

Why Occupy Wall Street will keep up the fight

By Kalle Lasn and Micah White, Published: November 18 , 2011

On Tuesday, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg [evicted the Occupy movement](#) from its spiritual home near Wall Street. Soon afterward, a longtime Occupier sent us his testimony from the streets of New York:

“Lost my stuff, including power cord for my laptop, in the raid, something or someone cleared out my bank account, and it’s raining. I could just write a country song. I’ll tell you this: the resolve is still here. People I talk to are a healthy mixture of rage, comedy, resolve, and excitement. Also exhaustion. Maybe the raid was the best thing that could happen? Winning at last, winning at last, thank God Almighty, we are winning at last.”

For two heady months, the amorphous encampment in Lower Manhattan’s Zuccotti Park had been the symbolic heart of Occupy Wall Street, the birthplace of the greatest social-justice movement to emerge in the United States since the civil rights era. This primal cry for democracy sprang from young people who could no longer ignore the angst in their gut — the premonition that their future does not compute, that their entire lives will be lived in the apocalyptic shadow of climate-change tipping points, species die-offs, a deadening commercialized culture, a political system perverted by money, precarious employment, a struggle to pay off crippling [student loans](#), and no chance of ever owning a home or living in comfort like their parents. Glimpsing this black hole of ecological, political, financial and spiritual crisis, the youth and the millions of Americans who joined them instinctively knew that unless they stood up and fought nonviolently for a different kind of future, they would have no future at all.

The Occupy Wall Street meme was launched by a poster in the 97th issue of our international ad-free magazine, [Adbusters](#), the hash tag #OCCUPYWALLSTREET and a “tactical briefing” that we sent to our 90,000-strong “culture jammer” global network of activists, artists and rabble-rousers in mid-July. The movement’s true origins, however,

go back to the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. That was when the world witnessed how intransigent regimes can be toppled by leaderless democratic crowds, brought together by social media, that stand firm and courageously refuse to go home until their demands for change are met. Our shared epiphany was that America, too, needs its Tahrir Square moment and its own kind of regime change. Perhaps not the hard regime change of Tunisia and Egypt, but certainly a soft one.

Only a soft regime change can end the pervasive corruption at the heart of our political system, in which corporate money wins elections, drafts laws and trumps citizen desires. Only the plural voices of everyday Americans, the 99 percent, have the capacity to wake up the 1 percent to their greedy, self-serving ways, and to dismantle the global casino in which \$1.3 trillion worth of derivatives, credit default swaps and other financial instruments slosh around every day without a hint of concern or regard for the millions of lives that such speculation can destroy.

Occupy was born because we the people feel that our country and our economy are moving precipitously in the wrong direction; that America has evolved into a kind of corporate oligarchic state, a “corporatocracy”; and yes, that what is needed is a regime change — a Tahrir moment of truth in America.

For several weeks Occupy Wall Street had a rare magic going for it. We held the high ground, stuck doggedly to our Gandhian, nonviolent ways and blindsided the cynical world with our optimism, our camaraderie and our determination to forge a way forward. It was a passionate, hopeful, democratic upsurge. Anyone who walked into Zuccotti Park was immediately captivated by the idealism of youth. Spectators of our direct-democracy process were drawn in and became politically engaged participants in our general assemblies. With nothing more than a commitment to consensus-based transparency, twinkling fingers that signal assent, “mike checks”

that amplify our voices, an ethos of mutual respect and hope for the future, Occupy sparked a global democracy moment.

By mid-October, there were occupations happening in 1,000 cities around the world. Hundreds of thousands of us, mostly young people, were suddenly vibrantly alive, politically engaged and living without dead time in a way that the world had not seen since 1968. That was the year that an insurrection in Paris's Latin Quarter suddenly exploded in cities and campuses around the world. The viral speed of that movement was uncannily similar to the way that general assemblies ricocheted around the Earth from Zuccotti Park. But whereas in 1968 we lost the thread and the movement fizzled out, this time the horizontal, open-source, peer-to-peer ways of the Internet-savvy generation, living in a much more dangerous era of multiple synergetic crises, just might be able to succeed.

Why didn't Bloomberg come down to talk to us? Or Goldman Sachs chief executive Lloyd Blankfein? Why didn't President Obama acknowledge the protesters — largely the people who elected him — and mingle in the open-air town halls? What a grand gesture that would have been. How come our political leaders are so isolated, our discourse so rigid? Why can't the American power elite engage with the nation's young?

Instead, they stayed aloof, ignored us and wished us away. We wanted a Tahrir moment, an American Spring, a new vision of the future, and they attacked us in Zuccotti Park in the dead of the night.

Bloomberg's raid was carried out with military precision. The surprise attack began at 1 a.m. with a media blackout. The encampment was surrounded by riot police, credentialed mainstream journalists who tried to enter were pushed back or arrested, and the airspace was closed to news helicopters. What happened next was a blur of tear gas; a bulldozer; confiscation or destruction of everything in the park, including 5,000 books; upward of 150 arrests; and the deployment of a Long Range Acoustic Device, the

infamous "sound cannon" best known for its military use in Iraq.

When the youth in Tunisia rose up demanding change, Ben Ali scoffed. When they occupied Tahrir Square, Mubarak resorted to paternalism and mob violence. In Syria, Assad's troops fire daily into the crowds. This kind of military mind-set and violent response to nonviolent protesters makes no sense. It did not work in the Middle East, and it's not going to work in America, either. This is the bottom line. . . you cannot attack your young and get away with it.

Bloomberg's shock-troop assault has stiffened our resolve and ushered in a new phase of our movement. The people's assemblies will continue with or without winter encampments. What will be new is the marked escalation of surprise, playful, precision disruptions — rush-hour flash mobs, bank occupations, "occupy squads" and edgy theatrics. And we will see clearly articulated demands emerging, among them a "[Robin Hood tax](#)" on all financial transactions and currency trades; a ban on high-frequency "flash" trading; the reinstatement of the Glass-Steagall Act to again separate investment banking from commercial banking; a constitutional amendment to revoke corporate personhood and overrule [Citizens United](#); a move toward a "true cost" market regime in which the price of every product reflects the ecological cost of its production, distribution and use; and with a bit of luck, perhaps even the birth of a new, left-right hybrid political party that moves America beyond the Coke vs. Pepsi choices of the past.

In this visceral, canny, militantly nonviolent phase of our march to real democracy, we will "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee." We will regroup, lick our wounds, brainstorm and network all winter. We will build momentum for a full-spectrum counterattack when the crocuses bloom next spring.

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