

<https://divergences.be/spip.php?article2873>



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Occupy Everything

- Archives - Archives Générales 2006 - 2022 - 2012 - N° 30. Mars 2012 - English -

Publication date: Monday 26 March 2012

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‘Occupy Everything!’ I can’t think of a more succinct expression to describe the kind of revolution I’ve always dreamed of. Since my youth, my vision has been of bottom-up social change based on mass assemblies; popular power imposed by forceful — but essentially non-violent — tactics like mass strikes, mass occupations and mass demonstrations; what John Holloway has termed ‘power *against*’ and ‘power *to*’ (but not oppressive ‘power *over*’); a revolution of ordinary people first *occupying* and then self-managing their work-places and neighborhoods democratically to create a federated, cooperative economy based on human and ecological need, not profit. These are not new ideas. The slogan ‘Occupy Everything’ pretty much sums up the anarcho-syndicalist philosophy of the IWW (‘Wobblies’). It also reminds me of the big sit-down strikes and factory occupations of 1936-37 in the US and France, of the student-worker rebellions of 1968, and more recently of the mass assemblies and ‘takings’ by workers of enterprises shut down during Argentina’s IMF-imposed bankruptcy. Not new ideas, but ideas whose time has come.

And what about “We are the 99%!” How better to draw the Marxian ‘class line’? It succinctly expresses the movement’s composition (the poor and the threatened middle classes) and names the ‘class enemy’ (the economic 1%, not just the government they control). [\[1\]](#) Another brilliant chant of the Occupiers goes: ‘This is what democracy looks like!’ It tears the veil of respectability off of the corrupt political systems that parade under the official heading of ‘democracy,’ and invites people to actively participation in changing society, outside of official channels, valid from Tahrir to Madrid to Wall St. All these popular verbal inventions express the movement’s half-conscious revolutionary aspirations. They ask ‘why not occupy everything and run society cooperatively, democratically and ecologically in the image of our assemblies and collectives?’

How many political consultants, Madison Avenue ad agencies, public opinion polls and political focus-groups would it have taken to come up with three such brilliant political slogans, guaranteed to go viral? They confirm my long held confidence in the mass creativity of people in struggle and in the ‘wisdom of the many’ — themes I develop later in this book. In any case, 2011 certainly brought joy to the heart of this old rebel, confirming my faith in humanity’s capacity for self-creation. All year long as I read and watched the news — for example Pacifica’s Sharif Abdel Kouddous’ exhilarating on the scene reports from Tahrir Square [\[2\]](#) — I would catch myself shaking my head and repeating ‘I can’t believe it!’ only to hear my daughter Jenny answer ‘but you’ve been talking about something like this happening for years!’

After a generation of top-down class warfare on the 99%, capitalism’s chickens are finally coming home to roost — as I had long been hoping (and incautiously predicting [\[3\]](#)) they would. 2011’s world-wide wave of popular revolts certainly represents the biggest challenge to the ruling 1%-ers since the 60s, when world wide revolts broke out from Vietnam to Paris to Prague to Chicago. Moreover, 2011 may prove to be just the beginning of something bigger as the worldwide economic, political and ecological crisis continues to deepen and as capitalism’s ‘solution’ (grind the poor, rape the environment) continues to outrage the mass of humanity.

Euphoria and Disappointment

Alas, after the euphoria of some early victories — the toppling of long-time dictators Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt — 2011’s Arab revolutions face new obstacles in their quest for political freedom and social equality: for example the power of the Army, the conservative weight of the Islamists, and above all the vast wealth and imperialist support behind the corrupt *comprador* capitalist regimes still in place. It is the nature of revolutions that once they knock down an obstacle, a new one rises in its place and so on until the last barrier is knocked down, that of the world capitalist system. And this can only happen on a global scale.

So let us not be discouraged that the burgeoning revolutions of the Arab Spring seem to be stalled for the moment — as entrenched power groups backed by foreign capital try to reinforced their grip, as conservative Islamists (legalized

at last by these mass democratic uprisings) pass from the side of the rebels to that of the powers that be, and as mass mobilizations seem to be ebbing. Such ebb and flow is endemic to social struggles, as the history of past revolutions testifies. The forces of reaction can be depended on to throw up new obstacles — from violent repression to sham reforms and cooptation of leaders — which the forces of revolution must continuously overcome. These struggles, with victories followed by defeats, are the way mass movements educate themselves.

Social revolution may appear to have gone underground, but it can be counted on to keep rearing its head in the face of ever new opponents until its goals — democracy, equality, social and environmental justice — are met. ‘Well grubbed old mole’ quipped Karl Marx (quoting his beloved Shakespeare) about one such revolutionary outburst during the 19th century’s wave of democratic revolts. And as the French rebels of May 1968 used to chant: ‘This is only a beginning! Continue the Struggle!’ Future historians (if there are any) may look back on 2011 as ‘Year One of the Radical Emergence.’

In any case, the radical Genie that was let out of the bottle can never be stuffed back in again. The revolts of 2011 are already historical. Listen to this, from the Egyptian blogger ‘sandmonkey’ who tells us to:

Think of the students of the Lycee in Cairo, 6th and 7th graders, who did a 3 day sit-in protest demanding the return of a teacher that got fired for carrying an anti-Mubarak sign in Tahrir and forced the administration to re-instate him. Think of all the 8 and 10 year olds who went out with their parents the day of the referendum to vote and had the experience engrained in their psyche forever, something we never had ourselves, and know that they will never allow that right to be taken away from them. Think of all the 12 year olds who are watching all the hot issues (secularism vs. theocracy, left vs. right, the role of the army, the role of the police, etc.) being debated all around them right now, and having their political consciousness formed right now and know that when they turn 18 it will be next to impossible for someone to trick or co-opt them. Think of all the 15 and 16 year olds who are watching the protests all around them and the lessons and mistakes that we are doing and think of what those kids will do the moment they get into college in a couple of years or when they join the workforce. Think of all your friends, wherever they are, who are joining and debating and talking and wanting to help and do something, and know you are not a solitary phenomenon. The Virus is everywhere. The Future is AWESOME. [4]

To this I can only add that the history of mass movements indicates that after a lull, they almost always pick up from the highpoint of previous struggle, from the peak of the last revolutionary wave, as if a period of defeat and apparent ‘forgetfulness’ had not intervened. So I’m confident we will learn a lot more about the creativity of mass non-violent movements in the future. Meanwhile, as Flo Kennedy, the wisecracking Black militant of the Sixties used to say: ‘If you take a bath on Sunday, don’t be surprised if you stink on Friday.’

The Historical importance of the revolts of 2011

Whatever the outcome tomorrow, no one will deny that 2011 proved, contrary to near-universal expectation, that mass revolutions are still possible in the 21st century. After the revolutionary waves of the 60s and 70s subsided, the rise of neo-liberal, globized capitalism in the 80s followed by the 1989 collapse of so-called ‘Communism’ in Russian and Eastern Europe had seemed to confirm Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s dogma ‘There is no alternative’ (TINA). And in a curious sense the Iron Lady was right. There was no political alternative *within* the system, what with British Labor, the US. Democrats, and the European Social-Democrats all converted to privatization, downsizing, outsourcing, social cutbacks and the like. By the 21st century reformist alternatives to the neo-liberal program of increasing inequality and the unbridled exploitation of labor and the environment had been eliminated, a process accelerated by the increasing power of big money over the political process at every level. However, what Dame Thatcher and her Chicago School adepts perhaps did not foresee was the possibility of an ‘Alternative’ *outside* the system — popular revolution — the only avenue left open by the total corruption of representative political institutions. And that is what they are faced with now.

Might 2011 mark the beginning of a new world revolutionary era? Most of my friends on the 'realistic,' programmatic Left consider my vision of revolutionary emergence going viral as pure romanticism. Not so the intelligence community and the CIA, which warned President Obama upon his taking office in the wake of the Crash of 2008 that 'domestic insurrection' posed a more serious threat to the U.S. security than 'foreign terrorism.' As evidence of the seriousness with which the masters of the capitalist universe take the rebellions and occupations of 2011, let me cite examples of two types of counter-productive U.S. strategies that reveal the level of panic in the national security community, one international, one domestic:

1. On the international front, how else to explain continued U.S. military support for Arab dictatorships like Bahrain, which brutally crushed its democratic movement and jailed the doctors who treated the wounded; continued support for Egypt (recipient of US military largesse nearly equivalent to Israel's) and of continuing shipments of the tear-gas shells used against the occupiers at Tahrir? This desperate policy unmasks any U.S. pretensions as a friend of 'democracy' among the peoples of the Arab-Muslim world. It insures that any successful revolution there will necessarily consider itself anti-US, thus undermining U.S. influence in this vital petroleum-producing zone.
2. Domestically, we see the spectacularly inordinate and unnecessary police brutality systematically unleashed on peaceful, non-violent U.S. demonstrators, guilty at worst of trespassing, a misdemeanor normally punishable by moderate fines. The frightening images of sitting students and young women corralled in a police net being systematically sprayed in the face with merciless pepper-spray brought up for me grim memories of respectful, cleanly-dressed black and white student protesters being brutalized on TV by Southern Sheriffs and State troopers with dogs, clubs, water canons and prison-farms. Those images made U.S. justice look so bad, that that the Kennedy brothers finally had to provide Civil Rights workers in the South Federal protection – but only as a Cold War move to blunt Communist propaganda around the world.

Today, unlike the reluctant JFK, the Obama Administration is doing nothing to prevent such images of U.S. justice going viral, au contraire. These horrendous images stand as a warning of what might happen to you if you lift your head in the U.S. They are designed to make the frightened parents beg their daughters and sons to stay away from demonstrations. Leaks concerning meetings and exchanges among local and Federal security and law enforcement communities suggest that this Robocop approach is a more or less concerted policy, while the consensus of media and officials seems to be that this kind of Robocop 'policing' is the way to deal with social protest, while the victims' lawsuits by the Civil Liberties groups get lost in the news cycle. Given the blow to U.S. reputation abroad, permitting such spectacular examples of police over-reaction can only be a deliberate policy. [This hypothesis was only confirmed during the Left Forum on March 17 the massive and brutal police attack on totally non-violent protesters, including many from the Forum who marched to Zucatti Park at the urging of featured speaker Michael Moore.]

Yet in the U.S. as in the Middle East, the response of the national security state to social unrest will not only serve to disgrace and de-legitimize the system that so mistreats its citizens, it will also boomerang. Almost every insurrection in modern times, beginning with the French Revolution, was sparked off by an instance of what we would call 'police brutality.' When the Czar signed the order to fire on Father Gapon's 1905 procession petitioning the 'Little Father' for social relief, he signed his own death warrant. In May 1968, when the Paris CRS riot cops broke up the student occupation and attempted to clear the Latin Quarter, the resulting violence brought out the working class and sparked a general strike that shut down the country and caused President De Gaulle to flee. As Gandhi allegedly put it: 'First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they repress you, then you win.' State violence, destructive, tragic, is ultimately useless in the long run when the conditions for social revolution are ripe, and they couldn't be riper now. My point is this: if our class enemies take our burgeoning revolutionary movements so seriously, maybe we ought to take them seriously too.

Five Original features of 2011 movements

Journalists and pundits have characterized the global movements of 2011 in various ways with the annual edition of *Time* magazine naming the Rebel as 'Person of the Year 2011'. But from a revolutionary perspective five original features stand out: 1. their creative appropriation of the Internet; 2. their internationalist spirit; 3. their radical anti-ruling class message; 4. their appropriation of mass non-violent resistance; and 5. their horizontal forms of self-organization, prefiguring a new society.

1. Creative use of the Internet

Scientists have discovered that RIV-11, the highly contagious Revolutionary Idea-Virus of 2011, was transmitted through the Internet, spreading from one Arab country to another through hundreds of blogs and websites as well as via new independent media, propagating an epidemic of rebellious acts and radical ideas. Among the major mass media, the international news organization Al Jazeera, based in Qatar, was sometimes sympathetic and reliably more objective than any government-censored national media or for that matter the Western networks like CNN, BBC, or the TV news here in France. If you have any doubts, click on Al Jazeera English for round the clock news and documentaries. [5] Up until now, dictatorships — by controlling the mass media, banning meetings, and persecuting dissidents — have been largely successful in isolating their subjects and preventing people power to reach a 'critical mass.' Today, the 21st Century connectivity of interactive Internet sites, cell-phones and social media — widely available everywhere on the planet — have changed that equation in favor of mass democratic movements of the oppressed.

Full Personal Disclosure: Another source of satisfaction for me as the revolts of 2011 developed and spread was the apparent empirical confirmation of ideas about connectivity and revolutionary self-organization I have been developing for fifteen years — theories concerning the emergence of internet-connected, horizontally-organized, spontaneous revolutionary movements on a planetary scale. In 1997 I was invited by my comrades in Moscow to represent the Praxis Center (see Part V) at an International Conference entitled 'Stop Capitalist Barbarism — Prepare the Socialist Alternative', hosted in Cape Town, South Africa by WOSA, the Workers' Organization for a Socialist Alternative, whose independent Marxist leaders had only recently been released from Robben Island — the notorious prison where they were held along with Nelson Mandela. By 1997 Mandela, now President, and his African National Congress party were carrying out neo-liberal policies (with the support of the South African Communist Party) that harshly affect the poor, the young, the organized workers whose years of resistance had put him in power.

There were delegates from as far off as Mauritius, Australia, and the Brazilian rain forest. Our logo was the globe with the South at the top, symbol of our rejection of the traditional hub-and-spokes model of international revolutionary organization with power flowing down from the Kremlin (or from a shabby rented office in Paris, Rome or New York). Our goal was to build an International Network (ostensibly *not* a hierarchical Party) a possibility suggested by the new ease in global communication through the Internet. Thrilled to be in newly liberated South Africa and in such an august company, I thought hard about what would be worthy of presenting. The position paper I submitted ultimately became the basis of the ideas in this book. [6]

I named my theory a 'Modern Archimedes Hypothesis' in honor of the ancient philosopher's famous boast: 'Give me a lever long enough, a fulcrum, a place to stand, and I will lift the earth!' The question facing the 21st century is: Can the world's billions collectively 'lift the Earth' out of its catastrophic capitalist orbit before environmental damage becomes irreparable? In my hypothesis, the Modern Archimedes would need a social lever (International Solidarity), a philosophical fulcrum (Planetary Consciousness) and an electronic platform (the Internet) on which we 99%-ers can unite their strength on a planetary scale and put an end to capitalism before globalized capitalism puts an end to us.

In 1997, many of my Leftist friends looked upon the Internet as an elitist gadget developed by the U.S. military and destined to be monopolized by commercial interests. Today, they are (justifiably) concerned with the use of the Internet for government surveillance of citizens, forgetting that the FBI and such have always opened the mail,

tapped the phones and recorded the meetings of everyone the governments considered 'subversive.' What's new in 2011 is that we can fight back with Wikileaks! To me, the potential of interactive Internet technology combined with its 'hacker ethic' and communitarian freeware mentality appeared as an implicitly egalitarian form of 'emergent' self-organization. And, like my comrades in the global South, I also foresaw that the Internet could help overcome Eurocentrism and the other parochial nationalisms that have always divided humanity and kept revolutions confined within national borders.

My main point was and remains that such international networking is necessary in our era of capitalist globalization when only a coordinated planetary movement targeting the trans-national corporations could be effective in the class struggles to come. I saw the ever-expanding Web as a potential class struggle weapon: one that would transform an old revolutionary syndicalist dream — the international general strike to overthrow capitalism — into a technical possibility. I called it 'a vast conspiracy whose center is everywhere and nowhere!' The reader will judge for herself if my somewhat visionary theories (developed in the following chapters) ultimately hold water, but no one can deny the crucial role of the Internet in the trans-national revolutionary movements of 2011.

From Tunisia to Wall St. and on to Manege Square in Moscow, all of 2011's mass movements made brilliant use of the Internet and social media, which kept newly-minted activists informed in real time of what was happening on the ground and enabled masses of people to come together and demonstrate effectively in the absence of a structured leadership organization. Indeed, the spontaneous protests involving thousands that suddenly occupied public spaces behaved not like the 'headless bloodthirsty mobs' of Conservatives' nightmares but like a sentient being with a thousand video eyes and cell-phone ears, or like a colony of ants foraging a new territory and sharing information about where to send workers. This Internet-based horizontal network-type of organization also turned out to be effective in dealing with censorship, government propaganda and state repression.

A story of links: It is interesting to recall some of the ways in which the Internet propagated an international wave of revolutions, all of which had of course long been simmering beneath the surface. The story begins with Private Bradley Manning, the heroic, idealistic 19 year-old computer nerd, who took his soldier's oath to defend the U.S. Constitution seriously, (allegedly) downloaded Mega-files of secret government communications, blowing the whistle on thousands of violations of U.S. and international law. Manning (allegedly) passed them on to another great hacker hero, Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, who posted a selection on his site. Both, of course, have suffered repression for their devotion to truth-telling, with Manning, kept in solitary for a year and a half facing life (and possible execution) and Australia-born Assange struggling to avoid deportation to the U.S.

The next link in the story of 2011 takes us to Tunisia. Among the thousands of these downloaded documents published on Wikileaks were diplomatic cables documenting the cynical corruption — long suspected but unprovable — of President Ben Ali, whose family had become enormously wealthy ruling Tunisia with an iron hand for the past 23 years. This information, transmitted via Internet, enraged a young Tunisian named Mohamed Bouazizi who set himself on fire in protest against injustice, corruption, unemployment and inequality under Ben Ali. Bouazizi was not the first Tunisian to commit such a desperate act, but his self-immolation was posted on YouTube and propagated via Facebook where it evoked enormous anger across Tunisia and inspired thousands to pour into the streets demanding social justice and an end to kelpocratic dictatorship. The Internet diffusion of a stolen document was the spark that burst into Bouazizi's tragic flame, then spread like wildfire via social media into the streets. The Internet proved to be the tool that provided the masses with the connectivity necessary for such a massive radical Emergence — the very phenomenon which Tunisia's police state and its government-controlled media were designed to make impossible.

Similarly, in Egypt, where militant worker strikes had been simmering for months, the spark that lit the fire of revolution was the bold YouTube video posted by 26-year-old Asmaa Mahfouz, the courageous Cairo woman who dared to bare her face, speak her real name, and challenge all self-respecting Egyptians to join her in protest at Tahrir Square on January 25. Of course the Internet itself didn't make either of these uprisings happen. Revolutions

happen on the ground, lead by real people. As it happened Mahfouz was herself in touch with the May 6 network, a radical group which had long dreamed of organizing such a demonstration. And although Cairo's Tahrir Square and other mass demonstrations opened a whole new political era for Egypt, it was the strength of the workers' strikes along the Suez Canal and in the energy sector that ultimately forced the regime to retreat and compromise. To conclude: the Internet is a tool, an organizational and communications tool, no more no less; but unlike the top-down, one-way broadcast media, it is one that the people can wield to their own advantage to transmit information, organize, and assemble their numbers – their greatest force. Moreover, the Web's connectivity and Emergent structure corresponds to the Emergent properties of spontaneous, popular self-organization, as analyzed as early as 1905 by Rosa Luxemburg in her *Mass Strike* pamphlet.

2. Internationalism

The ability of information, revolutionary ideas, and exemplary actions to leap over frontiers thanks to the new Internet technologies brings us to our next point, the spirit of internationalism that inspired the movements of 2011. We saw it exemplified in the telegrams of support from the Cairo teachers' unions to the Wisconsin occupiers who openly proclaimed they were 'inspired' by the Egyptians to overcome their fear and apathy – thus defying the U.S. media-led racial profiling of Arabs as terrorists. Later, in October, the Wall St. occupiers received the visit of several leading Egyptian activists including Asmaa Mahfouz of the May 5 movement as well as Yemeni activist Tawakkul Karman. And on October 15, less than 24 hours after the Zuccotti Park occupiers claimed "victory" over the city's attempted eviction, 951 Occupy Wall Street-inspired demonstrations reportedly took place in 82 countries around the world on 'Global Occupy Day.'

As the revolutionary spirit hopped from one country to another, a conspiratorial mind might with justification have imagined a secret 'Invisible International' directing the movement like a stage manager behind the scenes. (Indeed several Arab dictators accused the CIA, while Russia's Vladimir Putin blamed it all on an Islamist conspiracy to destabilize his regime!) Far from being the result of a centralized conspiracy however, the symbolic internationalism of 2011 remained largely virtual and has not yet achieved its potential for self-organization.

Despite exchanges of messages of solidarity and some tentative international actions — in particular the Palestinian people's non-violent invasion of Israel's borders – most of the communication between the democratic movements in different countries is still mediated by the Internet and the mainstream media. There have apparently been no successful efforts to organize pan-Arab encounters among rebel students, women and worker activists from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and other countries. Having been involved in one such effort with the Moroccan Human Rights Association in Rabat, I came to understand that the personal poverty of most student and worker activists, lack of accessible transportation, government restrictions on all sides, and preoccupation with local ongoing struggles make such international undertakings extremely difficult at the moment.

More surprisingly, here in Europe I have not been able to observe any efforts to organize European anti-austerity activists from Greece, Spain, and Italy, where young people and workers have occupied and demonstrated against Europe-imposed, cutbacks in salaries, education, health and other public services designed to reduce the people of Southern Europe to debt peonage to the German banks. The Euro plays the same deflationary role here today as did the gold standard in the 19th Century, restricting employment, lowering wages and keeping debtors forever on the run by making them pay back in dear money what was borrowed in cheap.

With common problems, a common currency and open borders, you might consider Europe one country, and the European capitalist offensive to make the workers pay for the bankers' economic crisis is Europe-wide. Yet, although there have been self-organized Europe-wide marches by the unemployed, the wealthy European unions and Left political parties have shown zero interest in organizing a Europe-wide resistance, much less proposing a joint counter-offensive. As we will discuss later, the main reason for this lack of international solidarity is that that

European unions and electoral parties are bureaucratically organized and subsidized by their national governments with mandates (and interests) restricted to operating within their parochial national borders and within the existing system. They have no incentive either to rock the boat at home or to sail forth into uncharted international waters without their government-issued legitimacy as official representatives of 'their' working classes.

The problem for the revolutionaries of 2011 – and not only in the Arab world and in Europe but beyond to Russia, the U.S., Latin America, Africa and Asia – is how to go beyond this admirable spiritual and virtual internationalism toward actual, effective internationalism. Serious international networking and on the ground organizing will be necessary in order for the 99% to stand united on a planetary scale against globalized capitalist imperialism, adept at the age-old game of divide and rule. For in a global economy, as long as wages remain low in one region, they can never rise in another. And as long as some are in bondage, none can be free. Revolution must go global, like capitalism. As long as one bastion of capitalism stands, no victory, no temporary advantage, can ever be secure. Indeed, as we will argue below (in 'The Invisible International'), it is hard to imagine globalized capitalism being overthrown without something like a global general strike to give backbone to generalized civilian uprisings across the planet. Now let us return to the other original features of the movements of 2011.

3. Radical anti-ruling class message

Like the 'virtual' internationalism implicit in the rolling revolutions of 2011, the revolutionary character of these movements remains virtual as well. However, as long as capitalism fails to solve the problems that provoked these movements – unemployment, poverty, racism, sexism, lack of dignity, political impotence, fear for the future of the economy and for the environment – the struggle will go on. And since capitalism is itself the problem, the implicitly revolutionary character of these movements will eventually have to become explicit, in whatever form that takes.

One admires the skill with which the Wall St. Occupiers deflected the media's constant insistence that their 'leaders' 'state their demands' – and thus assimilate their protest into the very political system they were rejecting. The logic is simple: no leaders, no one to be co-opted by the establishment. No demands, nothing to be negotiated away. Instead, the Occupiers of 2011 succinctly summarized their message by repeating: 'We are the 99%!' 'This is what democracy looks like!' and 'Occupy everything!' These slogans, as we have seen, are imaginative, strikingly powerful and enticingly vague as befits a movement in the process of defining itself. They imply vast revolutionary aspirations, although the protesters who formulated them probably do not yet imagine the implications of these aspirations in terms of the titanic class struggles it will take to achieve them. Meanwhile, there is no dearth of issues that the Occupiers have taken on as they filter out of the parks and into the neighborhoods, fighting 'redlining,' opposing evictions, supporting strikers, feeding the hungry. But the main focus is always on the system as a whole.

A quick comparison with the movements of the 60s and the 90s is instructive. As far as the U.S. is concerned, the 60s and 70's were an era of single-issue protest movements: anti-Vietnam war, anti-racism, women's rights, anti-nuke, Latin America solidarity, environment and so on. Although their militancy challenged the establishment massively and forcibly, they were oriented toward making change within the system and eventually were absorbed by it – without, for all that, ever fully achieving their goals. The choice of Wall St. as the target in 2011 suggests the tacitly anti-capitalist character of today's movement. Although there were 'anti-imperialist' movements (openly or tacitly pro-Russian or pro-Chinese imperialism) in the 60s, few were actually anti-capitalist in practice. The nominally Communist and Trotskyist parties that tried to take over the anti-war or anti-racist groups single-issue mostly talked about Malcolm X, Ho Chi Minh or Castro rather than explaining that the 'issues' of racism and war were linked by the capitalist profit-system. Today, after the Crash of 2008, the billionaires' bailout paid for by the poor, and Wall St. as the obvious villain, the capitalist cat is out of the bag.

On the other hand, just being anti-Wall St. doesn't make you a revolutionary socialist, and many of the protesters would be happy just to see a few Wall St. criminals sent to jail – some New Deal type reforms like regulation of the

securities markets and the corporations, less money in the electoral system, green jobs, and a fairer tax system. What is new, is that they all know that capitalism is to blame for their problems, and when the capitalist system, now in terminal crisis, proves itself incapable of such reforms, they will think more about changing the whole system from the bottom up.

In this overt anti-capitalism, the spirit of 'Occupy' is similar to that of the anti-corporate globalization movements of the 90s, which attacked international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank and openly declared 'Another World is Possible.' Like the rebellions of 2011, the anti-globalization movements of the 90's were internationalist from the start, converging on capitalist strongholds like Davos, Seattle and Cancun and relying on massive, mostly non-violent demonstrations. What is new about Occupy is that it spreads around the world via its grass-roots, acting locally while thinking globally.

4. Non-violence

To Western readers raised on media stereotypes of Arabs as warlike clansmen, violent fanatics, and gruesome terrorists perhaps the biggest surprise of the Arab Spring was the assimilation and effective deployment of the tactics of mass, non-violent resistance. Without the guidance of charismatic leaders, the masses of Tunisia and Egypt spontaneously deployed historically proven tactics of non-violent struggle like mass marches, demonstrations and occupations of public space, civil disobedience, fraternization with the soldiers sent to repress them, backed by prolonged political strikes among workers in key industries. By combining all of these classic tactics, the Tunisian and Egyptian masses were able to topple two of the world's longest-reigning and most corrupt French- and U.S.-backed dictators *in a matter of days*. Clearly, these Arabs were on to something!

The thousands of Tunisians and Egyptians who together carried out this brilliant tactical victory, having lived all their lives in violent, repressive societies understood instinctively that massive non-violence was the *only* way to bring their real strength — their numbers, their courage, their solidarity — to bear against mega-weaponry of the 21st century police state. To me the epitome of their creative non-violence was the way thousands of Egyptian protesters on the bridge leading into Tahrir forced their way into the Square through the police blockade after sustaining a day-long push-and-shove battle with ever new lines of brave protesters moving up to the front as lines of wounded and exhausted passed to the rear. Non-violence does not necessarily mean 'passive' resistance. Mass action is necessarily cohesiver. Nor does non-violence recognize the sanctity of bourgeois property — only of life. The sit-in strikes of workers barricaded inside the corporation's property is one of the workers' most forceful weapons, revived starting in 2010 by the Egyptian textile workers, mostly women..

The *N.Y. Times* made much of the contribution of foreign non-violent strategists like Vermont Professor Gene Clark to the emergence of non-violence among the Arabs, but it turns out that the Islamic world had its own historic non-violent role-model in Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the 'frontier Gandhi,' who according to Michael Shank (the Nation March 16) 'built a 100,000 strong non-violent resistance movement out of local tribal people' among the Pashtouns on the Pakistani-Afghanistan border — an arbitrary frontier imposed by the British the better to divide and rule the Pashtouns. According to Khan, 'Mohammed taught that a Moslem is one who never hurts anyone by word or deed.' The record of British atrocities against Khan's peaceful followers in the '20s was worthy of a Kadafi. So much for the Clash of Civilizations.

I doubt that many of the young Arab protesters had ever heard of either Clark or Kahn, but that didn't stop them from re-appropriating and re-inventing the most effective tactics in the historical arsenal of non-violent struggle, from Gandhi and the successful Danish WWII Resistance to Nazi Occupation to Martin Luther King. [7] What the Tunisian and Egyptian movements also showed is that non-violence encourages positive democratic, socialist, humanist values. In Egypt we saw women and men, young and old, workers and professionals, secularists, Christians and Moslems spontaneously joined in mutual respect and solidarity, while street crime fell as the police vanished and

neighborhoods organized and picked up the trash. This admirable prefiguration of true democracy (including respect for women) was established for two weeks among the thousands in Tahrir Square (and later among the occupiers of the Wisconsin State Capitol and Wall St. as well). Non-violence is woman-friendly, and without the full participation of women there can be no genuine democratic and social revolution. Once you remove the latent threat of man-on-woman violence, the full strength of women – the majority who bear the load of society — emerges. Take away the men with guns, and watch that woman power emerge. Listen to the voice of a Greek woman protester:

As a 10-year-old to a 14-year-old I lived through the Nazi occupation in Athens. There was not solidarity among the starving people of Athens then. Each family was struggling to survive alone. Today, again people are starving in Athens. I am amazed and surprised at the flood of solidarity that has appeared among the Greeks, of all ages, but especially among the young Greeks and the working class. It is not only moving, it is precious. As previously mentioned, the Greeks are angry, especially the women, women of all ages, with older women at the top. I consider this as a formidable force, which will contribute greatly to, literally, gaining back our land from the "supermen" American and European.

One cannot help comparing the astonishingly rapid and relatively painless nonviolent revolutionary overthrow of Ben Ali and Mubarak with the dismal record of violent revolutionary tactics like guerilla warfare which succeed (when they do) only after months or years of death and destruction and which generally lead to endless civil war and military rule (for example in Algeria), wiping out the gains of women in the process. Alas, the non-violent revolutionary victories of January and February have been overshadowed by the tragic news from Syria and Libya, where a promising democratic uprising degenerated into a civil war abetted by outside imperialist interests.

Was massive non-violence possible in Libya, with its dispersed population, regional and tribal divisions, lack of a coherent civil society ? I doubt it. Oil-rich Libya is a vast under populated Arab country where most of the work was done by immigrant labor, mostly from Black Africa. Appallingly, these poor, frightened Blacks, trying desperate to go home, were scapgoated by the insurgent Arab populations during the NATO-backed Civil War. On the other hand, there is the example of the democratic movement in Yemen, which like Libya, remains a traditionally warlike clan society where armed factional conflict is endemic. Led by an outspoken young woman, Yemen's mass movement like that of Egypt, remained non-violent in the face of government-sponsored armed aggression. Indeed, at one point tribal warriors reportedly joined the movement having apparently left their weapons at home. (The fighting between army units loyal and disloyal to the clan of the dictator are apparently independent of the parallel mass movement for democracy)

In Syria, significant numbers of soldiers assigned to repress non-violent civilian demonstrations have deserted and gone over to the side of the revolution, which is an historic step, necessary for any revolution to succeed. Many have taken up arms, ostensibly to protect the local populations, providing the Assad regime pretexts for massive bombardment of civilians. Although the cruel Assad would have invented other pretexts, it is hard to see how the presence of these liberation army units in their midst will help the oppressed civilians toward a democratic, women's' rights and social-equality solution to this tragic dilemma. Indeed, leaked documents from security forces in a number of countries, from Syria to the U.S., suggest that governments deliberately provoke violence in order to make impossible a campaign of massive non-violent protest, whose proven effectiveness (as in Egypt) is their greatest fear. This policy is carried out through two methods: police over-reaction (in Syria the mediatized torture-death of a 12 year old protester) and police provocation (in the U.S. the infiltration of Occupy Oakland by undercover agents who provoke violence and then move on to other towns).

Concerning the liberation of Palestine from Israeli military occupation, another apparently intractable problem, let us recall that the most progress was made by the first intifada, massive and largely non-violent with the Palestinian women (the most educated in the region) in the lead. Since then, the two armed factions, Fatah and Hamas, the one bureaucratic and the other Islamic, have been fighting each other, thus weakening the Palestinian cause and making life impossible for civilians already being tortured by the Israelis. Fatah's Palestinian Authority plays local police force

for Israeli domination while Hamas pointlessly lobs an occasional rocket at Israel, bringing down reprisal on the heads of their civilian brothers, sisters, parents, children in Gaza in the form of merciless poundings by IDA artillery and U.S.-supplied jet fighter-bombers. Could a worse situation be imagined? Let me conclude this discussion by quoting a Palestinian physician and parliamentarian, Dr. Mustafa Barghouti:

I remember the days when some political leaders of the largest Palestinian political parties, Al Fatah and Hamas, laughed at our nonviolent struggle, which they saw as soft and ineffective. But the turning point came in the summer of 2008, when we managed to break the Israeli naval siege of Gaza with small boats. Suddenly, I saw great respect in the eyes of the same leaders who had doubted the power of nonviolence but finally recognized its potential. The power of nonviolence is that it gives Palestinians of all ages and walks of life the tools to challenge those subjugating us. And thousands of peace activists from around the world have joined our movement. In demonstrations in East Jerusalem, Silwan and Hebron we are also being joined by a new and younger Israeli peace movement that categorically rejects Israeli occupation. [8]

To be sure, neither the tragic dilemma of Syria, nor that of Palestine, can be solved by waving the magic wand of non-violence, even if strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and non-cooperation remain more effective, more inclusive and less destructive tactics than civil war. Such problems can only be solved through *international* solidarity among peoples (which has nothing to do with foreign armed intervention). The Egyptian revolution, stalled though it remains, has already at least forced the partial opening of the border with Gaza, giving the Palestinians held prisoner there by Israel some access for travel and relief. The attempts of Arab sympathizers outside to non-violently invade the borders imposed by Israel on Palestine was a powerful demonstration of what is possible.

5. Horizontal forms of self-organization, prefiguring a new society

Another striking original characteristic of the movements of 2011 is the absence of the charismatic leaders and structured organizations typical of earlier movements and epitomized by the ubiquitous image of the Sixties guerilla leader *Commandante* 'Che Guevarra' more present today as a T-shirt icon or 'brand' than as a revolutionary model. Not only have today's Occupy Everything movements not produced equivalents of Guevarra, the Black Panthers' Bobby Seale or media-inflated leaders like France's 1968 student spokesman Dany-the-Red Cohn-Bendit (today a successful politician) they seem to eschew top-down types of leadership organization in favor of a more open, fluid, temporary type of organization from which new leaders are constantly emerging and where the voices of women are at last heard (as they rarely were in the more *macho* groups of the 60s). Moreover, these assemblies are federating.

Spanish sociologist Jose Luis Moreno Pestaña, a witness-participant in the Cadiz and Seville assemblies of *indignados*, reports:

The assemblies are held in public spaces. Sometimes we hold assemblies of the whole city, but the weekly assemblies are done by neighborhood. Every week there are coordinating meetings for all the assemblies in the city. The representatives change every three weeks, since the objective is to put in place a collective apprenticeship in how to acquire activist "capital." We learn how to speak in public, how to debate, to synthesize the positions that emerge. [9]

In the politics of Occupy, the medium is the message. And for the Occupiers from Tahrir through Madrid to Zucatti Park the essential message is: 'This is what democracy looks like.' Means are not separate from ends, process from revolt. The movement itself prefigures the new society it seeks – egalitarian, ecological, cooperative. As stated in the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City: "Exercise your right to peaceably assemble; occupy public space; create a process to address the problems we face, and generate solutions accessible to everyone... Join us and make your voices heard!"

Interestingly, the Zucatti Park Occupiers came up with an ingenious way of 'making voices heard.' Necessity was the mother of this peoples' invention. When the City banned the use of loud-speakers, the Assemblies decided to repeat, phrase by phrase, what each speaker was saying, those in front amplifying for those in back, so everyone could hear and participate. With good-humored irony, this process was baptized 'Mic-Check.' It encourages speakers to concentrate what is essential in their thoughts into short units and get to the point, while it also obliges the hearer to really take in the speaker's words and make them in some sense her own.

Writing from Oakland, CA, Ken Knabb, the self-styled mild-mannered enemy of the state, observes:

From the beginning the occupation movement has been resolutely antihierarchical and participatory. General assembly decisions are scrupulously democratic and most decisions are taken by consensus — a process which can sometimes be unwieldy, but which has the merit of making any manipulation practically impossible. In fact, *the real threat is the other way around*. The example of participatory democracy ultimately threatens all hierarchies and social divisions, including those between rank-and-file workers and their union bureaucracies, and between political parties and their constituents. Which is why so many politicians and union bureaucrats are trying to jump on the bandwagon. ... In this process we are already getting a taste of a new kind of life, life as it *could* be if we weren't stuck in such an absurd and anachronistic social system. So much is happening so quickly that we hardly know how to express it. Feelings like: "I can't believe it! Finally! This is it! Or at least it could be it — what we've been waiting for so long, the sort of human awakening that we've dreamed of but didn't know if it would ever actually happen in our lifetime." [\[10\]](#)

Regarding ends and means, Knabb concludes: 'popular participation is itself an essential part of any real solution.' In a similar vein, Stephen Graham, the author of *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*, decries that American cities 'have become much more sanitized, much more controlled by questions of zero tolerance, by questions of really aggressive policing, to clear out those that are deemed to be sort of not fitting a model of urban life.' On the other hand, he declares:

What's so wonderful about the Occupy protests is that there's a different, a much more hopeful idea of cities being pushed there, in a world where we have a really radical crisis and a radical sense of illegitimacy for the social model that we're all still having to live under... So, in a way, I think what the Occupy movement is so powerful at is demonstrating that by occupying public spaces around the world, and particularly these extremely symbolic public spaces, it's reasserting that the city is the foundation space for democracy. And we have to reassert that symbolically and with the actual groupings of the activists in space. So the internet is not enough. It's very much necessary to reassert that cities are political spaces which need to be used to mobilize social and political change.

Moreover, the occupations of 2011 do not just stand as examples of democracy and ideal prefigurations of a better society to be visited and admired on public squares, they also spill out into the surrounding communities, from which they draw their sustenance. Take, for example, this report from Mogniss H. Abdallah in Egypt: "In Cairo on April 22, the first national assembly of the Popular Committees for the Protection of the Revolution brought together 5000 people on Tahrir Square. Some 220 of these Committees are implanted across the country and have already come together in some 40 local coordinating committees. Their purpose is the self defense of their neighborhoods, villages and factories. They came into being, quite spontaneously, on January 28th when the police were suddenly withdrawn and criminal gangs of "baltagueya" were unleashed on the population by the regime." But instead of the planned 'chaos' and violence designed to turn honest citizens against the revolution, the self-organized volunteers brought about a rebirth of citizen consciousness and civic order, including the recycling of garbage.'

Since that time, the Committees have extended their field of action, monitoring the police, local authorities and social services. Also demanding the arrest and trial of corrupt men in power, the dismantling of fraudulently elected local councils, the restitution of illegally appropriated public goods, democratic election of local governors and an end to military trials of civilians. What we are seeing here is the spontaneous creation of an autonomous democratic

counter-power, organized for self-defense, and challenging the existing powers on every front. These 21st Century Egyptians may or may not be aware that the Paris Commune of 1871 grew out of local volunteer self-defense committees or that the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 were made by the self-organized, federated councils (Soviets) of workers, soldiers and citizens; but their common sense, class instincts and the needs of the moment, drive them — and will continue to drive them — to similar forms of self-organization. Thus the social revolution goes about its business.

Likewise in Greece, with the embattled working people under attack from the full power of European capital, the social movements are becoming 'more community-based, local-based, so they can address specific needs more. For example, electricity is being taxed, so they're working on making sure people don't have their electricity cut off, preventing people from being evicted from their homes.' So observes Marina Sitrin, author of *Horizontalism* [11] who has also studied popular movements in Latin America, including in Argentina during the financial meltdown when piqueteros and neighborhood assemblies drove several successive governments from power and workers took over closed factories and self-managed them. Sitrin continues:

Similarly in Harlem, people have been working with Occupy Harlem in preventing people's heat from getting cut off; in Occupy Bronx, it's about preventing people from getting expelled from their homes — so, more and more kind of reterritorializing, but at the same time keeping a space where we can have our assemblies and exchange experiences from around the city. And I think, actually, it's a much more radical, if not revolutionary, way of organizing, because when we just come to one plaza, we come to a plaza and have a gathering related to that space. When we're in our neighborhoods and we come together and relate in that way, it's more like alternative governance, which is I think what we're seeing to a small extent in Greece now and in Spain, as well.

One last example of prefigurative politics comes from Greece, where thousands upon thousands of working people lost access to their health care when they were forced into unemployment by the austerity measures imposed by the European Union and the international banks. The same manufactured 'debt crisis,' closing hospitals and clinics, has also left many recent Greek medical school graduates unemployed, and so now these young doctors are now treating unemployed patients 'outside the system' in clinic improvised in peoples' apartments. How better to demonstrate the absurdity of the commodified capitalist social system that leaves sick people untreated while unemployed doctors walk the street or work as busboys.

The Birth of Radical Emergence?

The revolutionary year 2011 may indeed enter history as the beginning of something new. Let's call it Radical Emergence. 'Emergence' is a relative new scientific concept related to Complexity theory which helps explain self-organization in fields as different as biology (evolution), zoology (flocking), physics (quantum), cybernetics (networking), human history (city-building), and social movements. Interestingly, Emergence theorists frequently cite Rosa Luxembourg's analysis of worker self-organization during the 1905-06 mass strikes in Russia. In terms of Emergence, one could say that in 2011, humans around the globe began emerging out of their atomised states and forming new movements, like clouds spontaneously forming out of droplets in the atmosphere. In one place after another, people came together in new self-organized assemblies and invented new forms of socialisation based on autonomy, mutual respect and community in struggle.

As in 'flocking,' another form of emergent behavior found in nature, the movement's leaders emerge and then replace each other as spontaneously as the 'leaders' in a flock of migrating birds, whose collective compass guides them unerringly across continents, through storms and other obstacles. The leader birds at the front express the flock's consensus of the moment — like the ever-changing spokespersons of the mass assemblies and occupations. The singer-songwriter David Crosby (of Crosby Stills, Nash and Young fame) puts it this way: 'The spread of a movement — look, this thing is like a solution that's reaching saturation. And at the right point, all of a sudden, the crystal forms.'

And that's what's going on down there in that park. America is a solution, and it is reaching a saturation point. And this crystal is starting to happen all over the country. [12]on Autonomy plus Connectivity equals Radical Emergence!

[1] After fifty years reading and writing radical leaflets, I'm humbled and secretly jealous I didn't think of 'We are the 99% !' myself. I did dream up a great slogan in 'Billions *versus* Billionnaires,' but it took the Zucatti Park Occupiers to come up with 99%-ers versus 1%-ers. Close but no cigar !

[2] Podcast at www.democracynow.org

[3] See my 'Is there Life after Capitalism ?' <http://www.stateofnature.org/isThereLifeAfter.html#next>

[4] <http://www.sandmonkey.org/>

[5] Al Jazeera, with a Washington bureau and highly professional U.S. based team of reporters, is banned from the U.S. airways. It is available via podcast at http://www.aljazeera.com/watch_now/

[6] Richard Greeman, 'On Building an International Network: A Vision in Three Parts,' *Discussion Bulletin*, International Conference 'Stop Capitalist Barbarism — Prepare the Socialist Alternative,' Cape Town, South Africa, Dec. 1997. Sadly, this brave attempt among seasoned revolutionaries to create an open, horizontally structured international network foundered on the rocks of Left sectarian power struggles exposed in the double dealing by the largest and richest of the constuantant? groups, Socialismo internatioario based in Rome, Italy, which was maintaining a parallel international organization under its control. This bitter disappointment led me to a reconsideration the question of 'the party'.

[7] For a highly readable introduction to the poorly-known history of non-violent struggles I recommend A Force More Powerful : A Century of Nonviolent Conflict by Peter Ackerman and Jack Duval.

[8] <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/22/opinion/peaceful-protest-can-free-palestine.html?ref=todayspaper>

[9] www.nonfiction.fr

[10] Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public Secrets <http://www.bopsecrets.org/recent/awakening.htm>

[11] http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/16/as_occupy_enters_third_month_a

[12] http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/10/legendary_folk_duo_crosby_nash