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The *High Tower*

LOWDOWN

EDITED BY JIM HIGHTOWER AND PHILLIP FRAZER

“They blame, with some justification, the problems in the financial sector for getting us into this mess, and they’re disappointed with the policy response here in Washington. And at some level, I can’t blame them.”

— Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke on the Occupy Wall Street movement, October 4, 2011

This is a real populist movement—against our financial and political plutocracy

From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy Nation in just two months

AMERICANS WHO FLEW bombing missions in World War II had a saying: “You know you’re on target when you start getting a lot of flak.” The protesters in today’s nascent “Occupy Wall Street” movement must really be on target, then, because—boy!—they’re enduring an unrelenting barrage of rhetorical flak from political and media defenders of America’s plutocracy.

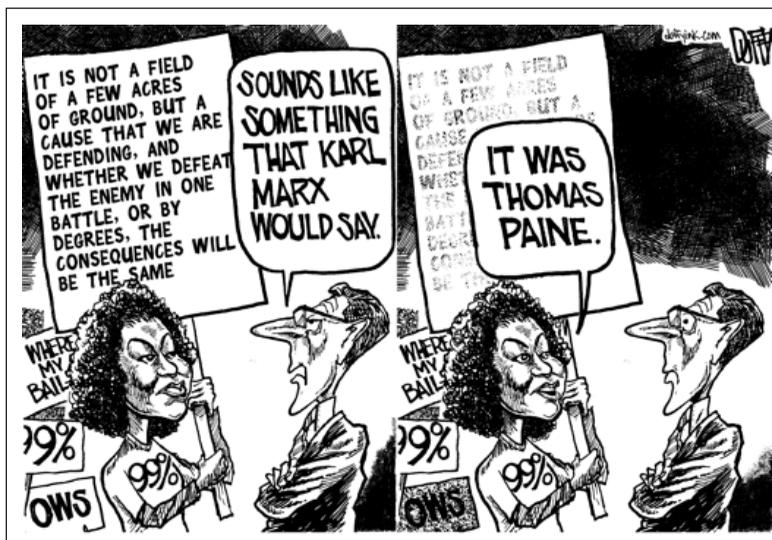
At first, the Loyal Defenders of the Plutocratic Order simply tried to ignore the youthful protest that had sprouted on September 17 in a plaza next door to Wall Street. But the occupiers, who were remarkably proficient in social media, spread their story and the visuals of their occupation to millions who tuned in on the web. This generated support from all over, and many more people began trekking to New York to join them. Surprised and alarmed by this inflow, the L.D.P.O. tried to cut it off by firing rounds of mockery at the protesters to make them look frivolous—a September 23 *New York Times* piece, for example, snickered that this “fractured and airy” movement was just a “carnival” of bored kids adrift in an “intellectual vacuum.” Their cause, opined the writer, was “virtually impossible to decipher.” Already, she declared, the movement is “dwindling.”

Sheesh, so snarky. And so wrong. In fact, the group’s core message of “enough is enough”—a call to rebel against rampaging economic injustice and rampant political corruption foisted on us by the richest one percent—was resonating among young and old, the poor and middle class, and it was spreading like wildfire throughout the country. Occupy Boston took root on September 30; Occupy Denver, Miami, Portland (Maine), and Seattle on October 1; Occupy Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Portland (Oregon), and San Francisco popped up simultaneously on October 6.

Within three weeks, there were more than 200 Occupy cities and towns, ranging in size from Philadelphia to McAllen, Texas.

Suddenly, with thousands of fed up Americans in the streets, linking together through a network named OccupyTogether.org, the principals of the Plutocratic Order were getting antsy. “Is this a big deal?” an anxious Wall Street CEO asked a reporter. “We’re trying to figure out how much we should be worried about all of this. Is this going to turn into a personal safety problem?” (You see, it’s always about them.) As the jitters of the elite edged toward panic, the L.D.P.O. rushed out its big guns, firing volley after volley of flak at the occupiers, most of it comically absurd:

- **The corporate hirings** on CNBC’s “Kudlow Report” reached all the way back to the dark days of McCarthyism for a red scare bomb, declaring that the 20-and-30-somethings in New York’s streets are “aligned with Lenin.”



- **Eric Cantor**, the extremely extreme House Majority Leader who keeps rousing the tea party mob in Congress to shut down our government, warned ominously about “the growing mob occupying Wall Street.”

- **As usual, the “Fox & Friends”** TV yak show offered a keen analysis of the situation, reporting that those protesting are “convicted criminals, methadone felons, and professional handcuff-lock-pickers.”

- **Mitt Romney**—whose own Wall Street investment fund made huge profits in the 1990s by taking over various companies, plundering their

assets, and firing thousands of workers—sounded this alarm about the rising rabble who dare to confront the financial order: “I think it’s dangerous, this class warfare.”

- **Rush Limbaugh** spewed a gusher of vitriol against “anarchists” and “union thugs” before coming to a Sherlockian conclusion about the purpose of the protests: “There’s no doubt in my mind that the White House is behind this. Obama is setting up riots.”

PERRY'S PIGGYBANK

"TELL ME WITH whom you walk," goes the old adage, "and I'll tell you who you are."

Maybe you're wondering just who the heck this Rick Perry-guy is, the loud-talking, slow-thinking Texas buckaroo who says he should be your president. His PR storyline is that he's just a straight-shooting, conservative politico out of Paint Rock, Texas. But it's been ages since Perry walked with the good folks of Paint Rock. Now in his 27th year in political office, this guy has consistently walked with Mr. Money and been his loyal servant.

Let's take a peek at Perry's "piggybank"—not his personal money (though it is curious how he became a millionaire while doing nothing but government work), but the Texas Enterprise Fund, Perry's \$400 million tax-dollar slush fund. TEF is supposed to be a cache of state cash for the governor to dole out as incentives for corporations to create jobs—but its results are somewhere between pathetic and a scam.

The fund has, however, been a boon both for Perry's re-election campaigns and the coffers of his corporate benefactors. For example, 20 of the governor's top corporate donors who put a total of \$6.5 million into his electioneering pockets, have been rewarded with a stunning \$116 million in TEF handouts. The watchdog group, Texans for Public Justice, reports that Caterpillar gave \$124,000 to Perry and got more than \$9 million from TEF; Lockheed Martin put \$232,000 in Perry's pay-to-play scheme and got \$5 million back in state money; and GE put in \$640,000 and got \$4 million from the fund.

To see with whom else he walks, get the full report on Perry's Piggybank from www.tpj.org.

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- **Tea party fave Rand Paul** expressed the odd concern that the peaceful occupiers would become a "Parisian mob" and start looting iPads from Wall Street executives on the grounds that "rich people don't deserve them."
- **And what's a clown show without Glenn Beck?** He warned all capitalists that "These guys are worse than Robespierre," and he described the coming horror of protesters who "will come for you and drag you into the streets and kill you... They are Marxist radicals... They'll kill everybody."
- **Herman Cain has been the goosiest of all.** Currently a GOP presidential front-runner, the former CEO of the Godfather's Pizza chain lectured the protesters: "Don't blame Wall Street. If you don't have a job and you're not rich, blame yourself." Then he doubled down on plutocratic goosiness by proclaiming that, "To protest Wall Street and the bankers is basically saying you're anti-capitalism." Worse, he exclaimed, protesting is "anti-American." Finally, the millionaire pizza mogul pleaded sheer ignorance: "These demonstrations—I honestly don't understand—what are they looking for?"

Something's happening here

*It's coming from the feel
that this ain't exactly real,
or it's real, but it ain't exactly there...
Democracy is coming to the USA.*

"Democracy" is Leonard Cohen's pulsating political anthem of hope. In the song, he's not quite sure about how far America has progressed on its historic voyage, but he is certain that if we keep tacking toward egalitarianism, we'll make it: "Sail on, sail on/ O mighty Ship of State!/ To the Shores of Need/ Past the Shoals of Greed... Democracy is coming to the USA."

This could be the protesters' theme song. Is the movement "real?" Yes. It's youth-driven, creative, broad-based, insistently democratic, optimistic, serious-minded, and deeply rooted in America's most basic values of economic fairness, social justice, and equal opportunity for all. It's not about left-right ideologies, but top-down realities. The movement is focused squarely on the narcissistic greed of today's financial and corporate elites who've turned their backs on America's workaday majority and purchased our government wholesale through moneyed corporations that now masquerade as "persons."

Is it "exactly there?" Not by a long shot. But this movement does have a shot. The spunk, motivation, idealism, passion, and energy of these young people (and the many older ones in the streets with them) are genuine—not the product of partisan operatives, focus groups, think tanks, rich funders, or string-pulling organizations.

These people are on target and on the move. At the very least, they represent fresh hope and offer new ideas for putting some real *progress* in *progressive*—and that alone makes them worth supporting, no matter what else they might bring to the cause.

A starting point for helping is for us more traditional progressive forces to understand clearly what the Occupy movement is and isn't, so we can punch back against the factual ignorance, misinterpretations, bad advice, lies, and outright villainy of the uprising's various critics. Let's start by wrestling **THREE BIG FIBS** to the ground:

I The occupiers have no focus.

Hello—they have "Wall Street" in the name of their movement. Isn't that a clue? Also their chosen slogan of "We are the 99%" shines the national spotlight right in the shocked faces of the avaricious one-percenters who control the vast majority of America's wealth and power and are aggressively using that control to get more for themselves, making a mockery of our democracy. For now, protest itself is the focus, and that's enough.

While the protesters do pull from a very full grab bag of particular outrages (corporate personhood, the contamination of our food supply, eliminating collective bargaining rights, the Koch brothers, Big Oil, student loan ripoffs, government-for-sale, permanent war, downsizing and offshoring middle-class jobs, gutting health plans and pensions, etc.), practically all come down to the domination and abuse of America's many by its evermore-privileged few.

Pundits sneer at the movement's plethora of causes as a confusing mess. But it's really a remarkable achievement. For years, the *Lowdown* has pleaded with diverse progressive groups to come together, keeping each of their particular concerns intact, but finding common cause in the overarching issue of corporate power. Well—here it is! Occupy's diversity is one of its great strengths.

This is America's genuine populism—as contrasted with the plastic, corporatized imitation that the tea party eruption quickly melted into (see *Lowdown*, September 2011). Real populism doesn't look down on poor people and doesn't try to pull down teachers, firefighters, and other middle-classers. Occupy Together invites us to unite in a real democracy movement that's not afraid to point at the opulent fiefdoms all the way up at the tippy-top of America's power structure, calling out the economic royalists for the injustice and inequality that they're imposing across our land.

No focus? Ask John Paulson. He's a little-known hedge fund profiteer who raked in nearly \$5 billion in personal pay last year (the largest one-year haul in Wall Street history). He didn't "earn" that by developing some product to benefit humanity, but by merrily betting that America's real estate market would collapse on millions of American families and by rigging a Wall Street casino game to sucker investors for his own enrichment. One day in early October, the New York protest moved from way downtown to uptown, stopping at Paulson's 28,000-square-foot, \$15 million stone mansion on the toney Upper East Side. They exposed him as a gleaming piece of plutocratic nonsense sitting pretty high above an economy that his ilk wrecked.

He repaid Occupy with a burst of narcissism that's truly priceless. In a press release, Paulson barked that taxes from hedge fund billionaires like him are "providing huge benefits to everyone in our city and state," thus inadvertently drawing attention to the fact that hedge funders are subsidized by a special tax rate that's less than half the rate paid by middle classers. Then he blurted that his fund "has created over 100 high-paying jobs in New York City." Wow—a hundred jobs! In a city of eight million people. Thanks, John. Our economy just wouldn't be the same without you.

Paulson concluded by scolding the growing number of angry commoners who have the temerity to con-

front the one-percenters: "Instead of vilifying our most successful businesses, we should be supporting them and encouraging them." The occupiers themselves could not have written a better expression of why and what they're protesting than this arrogant, über-rich, tin-eared Wall Street plutocrat delivered in his press release.

In the same vein, former congress critter Steve Bartlett, who's now Wall Street's top Washington lobbyist, told the *New York Times* that "We [don't] see ourselves as the target [of the protests]." After all, he explained, Wall Street "has to be well capitalized and well financed for the economy to recover." Steve's idea of recovering is to kill Wall Street reforms.

"Occupy Wall Street" is more than a slogan. It's a call to action that's tapping directly into the pent-up anger within millions of ordinary Americans who find themselves dismissed, disrespected, and disenfranchised in their own country. That's why it is surging. No less of an established figure than Al Gore gets it, calling the movement a "primal scream of democracy."

2 The occupiers are too vague—a successful movement has to start with a manifesto and a list of specific demands.

Oh, you mean like the founders did with the Declaration, Constitution, and Bill of Rights? But golly—didn't those come years after the Revolution began? Yes. The USA actually evolved from a very amorphous and disjointed movement at the start (it didn't even have a clear starting date or event). Various colonies and groups of colonists within them began protesting about different grievances they had against the arrogant, aloof, and abusive aristocracy of King George III—very few of them even thought about breaking away from England, nor did they have any specific governmental structures in mind.

Essentially, they wanted to be treated better and have some sort of say in how the Crown and such royally chartered corporations as the East India Trading Company dealt with American colonies. If anyone had demanded that this disparate bunch begin by signing on to a concrete set of reforms, the movement would've collapsed at the start. It was not a draft of proposed laws or an organizational chart that spurred the rebellion, but the passion, articulated outrage, and visionary hope of pamphleteers like Thomas Paine, rowdies like the Sons of Liberty,

and other mutts and mavericks.

So, give the mutts and mavericks of Occupy some room, time, and respect.

In fact, several Occupy cities, including the Wall Street group, have already formed a "Demands Working Group," but they will pursue a deliberate, democratic, and slow consensus-building process. Meanwhile, they know there is no shortage of specific policy ideas for shrinking the plutocracy and advancing democracy (see 10 years worth of monthly *Lowdowns*, for example). Progressive groups, media, think tanks, conferences, academics, websites, and so on constantly spew out a torrent of excellent "what-to-do" materials and routinely issue specific demands. But [IMPORTANT FACT AHEAD] practically no one in power has been reading, watching, or listening to them, much less acting.

The so-called "unfocused" young instigators of the Occupy movement have forced the establishment media, politicians, and Wall Street itself to take notice that masses of Americans are deeply pissed off. Polls have long showed that people despise the scratch-my-back collusion between corporate and governmental elites, and they're furious about the subsequent exclusion of the workaday majority from its hard-earned share of prosperity—but nothing changes. That's why these kids have taken to the streets, putting faces to those poll numbers and roiling the waters of the comfortable class. By literally seizing the public square, Occupy has seized a place in the national debate, putting the issues of fairness and justice onto the political agenda. They've done more in a few weeks to advance the progressive cause than several years' worth of our well-reasoned position papers have produced.

3 The occupiers are a chaotic, anarchic, socialistic band of hippie squatters.

This stereotypical depiction of Occupy Nation's encampments emanated from such professional fright-mongers as right-wing commentator Ann Coulter. Branding the movement the "flea party," this harpy screeched that the protesters are "wingless, bloodsucking, and parasitic."

All it takes to dispel such idiotic loathing of fellow Americans (who're merely practicing democracy) is to go to some of Occupy's tent cities and visit them, as I've been doing. From a distance, the camps can appear to be a disorderly motley collection of political

BUYING GOVERNMENT POWER

JUST TO SHOW his gratitude, Jamie Dimon of New York City made a donation to the New York Police Foundation this spring. "These officers," Mr. Dimon said, "put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe."

Yes they do. But was this a gesture by a civic-minded citizen—or the purchase of special protection? When Jamie Dimon says keep "us" safe, I doubt he means us *hoi polloi*. Rather, I suspect he's hoping that police officials will keep Wall Street bankers like him safe from us. Dimon is chief executive of JPMorgan Chase, the financial giant that helped crash our economy, took billions of bailout dollars from us, pays Dimon multimillion-dollar bonuses, refuses to lend capital to create jobs, is now gouging consumers with new fees, and lobbying in Washington to kill regulations that would protect us from banker greed.

The JPMorgan Chase donation that Dimon delivered was \$4.6 million—the largest ever to the police foundation. He even got a thank-you note from NYPD boss Raymond Kelly.

But Dimon's bank got its biggest thanks in mid-September. That's when the Occupy Wall Street movement launched its protest. According to a member of Occupy's legal team, the original plan was to base the protest's encampment in Chase Plaza, right in front of the big bank's Wall Street offices. But the NYPD was there in force ahead of the protesters, preemptively shutting down the plaza. Thus, the Occupy movement settled in at Zuccotti Park, well out of sight of Dimon and other executives of JPMorgan Chase.

This is exactly the sort of corrupt coziness between corporate and governmental elites that has brought people into the streets.

The *LOWDOWN*

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WALL STREET "PARK" IS DEVELOPER'S

THE RESILIENT Occupy Wall Street group in New York City doesn't actually "occupy" Wall Street. Instead, their encampment is in nearby Zuccotti Park. And therein lies a story.

Ironically, this people's movement against the overbearing power of Corporate America finds itself in a corporate-owned park. It's named for John Zuccotti, who is not some noted civic leader, but the chairman of Brookfield Office Properties, a big corporate developer.

In 2006, this outfit erected a 54-story office tower across the street from what was then an open space for the public, called Liberty Plaza. In one of those infuriating inside deals between corporate and government officials, Brookfield was given a zoning variance by the city to build a taller structure than the building code allowed—plus, it was given possession of Liberty Plaza.

To mark its corporate property, Brookfield put its chairman's name on the space. While Zuccotti Park technically must be kept open to the public, it is governed by rules set by Brookfield. No surprise, then, that after three weeks of the occupation, the corporation abruptly announced a new set of rules to prohibit camping, tents, sleeping bags, laying on the ground... and otherwise sustaining an assembly of citizens exercising their constitutional rights.

Thanks to a loud public outcry, this crude corporate attempt to oust Occupy failed—at least for the time being. But Zuccotti is still a corporate park, meaning an ugly crackdown on people peacefully protesting for democracy in America remains a threat. Meanwhile, Occupy Wall Street put its own, non-corporate brand on the space: "Liberty Square."

vagrants. Come closer, however, and you'll find a remarkably well-organized democratic space, functioning on an Aristotelian model.

Zuccotti Park in New York, for example, has a designated "front door" entry point, a welcome desk for visitors and supporters, a general assembly space, a media center, a legal desk, a library, and an arts area, as well as such necessities as a medical clinic (with health professionals volunteering their services), kitchen, sleeping area, and comfort desk (where protesters get such basics as toothpaste and sign up for showers and laundry facilities provided by area residents). Tasks are divvied up into more than a dozen working groups, ranging from a direct action committee to a sanitation committee (yes, they regularly clean up after themselves). And—while social media has allowed them to self-organize and communicate directly with the world—they also publish *The Occupied Wall Street Journal*, a well-written, four-color, four-page broadsheet that's financed through donations, put together by volunteer print professionals, and distributed free by volunteer barkers on New York streets.

Food? They've not had to purchase any, for New Yorkers regularly bring food donations to the park, and people from anywhere on the globe can order pizza, tacos, paninis, and other carry-out foods online from several area eateries that deliver to the protesters (one pizza place even offers an "occu-pie" special).

There is no "leader" or governing committee. Rather, decisions are made by the General Assembly, which gathers twice daily and is open to all occupiers (a system akin to the one used this spring by Egyptian occupiers of Tahrir Square). All voices and ideas are welcome, and proposals are adopted by "modified consensus" (approval of nine out of 10 participants). This can be painfully slow and frustrating, but it engages and empowers everyone for the benefit of the whole group—which is what democracy is supposed to do. If only Congress could make such a claim!

Support the movement

Despite the L.D.P.O.'s feverish efforts to mock, demonize, and otherwise make ordinary Americans fear, despise, and reject the Occupy movement, quite the opposite is occurring. An October *National Journal* poll found that 59 percent of Americans agree

with what the protesters are saying and doing. That includes 56 percent of the white working class, a group that Limbaugh, Fox, the Kochs, and other corporatists always target to foment cultural resentment, which they then twist into political energy for whatever game the moneyed class is running.

But not this time. Why? Because the occupiers are saying what's demonstrably true: America's bankers, bosses, big shots, and BSers don't give a damn about working people, fairness, and justice, or America itself. The moneyed and political elites are out for themselves, everyone else be damned. That undiluted, authentically populist message—so long missing from America's political discourse—is uniting downsized workers with debt-burdened college students, fans of rapper Lupe Fiasco with those of Willie Nelson, union members with tea partiers, etc.

Yes, tea partiers. The *Washington Post* reported last month that the Establishment's worst nightmare is coming true—rank and file tea party members, dismayed that their movement has been captured by Wall Street and its Republican lackeys, are reaching out to the Occupy camp. "I don't agree with everything your movement does, but I sympathize with your cause and agree on our common enemy," declared an October internet posting by "a former tea-partier" from rural Minnesota.

Of course, the elites will get much uglier and play much rougher as they see that the Occupy movement has staying power and growing appeal. We can expect infiltrators, sabotage, media gut jobs, police sweeps, and so on. That's why you and I must stand up. When I went to Occupy Washington's Freedom Plaza camp last month, an occupier said that the thing they needed most right now is for more people to come visit them. "You don't have to sleep in a tent or join in a march," she said. "Just come have a conversation with us, see what we're doing, then tell other people about it."

We can do that much, can't we? To connect with the movement in your area go to: **OccupyTogether.org**.

Citizens v corporations

Last month's *Lowdown* focused on the **We The People Campaign** to beat back the absurd notion that corporations are people. One important initiative we inadvertently left out is Public Citizen's www.democracyisforpeople.org

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