

THE OCCUPATION MOVEMENT AND U.S. MILITARISM

**Progressive Conversations on US Foreign
Policy in the Middle East**

**Levantine Cultural Center
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SPEAKERS

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TREMENDOUS SUPPORT

- **How many here today have followed OWS and OLA? Spent time there?**
- **Who considers themselves to be a supporter?**
- **What about those who think that the general political and economic crises which gave rise to the Occupation movements are here to stay?**



- **QUICK OVERVIEW
OF THE
OCCUPATION
MOVEMENTS**



SOUTH LAWN OF LOS ANGELES CITY HALL WITH TENTS – BEFORE EVICTION



TENTS PITCHED OUTSIDE LA'S CITY HALL BY OCCUPY LOS ANGELES



HOW DID IT BEGIN?

- Press portrays Occupy as spontaneous outpouring of people frustrated over economy.
- Researchers on social movements know they are not spontaneous.
- Call for Occupy Wall Street came from the Vancouver, BC based publication *Adbusters*.
- Focus on the financial sector came from *Take Back the American Dream* movement, which popularized Joseph Stiglitz's "99 %" phrase.
- Then, massive publicity from corporate media.



IMPACTS OF OCCUPY

- Quickly tapped genuine political emotions and spread throughout the entire U.S., as well as Canada.
- On October 15 rallies in many countries.
- Thousands of articles on wealth and income inequality in corporate and alternative press.
- While few politicians changed their policies, most, like those at LA's City Hall, changed their rhetoric, at least temporarily.



U.S. OCCUPATION MOVEMENTS SIMILAR TO THOSE ABROAD

- Resembles movements in Europe and Middle East, but with major differences:
- In Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria the purpose has been to overthrow dictatorships.
- In UK, Italy, and France it has been to oppose cutbacks, especially in education.
- In Spain and Greece the agenda has been to block major austerity measures, with strong union participation.
- In Israel J14 protests are directed at inequality, the destruction of the social welfare state, and deteriorating working conditions.



U.S. MOVEMENT'S TRAITS

- **Occupy not well understood or predicted.**
- **Enormous publicity in U.S. and Canadian corporate media.**
- **Activists are ecstatic, with many suggestions of where to go next and what to be wary of.**
- **Obama campaign team is drooling over the potential of using the Occupy protest movements in the next Presidential campaign. One of his early campaign themes is that he represents the 99%.**



WHAT IS THE MAIN FOCUS?

- **Based on Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Los Angeles and similar occupations have been focused on corporate greed. Slogan is “We are the 99 %!”**
- **The main target is the financial sector, identified as the large U.S. banks and Wall Street.**
- **Only proposal advanced in systematic way is “Get corporate money out of electoral politics.”**
- **The restoration of the Glass-Steagall for better Federal regulation of the banks is also mentioned.**



PRIMARY QUESTION

- **After peaking at nearly 800 separate Occupations, police repression has resulted in the eviction of most encampments, such as OWS, OLA, and Oakland.**
- **But, the economic and political conditions which propelled Occupation are still growing.**
- **The protest movements are surviving and are likely to revive for Occupation 2.0.**



THE OCCUPATION MOVEMENTS ARE AT A FORK IN THE ROAD



TIME FOR REASSESSMENT

- Elimination of most encampments means this is period to reconsider basics:
- No official platform or analysis beyond *99 % vs. the 1 %* related to domestic issues.
- Few formal actions except several marches, but proposals for March on Ports on Dec. 12, 2011, and a General Strike on May 1, 2011.
- No formal votes or leaders, (but they are *de facto*)



ISSUES WHICH SUPPORTERS PROPOSE BE ADDED TO THE OCCUPATION ANALYSIS AND PROTESTS

- **Militarism, wars, and their connection to domestic austerity and inequality**
- **The use of local government by the “1%” to enrich themselves**
- **Civil rights and civil liberties**
- **Racism and anti-immigrant nativism**
- **Environment and energy**



WHY ADD U.S. MILITARISM?

- Because the U.S. war economy is a major factor in the growth of inequality and the implementation of *selective* government cutbacks.
- Because the concern over violence is part of the 1% - 99% framing. The 1 % actively practice violence through *their* police and the military – domestically and globally.



THE ECONOMIC CONNECTION

- **The same economic process giving rise to Wall Street investment scams based on risky mortgages applies to foreign policy.**
- **The relentless search for highly profitable returns also leads to foreign investments.**
- **These foreign investments guide US foreign policy and directly lead to wars, especially for energy resources.**



STRIKING MILITARY STATS

- **U.S. government spends about half of the world's entire military expenditures.**
- **Chalmers Johnson estimated the total annual cost of US wars, military, surveillance, and security is around \$1.2 trillion per year.**
- **The War Resisters League says it is about \$ 1 trillion per year.**

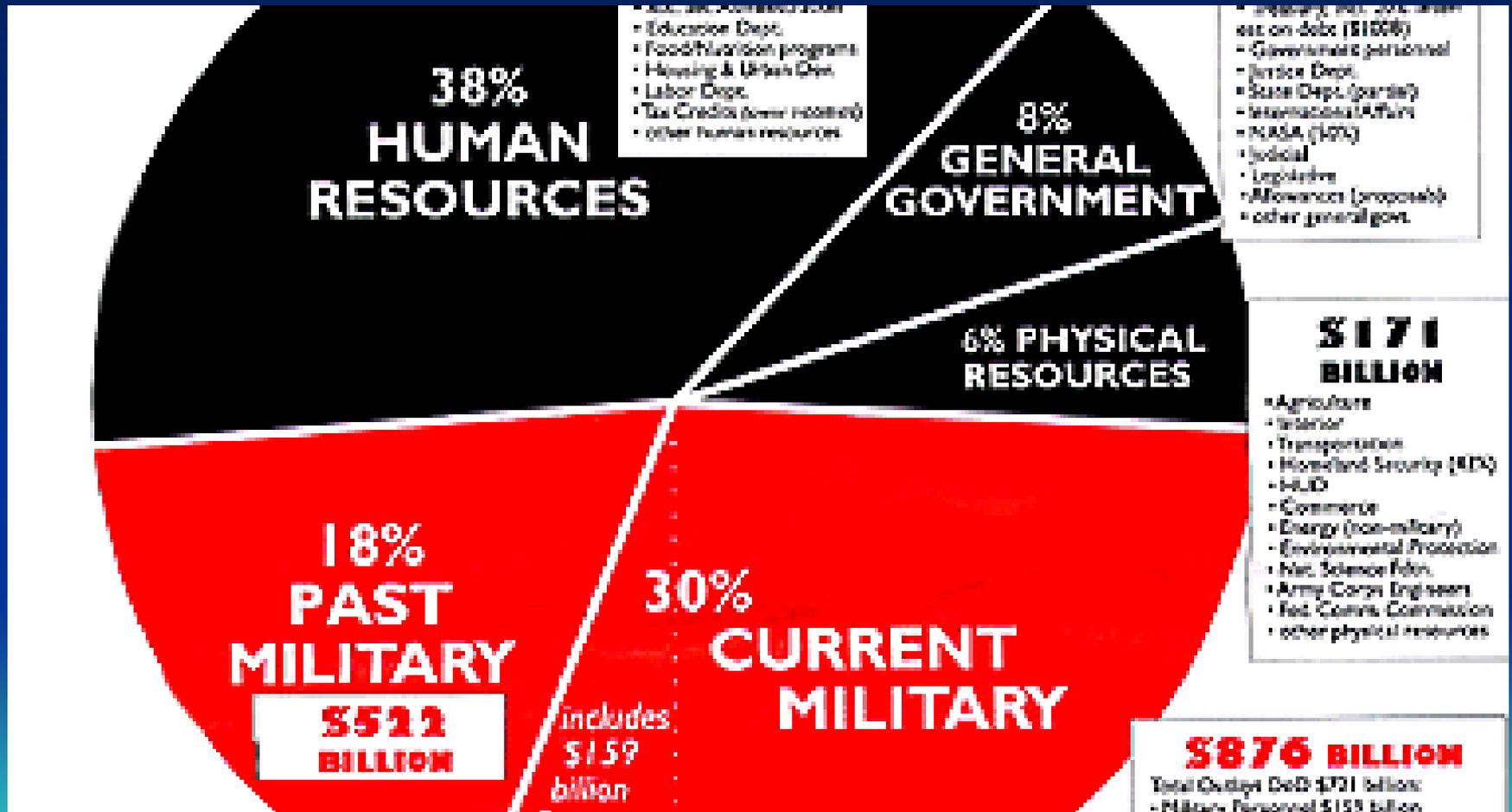


ENORMOUS COST OF MILITARISM

- Taxpayers in the city of Los Angeles, California will pay \$5.4 billion for Department of Defense Budget for FY 2012. For the same amount of money the following could be provided:
- 3.0 million Annual Energy Costs for a Household for One Year OR
- 3.6 million Children Receiving Low-Income Healthcare for One Year.
- Many more telling examples at “Costs of War.”



U.S. MILITARY EXPENDITURES



SOME OPTIONS

- Raising the military/foreign policy issues in Occupation signs, flyers, websites, and Facebook.
- Supporting anti-war movements and actions.
- Raising military issue on march to the ports.
- Reaching out to soldiers, who are, historically, much more part of the 99% than the police.
- Pension funds and socially responsible investments.



**MORE DETAILED
DISCUSSION OF MANY
ISSUES RELATED TO
THE OCCUPATION
MOVEMENTS**



COULD MOVEMENT SUCCEED?

- In L.A. the choice of City Hall was perfect, but the local occupation movement should research the role of local government in wealth redistribution:
- City pension funds invest in dicey mortgages and war industries.
- Real estate scams galore for rich speculators
- Regressive fees, taxes, and fines.
- Employee layoffs, compensation cuts, and hiring freezes.
- Cutbacks in public services and infrastructure.



COULD MOVEMENT BE CO-OPTED?

- Organizations, especially unions supporting Obama's reelection, are already hard at work.
- They shaped the Occupation message of redistribution, without a critique of militarism, capitalism, environment, civil rights, civil liberties, racism, or immigration.
- Through the corporate media, they have heavily promoted the Occupation movements. This publicity is totally different than their treatment of prior protest movements.



COULD MOVEMENT BE DE-RAILED?

- Like other protest movements, publicity in the capitalist media could be pulled or turned negative.
- Like the Middle East, electronic media could be blocked.
- Police have already systematically infiltrated, attacked, arrested, and evicted most Occupations.
- Like Israel, token reforms could be offered to take the wind out of the movement's sails.



COULD THE MOVEMENT BOOMERANG?

- By singling out tax breaks for the rich, the Occupation movements could be the lever the White House needs to raise their tax rates.
- The increased tax revenue could then be used for the Pentagon and escalating resource wars -- Peter Peterson's proposal.
- The promise of new revenue for domestic priorities would only be a cover for expanded militarism.



LEADERSHIP OPTIONS?

- The class corresponding to the 1 % is extremely well organized at the level of ideas and organizations, such as violent police forces which “preserve and protect.”
- Decentralized, leaderless movements are not capable of long-term mobilization and confrontation with the 1 %.
- Leaders of the 99% with broad awareness and full participation have great potential.



THE REAL ECONOMIC ISSUE

- **The problem is the economic system itself, not just greed by Wall Street and banks.**
- **Greed is inherent to the economic system and cannot be wished or regulated away.**
- **The history and logic of capitalism indicate that there are no reformist paths which can eliminate greed and corruption from the economic system.**



THE VIOLENCE QUESTION

- **Many people are preaching non-violence to Occupy.**
- **But, Occupy is already non-violent.**
- **The 1 percent monopolize violence through their police and military.**
- **It makes more sense to preach non-violence to them than to unemployed students and homeless people.**



ENORMOUS POTENTIAL

- If the movement can change tactics, analysis, and organization, it can grow.
- If it analyzes how the economic system really works, and expands the occupations to work, government, and military sites, its potential can be realized.
- If the many efforts to discredit, derail, and co-opt can be thwarted, much will be possible.
- If its “lumpen” base among the unemployed can be expanded to those working, the power to disrupt is formidable.



WE COULD HAVE SOME REAL FIREWORKS

