

## Occupy Wall Street and Co-optation

I hesitate to comment much on Occupy because there is a huge age gap and because I've not been able to take as active a part in Occupy as many of my friends.

I have noticed some tensions (which should hardly surprise me) between those of us from the "Old Left" and Occupy. Such as the debate between mass civil disobedience and mass peaceful and legal actions. I think that is essentially a false debate, not worth pursuing here. (It is in fact quite possible to combine the two, as we did on several occasions during the Vietnam War). The problems involving the police and the Black Bloc are real enough and my advice - my strong advice - is for movement folks to negotiate directly with the police, to try and force them to see us as human, and to force us to see them not as the primary enemy, but as fellow-humans brutalized too often by the structure. And it is no less urgent for us to negotiate with the Black Bloc, to meet with them where possible.

Politically I think one weakness of Occupy is the failure to focus on the problem of the military/industrial complex (this isn't simply a problem of capitalism - the same problem existed in the late Soviet Union). It is this which has helped "militarize" the domestic police force.

And I think, on the matter of co-option, there is the reality that in any political system in which there are electoral forces at play - where people are free to organize within the political structure - it becomes inevitable that the political players on the left will try to co-opt *any* movement for social change. (As the GOP has tried to capture the insurgent and largely incoherent Tea Party insurgency on the right).

This happened with the Civil Rights movement, it happened with the Vietnam protest movement (which drove LBJ out of the political arena). It happened with the women's movement, and with the Gay/Lesbian movement.

That is pretty much inevitable. But those movements achieved success because at the center they were not willing to be co-opted into the system *as it existed*. The Vietnam movement rejected efforts to tame it (ie., "negotiate now" as opposed to "unconditional withdrawal"), and the final tumult, now largely forgotten by the current generation, of the "May Days" in 1971, when tear gas floated over all of Washington DC and thousands - not dozens or hundreds - were arrested. The Civil Rights movement largely also refused - students of history will learn that the White House made serious efforts to prevent the 1963 March on Washington, and then sought to co-opt it.

To some extent I think the gay/lesbian movement has been co-opted, and that is an exception to the general rule. By insisting on the right to marriage, and the right to military service - both perfectly sound demands, but very moderate - they were accepting the existing structure, not seeking to change it. In this regard I think the feminist movement was much more of a rejection of the existing structure.

But now I already wander into a more general discussion. In general the goal of those who seek radical change is **NOT TO BE MARGINALIZED**.