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Will Occupy Wall Street Be Co-opted?

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Much of the recent commentary about the Occupy Wall Street movement focuses on whether or not this radical movement will be "co-opted" by the unions, or the Democratic Party, or other liberal forces. This seems to be the concern of many academic lefties and activists, who are quick to warn the Occupy Wall Street activists to avoid "co-optation" at all costs.

In other words, these lefties view "co-optation" as failure. I disagree. The success of every radical movement in American history has occurred when it is co-opted by the forces of reform. Read the 1892 Omaha Platform of the People's Party, or the 1912 platform of the Socialist Party, or Upton Sinclair's 1934 "End Poverty in California" platform for his campaign for governor of California, or the 1948 platform of Henry Wallace's Progressive Party campaign for President.

Many of the ideas proposed in these documents -- including a progressive income tax, the 8-hour day, the direct election of Senators, old age insurance, and voting rights for African Americas -- were considered radical in their day. Eventually, many aspects of these platforms were adopted by one of the two major parties, in somewhat watered-down versions. Is that a failure or a victory?

When there's enough political pressure, the reactionary and conservative wing of the establishment tries to beat the movement back using repression. But the moderates and liberals within the establishment use the fear of disorder and radicalism to push through reforms that are modest versions of what radicals have been demanding.

The moderate wing of the establishment hopes this will knock the wind out of the sails of the movement, but if the movement views these as steppingstones to further reform, then it is not co-optation, it is a way to build on victories. That's the story of the New Deal -- pushed by protests among farmers, workers, the jobless, renters, veterans, and others -- and every other era of reform in our history.

In their book, *Organizing for Social Change*, Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max (long-time organizer trainers at the Midwest Academy) write that organizing has three goals:

1. Win concrete improvements in people's lives
2. Give people a sense of their own power
3. Change the relations of power

We should judge the Occupy Wall Street movement on those terms. The veteran community and union organizers now talking with the Occupy Wall Street folks are trying to figure out how to keep the movement from fizzling out. They understand that they have to win victories for real people, keep a sense of urgency in the air, keep the media interested (in the reforms, not just the spectacle), get politicians to take advantage of this growing momentum to push for legislation that didn't seem possible a month ago, and keep the leaders of America's biggest corporations up at night worrying about this new economic justice movement that is putting the richest one percent on the defensive.

This movement eventually has to be about the 1% paying back the money it "stole" from the 99%. How?

- Stop banks from foreclosing and evicting homeowners who were victims of predatory lending or economic hardship.
- Reduce mortgage principle for underwater homeowners.
- Reduce student debt
- Raise taxes on millionaires and billionaires
- Make banks pay for local costs/damage caused by foreclosures(similar to ACCE's proposed California law to make banks

pay \$20,000 per foreclosure).

- Make banks that got federal bail-outs spend the money helping homeowners and small businesses. (We need an accounting of where the money went and which banks are hoarding it as well as have paid huge compensation to top execs).
- Pass a public works jobs plan that focuses on creating jobs by repairing the nation's crumbling infrastructure and schools

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Been to Occupy Wall Street?

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