

On the Occupy Wall Street Action Plan

A statement, called an Action Plan by one of the people circulating it, seems to have emerged from the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York, or from a working group set up by the people there. It's impossible to know how many people in and around OWS would agree with the thrust of this plan, but the two main points—if adopted and carried out—are extremely important. Even to get these points widely discussed would be a huge step forward. *The details are less important than the main ideas.*

Point 1 is to create an elected National General Assembly which would convene on July 4, 2012 to come up with a "petition of grievances" that would be presented to all members of Congress, the President, the Supreme Court and federal political candidates. . . .*before* the 2012 elections. The ratification of the petition of grievances shall be by "simple majority vote."

Point 2 is that "if the petition of grievances . . . is not acted upon within a reasonable time and to the satisfaction of the Delegates of the National General Assembly, said Delegates shall organize a new Completely Non-Partisan Independent Political Party to run candidates for every available Congressional seat in . . . 2014 and again in 2016 until all vestiges of the existing corporatocracy have been removed by the ballot box."

The clear implication is that the National General Assembly will constitute itself (in some form) as an ongoing body capable of organizing substantial actions, campaigns and appeals to the public on specific issues and on behalf of a larger vision.

I don't know whether it will be practical for the OWS movement, which is still in its infancy, to elect a meaningful, democratic National General Assembly, and to avoid being taken over by Obama loyalists in some areas, political sects in others, and opportunists elsewhere. The important thing is that the creation of a new, militant national organization is on the agenda, and there is recognition that it would have to be, in some sense, an elected representative body that makes its most important decisions "by simple majority vote" based on serious deliberation and consultation with constituents. This proposal, in one bold stroke cuts through the straitjacket of so-called "consensus decisionmaking," which in practice means giving veto power to people who might be in the minority, to those who have the lifestyle to sit through interminable meetings, and to those who know how to manipulate the process (for example, setting things up so that your proposals become the "default" and alternative proposals or changes require supermajorities to pass).

The second point is essentially a call for the creation of a new political party, opposed to the Democratic and Republican parties. The expression "completely non-partisan . . . political party" might seem to be an oxymoron, but I think it was inserted to make clear that the intent is not to support Good Democrats the way PDA and some other groups in the liberal left have done. Most people think of a party as an organization primarily devoted to running candidates (like the Green Party), in other words, an electoral machine. However, the kind of party implied in this proposal would be the political expression of the new direct action movement, and a potential vehicle for uniting and empowering the "99 percent" or at least a very large sector of the population that sorely needs such a vehicle.

The twenty items listed by the working group (as suggestions) contain some that are quite good and some that

are pretty awful, in my view. They require a great deal of thought and in some cases, severe criticism, which I will not attempt in this piece. However, the intent and spirit of the list as a whole is consistent with the goal of democratizing the economy, challenging corporate power, and establishing genuine democracy in the political system in place of the elitist and corrupt system that is dominated by and serves the interests of the corporations and the very wealthy. Hopefully the petition of grievances will be improved and refined in the deliberative process and down the road as the movement gains experience, learns from mistakes and develops itself on the theoretical level. Right now the list of suggestions is a grab bag of ideas, including some leftish shibboleths that hopefully will be abandoned as the movement learns better.

As a transition from direct action and lists of grievances to a more fully developed set of ideas, I would propose a principle such as the following:

"As long as the economic and political system is dominated by huge concentrations of wealth, small legal victories can be no more than marginally or temporarily effective. The real solution in the long run is to democratize the economy, which goes hand in hand with democratizing government and politics. Many intermediate steps can be taken toward this end, but it is important to distinguish between real progress and rhetorical flourishes or gestures designed to stall the momentum of the new movement and keep the old elites in power. It will be necessary to break the power over society of giant corporations and the very wealthy, and ultimately to subject large economic institutions to complete and effective democratic control. 'Government regulation' is not enough because the government itself can be bought, subverted or blackmailed by those who control the economy through corporations, the mechanisms of global capitalism, and media and propaganda machines for which 'private profit' is the only true value."

This Action Plan is a step forward, or will be if it adopted by the OWS General Assembly as a whole. I hope that it is in addition to (rather than supplanting) the original Declaration, whose long list of grievances constitute an indictment of the system as a whole and can be understood even by people who might misunderstand or disagree with the Action Plan.

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