The way forward in the fight for social equality

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With the forcible clearing of protest sites in Los Angeles and Philadelphia, the coordinated drive by local governments has led to the shutdown of the Occupy encampments in most major US cities.

Wednesday's evictions had the characteristic features of other actions throughout the country: the deployment of hundreds of riot police, armed with tear gas, rubber bullets, and bean bag guns; the use of truncheons against peaceful protesters; mass arrests, including nearly 300 in Los Angeles alone; and punitive detention for workers and young people seeking to exercise their democratic rights.

The police crackdown on Occupy Wall Street—conducted mostly by Democratic Party mayors—has met with approval from the major media. The actions in Los Angeles, under the leadership of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a former union bureaucrat, was more consciously manipulated to win over the support of "left" journalists. In a statement released on Wednesday, Villaraigosa declared the action a "shining example of constitutional policing," while declaring it his hope that the Occupy LA movement would "amplify their calls for social justice and economic opportunity."

Tom Hayden, writing in the liberal weekly the *Nation*, echoed Villaraigosa's words. "The way the LA eviction has been handled so far is a very important achievement," Hayden said, adding that "a crack of hope has been opened for nonviolent conflict resolution"—that is, the "nonviolent" deployment of police to repress political dissent.

Following the clearing out of the encampments, including at Wall Street itself, the political and media establishment hopes that the mass anger that has found expression in these protests can be diverted behind the Democratic Party and ultimately into Obama's reelection campaign.

In an article published on Wednesday, the *New York Times* commented that while "most of the biggest Occupy Wall Street camps are gone," the slogan of the "99 percent" had entered the "political lexicon. Democrats in Congress began to invoke the '99 percent' to press for passage of President Obama's jobs act—but also to pursue action on mine safety, Internet access rules and voter identification laws, among others."

In other words, the initial expression of mass anger over social inequality is to be safely chloroformed and translated into the cynical and hypocritical posturing of the political system.

Amid the crackdown on the Occupy movement, different political trajectories are asserting themselves. The more affluent middle-class layers represented by Hayden and the *Nation*, and the pseudo-left political milieu that surrounds them, are interested not in any fundamental social change, but only in making things more palatable for their relatively narrow stratum. By seeking to maintain the political stranglehold of the trade unions and the Democratic Party, they facilitate the violent police repression—whether or not they are openly cheerleading it.

However, there is also an opposing political current. A section of the participants of the Occupy movement—and of the population as a whole—is beginning to draw important lessons from the suppression of the demonstrations, the police violence, and the the complete imperviousness of the political establishment to the demands and needs of the people.

Illusions that the political establishment could be pressured by a movement of the "99 percent," without class or political distinctions, into fighting social inequality have come into conflict with the police

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repression ordered by these very same politicians.

This is the significance of the resolution passed at the University of California-Davis on Tuesday night. On November 18, UC Davis was the scene of one of the worst police outrages, in which a university police officer calmly and systematically fired pepper spray into the faces of a dozen sitting protestors, who were then arrested.

The UC Davis resolution, which was moved by a member of the International Students for Social Equality, calls for a break with both political parties and a turn to the working class. It makes an appeal to workers and youth around the world to engage in a common struggle and denounces Washington's hypocritical posturing. "While the American government invokes 'democratic rights' to justify wars abroad," the resolution states, "it responds to social protests at home with riot police, tear gas and rubber bullets."

The resolution continues: "The way forward is clear: No support should be given to either of the two parties! The dictates of the banks and corporations can be countered only through the independent social and political struggle of the entire working class."

The passage of this resolution reflects a broad disillusionment of workers and young people with the Democratic Party and a willingness to engage in the great political questions confronting the working class.

Just as the Occupy Wall Street protests are only the beginning of mass social struggles in the United States, the process of political clarification and delineation is still in its early stages. Whatever the hopes of the mass media and the two big business parties, the crisis of capitalism will inexorably drive workers and young people into struggle. The year 2011—which has already seen major social struggles in the Middle East, Europe, Asia, Latin America and the United States—is drawing to a close with the world economy once again standing at a precipice and the ruling class responding with ferocious attacks.

The basic task is the building of an independent political leadership, one rooted in an understanding that none of the problems confronting workers and young people—mass unemployment, falling wages, austerity, war and the attack on democratic rights—can be resolved within the framework of capitalism, and that social equality can be achieved only through the fight for socialism. This is the perspective fought for by the Socialist Equality Party and its student organization, the International Students for Social Equality.

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