

We Occupy, Everybody Dances

There's dancing for joy, and then there's dancing around issues. We will all dance with joy if we avoid dancing around the issues.

For example, there's the Tea Party Two-Step. That's when they see the immigration issue as an opportunity to blame workers. They dance around the fact that the engine that drives immigration is the demand for ever-cheaper labor to boost profits, so much so that for years capitalists have sent trucks to the border to haul workers to and from their fields and factories. First it was in agriculture, then meatpacking and construction, now everything. For the Two-Steppers a worker scratching for a living, often at the risk of life and limb, is the villain, not the profit-above-all system. Of course, it's much easier to kick the workers than to challenge the elite, but it's not right.

It's the same for the "middle class" waltzers. That's where they think that the erosion of "middle class" careers is the fault of government taxing to transfer value to social welfare programs like food stamps, Medicaid and Social Security. That's one clumsy waltz. In the real world, better paying jobs and vocations have been either exported by capitalists or downgraded by capitalists, all, again, for more profit and to avoid death by competition.

Conglomerates have formed to take over the food industry, pharmaceuticals, medicine, banking, insurance and many others. The independent agent, the family doctor, the pharmacist, corner grocer, plumber and bricklayer have all been turned into staff employees of huge corporations. And, instead of confronting this problem, the waltzers tell us we should be happy with mind-deadening, back-breaking, minimum-wage jobs. For their part, the government and the paid-off politicians have deemed the corporations "people" and the people as fodder or bother. To put an end to this dance of lies and to begin our dance of joy is the mission of Occupy.

—From members of the Denver-Boulder branch of the Industrial Workers of the World

Case in Point: The Occupy UC Davis General Assembly—1,729 strong—passed a proposal on November 22 that called for a general strike. The proposal closes with these encouraging words (emphasis ours; see full text at OccupyDavis.org):

This [action] will entail total campus participation in shutting down the operations of the university on the 28th, including teaching, working, learning, and transportation, as we will collectively divert our efforts to blocking their vote[s]. In doing so students, faculty and workers assert the power—and the will—to effectively represent and manage ourselves.

The Clearing of Zuccotti Park

The overnight clearing of Zuccotti Park by the police, following similar actions by police in Denver, Portland, Oakland and Atlanta, brings to a close one phase of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Some will reproach the movement for not fighting back harder against the police. (To their credit, a minority adopted "guerilla" tactics, running through the streets dodging cops.)

That reproach is beside the point. When the police hesitate, militant resistance may sway them; that is what happened in Portland, Oakland and earlier in New York. But no unarmed crowd in a public park is a match for organized and trained police who are determined to do their duty. The only hope is to reach out to new forces.

Resisting police violence with violence may accomplish that: in 1968 the sight of students in Paris battling police sparked a general strike. With the partial exception of Oakland, no such development occurred here.

There may be times when it is necessary to fight even when defeat is certain: Trotsky, for example, denounced the Communist Party policy of advocating retreat in the face of Hitler, declaring that ten unsuccessful proletarian insurrections one after another would be less

demoralizing to the German working class than allowing Hitler to take power peacefully. But the clearing of the parks does not mean the triumph of Hitler: the ruling class is still operating with its traditional instruments of carrot, club and cry of alarm, a blend of repression and concession. The people who took the initiative in this movement are still at liberty, free to try again.

OWS is the biggest upsurge in the U.S. since the 1960s. It drew in people with no history of political activity, and tested both them and the more experienced. It won near universal admiration even from people who were not ready to join it. In its conscious self-identification with movements in other countries, especially in the Arab world, it delivered a blow to American provincialism (and, by implication, to Zionism). Its refusal to define itself by what are sometimes called "reasonable" demands—a refusal that drove old-style reformists crazy—may turn out to be its most enduring legacy.

Phase one has ended. Phase two will pose new tasks.

—Noel Ignatiev, activist and author of
How the Irish Became White,
on pmpress.org, 11/15/11