fed up with racist police brutality, it becomes justifiable for them to express their frustration through overwhelming mass action against targets that symbolize wealth, privilege, and the power of the elite. In place of random, individualized violence, revolutionaries counterpose the use of disciplined, organized means of mass direct action such as strikes and workplace occupations.

Revolutionaries have no illusions in the long-term efficacy of nonviolence, or, for that matter, of leaderless, consensus-driven decisionmaking. Leaderlessness leaves a vacuum open to cooptation and misleadership by reformist forces, as occurred in Wisconsin. Instead, we advocate the establishment of a leadership democratically elected by all sectors of the working class and its allies, and committed to independent political action, free from the influence of union bureaucrats and “liberal” capitalist politicians. In addition, our movement acquires the means, skills, and organization that we must have to **defend ourselves** and our protests from the police and other agents of the capitalist state – including radical right-wing mobs. That means enlisting those with military and self-defense skills to organize, train, and deploy **workers’ defense guards** whenever and wherever they are needed, **meeting violent attacks with force**, when necessary. Military veterans and disaffected service members should be encouraged to break with their bosses in the Pentagon and join in these efforts. Labor and the Black and Brown communities must unite with students, youth, and the unemployed to build disciplined, unified self-defense squads to protect our street actions, occupations, and strike actions – as well as the oppressed communities – against police and right-wing thuggery.

How to Attack Capitalism at Its Roots

Defending ourselves will help to keep the movement from disintegrating, but that alone will not turn the attack back on the plutocrats. Occupying Wall Street will not shut down the system. How can we do that most effectively? The answer lies in identifying the one thing that capitalism still needs from us: our labor. The most effective weapon we have in this struggle is our ability to refuse to allow the corporate plutocrats to profit from our labor – that is, **to go on strike**. The Egyptian people know this well; the Tahrir Square occupations were supported by labor strikes throughout Egypt’s industrial sector. To succeed, we must follow their example!

To win this fight for once and for all, we need to develop the Occupy Wall Street movement into a nationwide set of popular/worker/labor assemblies that meet to **plan and prepare for a nationwide indefinite general strike**, including the physical occupation and defense of factories, offices, and other workplaces. Local assemblies of workers, supported by youth, the unemployed, and the oppressed communities, should delegate strike committees of the activists in the ranks to go to all worksites to organize meetings, help establish rank-and-file committees, caucuses, and networks, and enlist support for turning the occupations into something much more effective: **a nationwide political general strike with the aim of taking power** into the hands of working people and their allies. Strikes alone are not a panacea, but organizational developments like this can lay the foundations needed for the formation of a mass workers' party – not an electoral party, but a unified body that fights for a **workers' government** that can seize the fixed and finance capital and put labor to work under workers' self-management, workers' planning for human needs, and workers' democratic control.

And, because capitalism is a global system, we need to make connections with our brother and sister workers internationally. Just as Occupy Wall Street has been inspired by the Arab Spring, we need to join forces with, inspire, and be inspired by the mass movements of working people everywhere. We are all oppressed by the same tyrant: the capitalist system! We must all work together to overthrow it and replace it with a system that focuses on meeting human needs, improving the quality of life for all people, and repairing our damaged planet, rather than the accumulation of profit, privilege, and power in the hands of a few.

Here are some of the programmatic goals we urge the Occupy Wall Street to adopt:

1. Full employment at prevailing union rates for all who are willing and able to work. No budget cuts! No austerities! Restore and increase budgets for all public services and benefits. Full pension and health care benefits for all retired workers, public and private sector alike. To assure full employment, thirty hours of work for forty hours' pay must be implemented to spread the available work to all, and to compensate for the increased rate of production over the last 50 years that has been exploited by capital to sustain high unemployment rates and lower real wages.
2. Failing industries (both financial and industrial) must be taken over (nationalized) under workers' control without compensation to provide adequate access to credit and to get the wheels of industry rolling again. For example, the Big Three automakers, as well as the domestic plants of foreign auto manufacturers, should be taken over under workers' control. Only then can the industry be rationally planned to assure that production is retooled to provide, first and foremost, a public transportation and energy infrastructure that obviates the need for excessive auto production and the commensurate waste of petroleum. The production of non-polluting electric cars, for example, must be planned and coordinated under workers' control as a step toward staving off the environmental disasters threatened by climate change.
3. STOP LAYOFFS! When the bosses declare layoffs or attempt to close down a workplace, workers should occupy the factories and the workplaces and establish workers' control. Establish

a massive network of occupied workplaces as democratically run organs of an incipient planned rational economy.

4. Housing is a right! Stop all foreclosures and evictions. Move the homeless and those in overcrowded housing into housing already vacated due to foreclosures and the falling real estate market. Massive public works projects to build adequate housing for all, and put people to work doing socially necessary construction, must be financed by a banking industry nationalized and coordinated under workers' control.

5. Quality universal public education at no charge from daycare and pre-school through the graduate level. Working people know that without a good education, our children have no future. To confront the current economic and environmental crisis, everyone's intellectual potential must be cultivated. Through education we can build a rational economy and divest the world of poverty and drudgery. Education should be under the control of teachers, parents, and students old enough to participate. In that way, we will assure quality education and not the miseducation, overtesting, and ruling class propaganda that currently plague our public schools.

6. Quality free universal health care at no charge from prenatal to the grave is long overdue. Each person must be given access to the benefit of medical science and current treatment options. Insurance companies must have no "place at the table"; the only way to provide health care for all is to divest it of the profit motive. To accomplish democratic health care, all medical institutions must be placed under worker (Doctor, Nurses, Staff) control with community/patient participation.

7. End attacks on undocumented workers! End the ICE raids! Full employment rights for all workers! To end capital flight through working class solidarity across borders, we demand: Same work, same contract, same wages and working conditions! Down with the maquiladoras! Open all the borders. For the right of all workers to cross the borders and seek work and establish their homes without restrictions and arrests. Free all detained undocumented workers!

8. US troops out of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the rest of the world. Down with imperialist oppression! The defeat of imperialism is a victory for workers and the oppressed in the world.

9. We cannot count on Obama and the capitalists to clean up the environment and prevent catastrophic climate change. For them, profit always comes before the environment and the need of the workers. But the time to stop climate change is running out. The working class must combine its struggle against capitalist exploitation, and against the current economic crisis, with environmental consciousness. We must fight for workers' control of industry in order to transform the current, outmoded technology of industrial production to totally green and sustainable technology.

10. Break with the Democrats. No cross-class coalitions with Democrats and pro-capitalist Green Party politicians. For a struggle to replace the union bureaucracies that give our dues to the capitalist Democratic Party. Fight for the political independence of the working class! We need to build a workers' or labor party based on democratically run unions and organizations of the oppressed and the unemployed.

11. Build a workers' government that can and will implement and defend all of these proposals. To accomplish our goals, working people need their own government. If we allow the capitalists to control the state via their government, they will continue to attack and ultimately destroy the few social gains we have won in the past that still remain today (social security, medicare). To defend our gains, we need workers' power.

Humanist Workers for Revolutionary Socialism

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hw4rs@yahoo.com

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