

Three Cheers for the Occupiers and Their Supporters — Now What?

by Doug Dowd

This is being written three months after the “Occupy” (or “OWS”) political efforts took hold. They are all admirable and well-justified, given that increasingly since the 1970s Wall Street has come to dominate, exploit, and manipulate not only local and regional politicians, but Congress and the White House. What should also be clear is that the struggles addressed by the current local protests cannot be won unless the local groups are also the first step toward a broader and deeper *national* political movement. This broader coalition will be one that demands that, instead of bought-and-paid-for politicians, “We the People” — you and I — are going to run the country. That movement must be well on the way as soon as possible in order to become strong enough to guarantee that the 2012 election will be won by us, we the people, *you and me...*

So what about Obama? You know, I agree with those who are angry and disappointed with what the Democrats and Obama have done — and have not done. That said (and that’s saying a lot), if the Republicans take over more of Congress and the presidency, they will make the current government look very good indeed — which, I agree, it assuredly is not. We must immediately work hard to push the Democratic Party toward genuine democracy. By kicking the Republicans back in the next election we can then get to work to “democratize” the Democratic Party, and to get a meaningful third party going.

If things are not to get much worse and never become better we must start working today and never stop. Many of us did some hard political work in the 1930s and again after World War II; for a while. Then, as we relaxed, the conservatives muscled up, were increasingly financed, active, and successful. If we allow today's always stronger and more rightist politics to win in the 2012 elections, they will certainly use their increased powers to worsen the already frustrated lives of the majority. I propose the following four-point program.

Toward a National Political Movement

The Occupy movement has been exciting, admirable, and necessary. But now our focus must broaden and deepen, and its demands must become national. The rightists bought their way; we have to work them down and bring decency up. We must win — and we can!

Point No. 1

What “work” must we do? We must become accustomed to spending a significant period of our free time in one or another political activity. We must look for and participate in political meetings. We must join or create political organizations on the local, state, and national level. If we join existing political groups, we must work hard to see that they are fighting for the desirable and needed socio-economic programs. At the same time we must do our best to work hard for local, state, and national politicians who represent the *needs* of the people, not the *desires* of business and the rich.

Point No. 2

We must accept the fact that we cannot know what to work against and what to work for unless we increase our understanding, unless we keep up with what is going on. There's no shortcut: We need to spend the time learning, absorbing, digesting, reflecting. Almost all public libraries carry the newspapers, journals, and books we need to know what is or should or should not be going on, at home and abroad — economically, militarily, politically, environmentally. If that means our giving up some hours in front of the television, so be it. I am in my 93rd year. Living that kind of life had its troubles, but they were outweighed by the satisfaction given me by those I met and worked with and who, over my long life, became my closest friends. So what have I really missed as a result?

Point No. 3

For whom and what should we work? Unfortunately, that will often be difficult to answer. As things now stand, whether it's local and state and national elections, the majority of those running for election have been bought and paid for — and for some of them, as Gore Vidal put it, they've been and sold so many times they don't even know their own name. These people are mostly bummers — at best, they're venal hacks. At worst— Well, who knows what the bottom of the barrel can hold? (Or is there a even a bottom to the barrel — do we have depths below depths?)

What do we do about the national presidential election? In the 2008 presidential election, I didn't have to think twice: vote for Obama — not only because the GOP guy was impossible, but also because it would be

wonderful to break through the racist barrier. Moreover, Obama seemed to be an intelligent and decent man.

I still believe he is both, but one can be intelligent and decent and also be unsatisfactory for people like myself (and I would think to you, too). Indeed, I did a little work for him on the radio. To which I add this: If I were asked, I would do it again, even though I have been and remain a severe critic of Obama. My opinion of him is that he is basically conservative, but conservatives can also be decent (just as non-conservatives can be indecent). If I did work for him again, at the same time, I would constantly try to get him to begin to work hard for decency. Although I am in support of there being a third party and will work for it, that must be something that is done *between* elections — that is, after this upcoming one.

Next, the Congressional, local and state elections. We must search out and work for left of center candidates. We must *find* desirable people to run for office and, as well, do the financial and political work to support them with a lot of time. Mostly what it takes is political work by us. That takes me to my political history, a part of which is relevant for today and this moment...

I was born in San Francisco in 1919; just another kid. I began to take steps toward becoming an unusually political kid in 1934 when, walking around downtown I saw a parade going up the main street, carrying two coffins. Along with some other kids, I joined the parade for fun. When I asked some of the guys who the coffins were for they told me. The day before, while they were picketing the docks for better wages and conditions, two longshoremen had been murdered by thugs paid by the ship owners. I knew nothing about any of that, but as I walked along for an hour or two I was educated by the guys. Dock workers were on strike and their bosses got

tough — murderously tough. But I also learned from the guys that their union, as was common in those days (and not uncommon today), was corrupt; they had taken matters in their own hands with a strike.

They were led by Harry Bridges, a leftist and an immigrant from Australia. The fight had two aims: (1) to bring the union to life, and (2) to force the ship owners to provide decent wages and working conditions. Both soon were soon achieved in San Francisco, and the struggle soon spread to all U.S. docks. (There is a fine film for the New York docks, *On the Waterfront*.)

Such struggles soon began to take hold in autos and steel and others. As Governor of New York Roosevelt had been a conservative Democrat and a good pal of Wall Street. By 1935 he understood — it had been made clear to him that if he wanted to be re-elected — he had to begin to meet the needs of the people, instead of the wishes of Wall Street. He was re-elected three times. When he died in 1944, he had become a moderate lefty. Naturally, by this time he was hated by his former pals — Wall Street and all conservatives. I was in foxhole in the Pacific war when the news came of his death, and I, once his harsh critic, wept.

Part of the reason for the discussion above is to make a point. It is this: If a conservative Democrat (as FDR was when first elected) could become an increasingly strong liberal in his second, third, and fourth terms in the White House, it is entirely possible that Obama could. That means we must become politically involved seriously. We have a lot to do, both to help Obama to change his ways and to get people like ourselves to work for him. But there is much more we can and should be doing. We can and should be

creating and working with a nation-wide political group with the aim to make the USA into a safe and sane society: *our* country.

Point No. 4

A group of us created a movement in the mid-1960s: “The Mobe.” It was such a movement! Something like it is needed and possible now. Here’s what we did.

The Mobe

The Beginning

My San Francisco background notwithstanding, “The Mobe” was not short for “Moby Grape,” which in the 1960s was a popular rock group in my home town. The full name of The Mobe was *Mobilization Against the War in Vietnam*. In the beginning, a meeting of about twenty-five activists was organized. Almost all of us represented an existing group (SDS, SNCC, CORE, SANE [now Peace Action], Women for Peace, the Socialist Workers Party, *plus* the Communist Party, and still others).

When we first met there was, of course, friction. Ever the sectarian left, it would seem, some representatives were openly antagonistic to others. But as weeks and months passed, we came to work well together. And here’s an amazing fact: Although we began and continued to be an anti-war group, within a few months we began to have representatives from all kinds of liberal and radical political groups. Within 6-to-8 months we were incorporating representatives from more than *two hundred* separate groups.

They worked with us against the war, without losing sight of their own overlapping basic aims.

The Middle

We worked hard — but did we make a difference? We did. For one thing, we pulled the tail of the tiger: The U.S. government sent many of our people to prison for their anti-war efforts. (My son Jeff was one.) The Mobe had innumerable demonstrations, with two standing out for their *millions* of participants in Washington, D.C., in the late 1960s.

Here are two very personal events that drove home our success.

First, a family matter: My older brother is as conservative as I am not. We rarely communicate. Nonetheless, after one of our incredible events, he telephoned me to say, “Thanks for your great demonstration,” and added that he had persuaded his two sons to find a way to avoid going to Vietnam.

Then in early 1970, three of us working with antiwar activities (Noam Chomsky was one) were invited to go to North Vietnam. I will never forget or forgive my country for what it did with its Vietnam bombing (which was going on day and night while we were there). Nor will I forget our meeting with their leader. He told us that so long as our movement against the war was functioning, he was sure that our strenuous activities would keep the USA from using its atomic bombs — and without a hideous atomic replay in Vietnam of Hiroshima-Nagasaki, the USA couldn't win.

The Mobe was a national organization of and for the 1960s. Right now, at this critical juncture, a new national organization would make a difference — *the* difference!

The End

The Mobe continued to function into the early 1970s, but — along with most other valuable groups (including unions) — it weakened. In the same years, rightist politics took hold, got lots of financial support from the business world, and began its *cancerous hypertrophy* (or more politely, its *ongoing expansion*). The Mobe closed down in 1972.

Some reading this will remember, or will even have been part of, The Mobe. Some are already members of the political groups we need so badly. All who are reading this can, and I hope, are already active or will soon become involved politically.

The Future

I am sending this to dozens of people, some of whom can and will send it around. As I bump around in my 93rd year, I can't do much more than write, and I hope that it will be helpful. It cannot be, without your help.

Hang in there, multiply, and do what you can to make the USA become a decent society — finally.

