

Politics and the international Occupy movement

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The spread of the Occupy Wall Street protests internationally has undeniable political significance. On October 15, occupations will begin in cities in Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Canada, South America and Africa.

The movement that is developing is, in its essence, anti-capitalist. The protests are animated by aspirations for social equality. Their banner slogan, “We are the 99 percent”, is imbued with working class hostility to the monopolisation of society’s wealth by a tiny financial and corporate elite—the “one percent.”

In the United States, the myth of the superiority of “free enterprise” has been discredited in the minds of tens of millions, particularly in the three years since the onset of the global financial crisis. The conditions facing workers and young people in the centre of world capitalism are forcing them to seriously consider radical social change and the perspective of socialism.

The occupations implicitly challenge the official political institutions, parties, trade unions and pseudo-left protest organisations and their subservience to big business interests. They are giving voice to the opposition to mass unemployment, the slashing of wages and conditions, soaring education and health costs, environmental degradation and war.

The resonance of such sentiments around the world expresses the fact that the experiences shaping the attitudes of the American working class have been universal.

Three years after the financial collapse, it is clear that the speculative and semi-criminal financial operations that came to dominate the wealth accumulation of the

capitalist “one percent” have led to the breakdown of the entire structure of world capitalism and a descent into economic depression and inter-state tensions.

In every country, the mantra of the ruling elite is the same. They are demanding that the full burden of the crisis they caused be imposed on the working class through job destruction, wage cuts and the elimination of essential social programs and rights. Capitalism has failed as a world system. It offers only a future of poverty, degradation, environmental catastrophe and, if not overthrown, the threat of devastating new wars between rival capitalist nations.

However large or small, the initial global protests this weekend reflect the elementary awareness that the working class everywhere confronts common problems and a common enemy—globally organised finance and corporations and the elite that owns them. There are no national solutions.

The critical issue now is to make conscious the impulses that have given rise to the Occupy movement. The fight that faces the working class and oppressed will require a worked out political perspective of revolutionary social change on an international scale. It is essential that a thorough discussion take place on the questions of political program, strategy and tactics.

First of all, the working class must discuss and carry out a political break with the nationalist and pro-capitalist organisations that serve the ruling classes—the Democratic Party and AFL-CIO in the US, the social democratic and Stalinist parties and trade unions across Europe, the Labor Party and unions in Australia, and their equivalents in other countries.

The fact must be faced by Occupy protestors that defenders of these reactionary organisations have rushed to try and take control of the movement in order to block such a discussion. They are easily identified. They are those who are most vocally insisting that “no politics” should be permitted within the protests. The administrator of the “Occupy Sydney” Facebook page in Australia is one example. He or she declared this week: “[A]ny political party or group who wishes to try and hijack this into a political agenda, we will throw them out.”

Such positions are profoundly anti-democratic and hostile to the aspirations behind the Occupy movement. They amount to nothing more than a ban on any critique of the parties and unions whose pro-capitalist political agenda is responsible for the conditions facing the working class. It is an attempt to censor socialist politics and prevent the development of a genuine political alternative.

At every level, “no politics” is an absurdity. It is obvious to any serious person that a struggle against the capitalist “one percent” poses critical political issues. Every social movement in history has been compelled to adopt a standpoint on the basic question of politics—which class should rule.

A genuine movement for social change must be orientated to the revolutionary mobilisation of the only social force that has the power to overthrow capitalism—the international working class. It must advance a solution to the historic problems confronting society as a whole. It will need to be consciously aimed at ending the private ownership of the means of production and the nation-state system which are the basis for the domination of the capitalist oligarchy and give rise to the contradictions wracking the world economy.

The danger that is confronting the Occupy movement is that it will be reduced to yet another protest that vents popular anger and opposition, but is harmlessly channeled back behind the parties and institutions of the political establishment.

In the United States, for example, supporters of the governing Democratic Party are already seeking to direct the Wall Street protests into the campaign for the re-election of Barack Obama in 2012, on fraudulent “lesser evil” claims that he is more of an opponent of Wall Street

than the Republicans.

In Australia, elements within the protests this weekend are seeking to direct them into futile appeals for change by the Labor Party government, its Green Party partners and the trade unions—the very organisations that are presiding over an escalating assault on the living standards of the working class on behalf of the Australian corporate elite.

Across Europe, similar efforts will be made to steer the movement under the wing of the official political establishment. Organisations like the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany, and the Socialist Workers Party in Britain work deliberately and consciously to block any independent political movement.

What is required is a conscious rebellion against the pro-capitalist apparatuses. A unified world party of the working class must be forged, one that will combat every form of nationalism and chauvinism and lead the struggle in every country for the establishment of genuinely democratic workers’ governments and the socialist reorganisation of society. The progressive answer to the rule of the “one percent” and the failure of capitalism is the transformation of the major financial institutions and corporations into publicly owned and democratically controlled institutions, and the planning of world economy to meet social need, not private profit.

The Socialist Equality parties and the *World Socialist Web Site*, as part of the International Committee of the Fourth International, consciously embody this perspective. We encourage all participants in the Occupy protests internationally to contact us for a discussion on the policies, history and tradition of the world Trotskyist movement.



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