

A Declaration of Disaffection

The first duty of every patriot during our War for Independence was to have a gun at the ready. The first duty of every patriot *right now* is to understand how we got into our current economic morass and to communicate that understanding to those around them. In that way, we can develop a more informed electorate that is better armed to contend with our problems by rational means. If you can't explain the energy and anger of the Occupy Wall Street movement, you don't understand what's happening. If you don't understand what's happening, you're not meeting your responsibility as a patriot.

Those who reject the Occupy movement without understanding its anger are blind to the reality experienced by many tens of millions of Americans every day. The dismissive label "class warfare" is routinely used as a talisman against anyone seeking to address the dangerous concentration of wealth and power in this country over the past 30 years. One of the Wall Street occupiers provided a definitive rebuttal to that label with a simple sign: "They only call it class warfare when we fight back." The class war has been going on for 30 years... it's about time we fought back.

The occupiers feel betrayed by a wealthy elite that constantly secures selfish advantage through a system of political bribery in the form of campaign contributions. This is possible because the nation's Congress has degenerated into an auction in which the highest bidders write the laws.

This was not the intention of the men whose collective vision in 1787 gave us this system of government. Many of them explicitly feared just this sort of systemic failure, in which the interests of the great majority of Americans were no longer represented in the federal government. Thomas Jefferson hoped that we would, "...crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country." The plutocracy that Jefferson feared now has a stranglehold on our federal government. It is not only our right but our duty to deliver it from this tyranny.

Three years ago the banking industry was rescued with taxpayer money from the consequences of their own reckless greed and irresponsibility, although many of its executives lined their pockets very deeply as things deteriorated. These same institutions then showed no inclination to do anything to benefit those who had rescued them, unless it was clearly and reliably in their purely selfish, financial interest to do so. In fact, some of them spent millions of dollars lobbying Congress for even more special treatment - and they got it. To paraphrase the documentary "The Corporation", if corporations are people, the big banks are clinically diagnosable as psychopaths. Enough is enough.

The rapid contagion of the Occupy movement is unintelligible without understanding the patterns of systemic and egregious injustice within the larger economic and social landscape over the past three decades.

The 1% referenced by the movement aren't all those who have higher incomes or more wealth. The 1% are the bad actors who use the substantial political power that wealth brings to rig the system more and more to their selfish advantage, with the result being a deep violation of the social contract at the heart of our nation. I call them "the looting class." A few examples:

- ❖ In the 1990s a wave of deregulation driven by corporate cash eliminated safeguards that embodied the lessons learned in the Great Depression. Once the rules were gone, Wall Street, in collusion with credit ratings agencies, became a casino and brought on the greatest financial crisis since the 1930s. An excellent insider's account of this historic fraud is "It Takes a Pillage" by Nomi Prins. You might also want to see the 2010 documentary "Inside Job."

- ❖ Many among the 1% have used large political donations to get the the tax code modified to serve their personal advantage. See “Perfectly Legal” by David Cay Johnston.
- ❖ For decades, corporations have looted their workers’ pension funds. See “Retirement Heist” by Ellen Schultz.
- ❖ The Federal Reserve Bank has repeatedly made decisions in recent years aimed at fueling Wall Street while undermining the financial security of main street. See “Greenspan’s Bubbles” by Bill Fleckenstein.
- ❖ The Securities and Exchange Commission has had a revolving door between those who are supposed to regulate and those they are supposed to regulate. What is even worse, they have been *illegally* destroying many years of records of criminal investigations.
- ❖ We have become a two tier society, with special treatment for the political and economic elite, who are accorded a status of “platinum citizenship.” See Bruce Greenwald’s “Liberty and Justice for Some.”
- ❖ President Eisenhower warned us about the dangers of the "military-industrial complex" in his farewell address. His worst fears have been realized in an immense, politically powerful industry that owns the Republicans, as well as many Democrats, in Washington. See “Washington Rules: America’s Path to Permanent War” by Andrew Bacevich.
- ❖ The U.S. has the world’s largest prison population. The prison industry in this country is itself an arguably criminal enterprise, particularly when judges are paid off to create new customers for the system. See “The Perpetual Prisoner Machine” by Joel Dyer.
- ❖ In the aftermath of the 2010 election there has been a systematic voter suppression campaign working at the state level around the country. While those engaged in this activity claim that they are trying to prevent voter fraud, any honest examination of the patterns of proposed legislation shows that their goal is to make voting more difficult for minorities, the poor, and the young. In other words, any groups more likely to vote for Democrats than Republicans. This is the real voter fraud, and it is a direct assault on the heart of American democracy.

Those who defend such practices rely on slogans and labels to articulate what has become a self-serving mythology of the looting class. Here are some familiar ones:

▶ *Regulations stifle business.*

While there are poorly conceived regulations that unnecessarily stifle business, some regulations are helpful or even essential to our security. The lessons learned from the Great Depression led to the Glass-Steagall Act, which stifled business only in the sense of making it difficult for the financial industry to create potentially catastrophic risks to the larger society. That act was repealed in the late 1990s, which helped set the stage for the 2008 financial crisis.

▶ *Taxing the job creators destroys jobs.*

This has been repeatedly discredited. For example, when Bill Clinton proposed his first budget in 1993, every single Republican in both houses of Congress voted against it - twice. One after another they made speeches predicting that Clinton’s economic policies would ruin the American economy, mostly because it raised taxes, particularly on the wealthy. By the time Clinton left office almost 8 years later, over 22 million jobs had been created, the federal budget was running surpluses, and the national debt was going down. In recognition of this, the famous national debt

clock was turned off, since it was thought that the debt problem had been solved. Then George W. Bush drove the country to the verge of bankruptcy with his wars and tax cuts for the wealthy. See "The New American Economy: The Failure of Reaganomics and a New Way Forward." by Bruce Bartlett, former economic policy adviser to President Reagan.

- ▶ *The working class can only be motivated by sticks; the wealthy can only be motivated by carrots.*

Of course, they don't actually express it this way, since that would be much too obvious. However, you can be sure that Republicans will oppose any measure to bring higher wages or greater financial security to working people, using whatever sophistry they can summon, while favoring any measure that makes the rich richer, using the same discredited arguments that gave us the disastrously bad policies that led us into this mess.

If you want to understand what has gone wrong in this country *in general* to get us to this point, see the Bill Moyers article "People Are Occupying Wall Street Because Wall Street Has Occupied the Country", which draws freely from the important work, "Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer -- and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class" by Hacker and Pierson. As Moyers reports, a revolution of the wealthy was launched in 1971 and step-by-step -

"...they bought off the gatekeepers, got inside, and gamed the system. And when the fix was in, they let loose the animal spirits, turning our economy into a feast for predators. And they won - as the rich and powerful got richer and more powerful - they not only bought the government, they 'saddled Americans with greater debt, tore new holes in the safety net, and imposed broad financial risks on workers, investors, and taxpayers.'"

The result of this is that now -

'The United States is looking more and more like the capitalist oligarchies of Brazil, Mexico, and Russia where most of the wealth is concentrated at the top while the bottom grows larger and larger, with everyone in between just barely getting by.'

The Occupy movement isn't necessarily anti-capitalist, nor is it necessarily about the income gap per se. Rather, it is about a profound power inequality that is the result of 40 years of class warfare that has been waged by the looting class against the rest of us and that has led to deep and widespread injustice that poses a mortal threat to the future of America and everything for which it stands. Enough is enough.

The day of reckoning has arrived.

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