

UC Santa Cruz

Reprint Series

Title

Reform or Radicalism: Left Social Movements from the Battle of Seattle to Occupy Wall Street

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4pw6j9s1>

Authors

Rowe, James K
Carroll, Myles

Publication Date

2014-03-01

Peer reviewed

Reform or Radicalism: Left Social Movements from the Battle of Seattle to Occupy Wall Street

James K. Rowe (corresponding author)
School of Environmental Studies
University of Victoria
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria BC V8W 2Y2
Canada
250-884-8757
jkrowe@uvic.ca

Myles Carroll
School of Environmental Studies
University of Victoria
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria BC V8W 2Y2
Canada
250-893-3223
mylesc@uvic.ca

Published in *New Political Science*, March 2014

ABSTRACT:

We examine two recent cases of relative Left success – the Battle of Seattle and Occupy Wall Street – and argue that in each case an effective dynamism between radical and reform wings drove gains. This analysis is not meant to deny political difference and hawk false unity. Instead we want to challenge the luxury of mutual dismissal with the actually existing benefits of movement dynamism. By dynamism we mean *contributions arising from different activist wings and productively interacting to increase overall movement power*. Our ultimate claim is that the North American Left will yield greater success by becoming more self-conscious about the concrete benefits of movement dynamism.

Introduction

Reform or revolution – the question Rosa Luxemburg famously posed in her 1900 pamphlet of that name – continues to vex Left social movements.¹ The question still names real ideological, organizational, and tactical differences. And yet the debate’s persistent intensity tends to exceed these differences: Identity attachment more than political efficacy often powers the rigid rancor dividing movement wings.

In this article we unpack two central mobilizations launched by social movements in the past 15 years (The Battle of Seattle and Occupy Wall Street), and demonstrate how these two relative successes can be largely attributed to an effective dynamism between

¹ Many thanks to William Carroll, James Clifford, Jessica Dempsey, Chris Dixon, Barbara Epstein, David Hoy, Kate Garvie, Cheryl Hall, Shana Hirsch, Ronnie Lipschutz, Bob Meister, Michael M’Gonigle, Lindsay Monk, Matt Murray, Leo Panitch, Trudi Lynn Smith, and Michael Walters for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this article. Thank you also to Jules Boykoff for pointing us towards helpful resources, and to Mark Bray for providing last minute factual clarification regarding OWS evictions. Finally we’d like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for their excellent revision suggestions. All analytical oversights remain our own.

radicals and reformers. By dynamism we mean *contributions arising from different activist wings and productively interacting to increase overall movement power.*

This analysis is not meant to deny political difference and hawk false unity. Instead we want to challenge the luxury of mutual dismissal with the actually existing benefits of movement dynamism. Real political differences should be openly debated, but these debates should occur with the understanding that under current conditions, and for the foreseeable future, dynamism between differing wings is central to movement success. Political economic events like elections and crises condition the possibility for dynamism, but seeking it out even in inopportune times can strengthen a movement's capacity to become a stronger political economic force itself. Movement dynamism can be nurtured through ideological, organizational, and tactical openness to differing tendencies and constantly changing circumstance.

Our geographical focus is the United States. Current structural conditions in northern North America do not favor Left movements. The very concentrations of economic, political, and cultural power inspiring Occupy Wall Street (OWS) ensure that the forces arrayed against even modest regulative and redistributive efforts are massive (witness the weakness of Dodd-Frank financial reform in the wake of extensive industry lobbying). Moreover the extent of military power in advanced capitalist societies renders the insurrectionary path to revolution largely null – a development Friedrich Engels was already worrying about more than a century ago.² By no measure are Left movements on the precipice of a revolutionary situation in North America: be it insurrectionary or parliamentary.

² Samuel Hollander, "Marx and Engels on Constitutional Reform vs. Revolution: Their Revisionism Revisited," *Theoria* 57:11 (March 2010), p. 81.

In fact nobody really knows what a Left revolution in an advanced capitalist society looks like; it has never happened. Similarly game-changing reforms successfully subordinating capitalism to social values of care, solidarity, and ecological flourishing have been elusive since the advent of neoliberalism in the late 1970s. The uncertainty of transformational *and* incremental strategies in advanced capitalist societies marked by massive concentrations of power are conditions favoring social movement dynamism.³ Recent Left successes in Seattle and New York can be explained by a totality of effort contributed by both reformers *and* radicals. Our ultimate claim is that the North American Left will yield greater success by becoming more self-conscious about the concrete benefits of movement dynamism. Before getting to our cases we briefly survey the existing literature on social movement dynamism. We then historicize the radical/reform debate, accounting for its contours in 21st century North America.

Social Movement Dynamism

While not a primary theme in the literature, academic social movement research has contributed important insights into the relationship between differing activist wings.⁴ Similarly it has helpfully accounted for how excessive differentiation or fractionalization often leads to movement decline.⁵ Herbert Haines' work on radical flank effects is the

³ Given the current lack of clarity around what constitutes a worthwhile revolution, the classic question 'Reform or Revolution?' is currently commensurate with the more general 'Reformism or Radicalism?' We use these formulations interchangeably.

⁴ See Sidney Tarrow's discussion of 'multiform movements' in *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 103. The collective work of Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilley, sometimes referred to as Political Process Theory (PPT), represents a canonical consensus in the academic study of social movements. While attentive to differing tendencies within movements, this approach biases towards the efforts of reformers as will be discussed below.

⁵ See *Power in Movement*, p. 148; and Lesley J. Wood, *Direct Action, Deliberation, and Diffusion: Collective Action after the WTO Protests in Seattle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 24.

most sustained account of internal differences producing effective synergy in the social movement literature.⁶ For Haines radicals can both help or hinder more moderate movement organizations, creating either positive or negative radical flank effects. “Radical flank effects,” he writes, “are patterns of gains or losses, successes or failures experienced by moderate organizations which can be directly attributed to the activities of more radical organizations or groups.”⁷ Haines’ work focused on the US civil rights movement, but since most movements involve political differentiation, it has broad applicability.

Some of the ways radicals can benefit moderates include increasing issue awareness using attention-grabbing tactics. Similarly radicals, by pursuing a maximal agenda, can render demands made by moderates appear especially reasonable. The ultimate radical flank effect is the generation of political crisis through some version of direct action, a crisis enabling moderates to broker a compromise that furthers otherwise stalled goals. Speaking to the respective niches of differing wings Haines notes how “radicals specialize in generating crises which elites must deal with, while moderates specialize in offering relatively unthreatening avenues for escape.”⁸

While negative radical flank effects like alienating potential movement supporters through controversial tactics are also possible, Haines found radicals to ultimately benefit moderates in the US civil rights movement.⁹ Haines’ account of radicalism’s importance

⁶See Herbert Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988). While influenced by Political Process Theory, primarily the work of Doug McAdam, Haines’ sustained accounting of radical contributions to larger social change processes distinguishes his work in the field. This said Haines is primarily interested in how radicals affect the success or failure of more moderate groups. In this regard he shares an ultimate focus on reform efforts with political process theorists.

⁷ *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream*, p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

in social change processes has multiple applications in the cases of Seattle 99 and Occupy. But a significant problem with his approach is its bias towards reformers as the political center of movements. This bias is common in academic social movement literature. According to Kathleen Fitzgerald and Diane Rogers:

The study of social movement organizations (SMOs) has generally been approached from the reform perspective that predominates within the social movement theoretical literature... When researchers have acknowledged SMOs as radical, they have tended to view them as contributing to the success of more moderate SMOs rather than analyzing RSMOs on their own terms.¹⁰

The academic literature's bias towards reform efforts is not without reason. Reform currents are generally majoritarian within movements and have historically been more intelligible to popular publics – a longstanding tendency Lenin named 'trade union consciousness' in *What is To Be Done*. Moreover radical demands or visions are rarely actualized within the lifespan of those who articulate them. When lasting social change emerges from movements it typically appears most clearly as reform initiatives (wage increases, supportive legislation etc.). But while intelligible, the bias towards reform currents in the social movement literature has obfuscated the inherent value of radicalism, and the benefit of dynamic exchange between differing wings (not simply radicals helping moderates, but moderates also contributing to radical aims).

The analytic limits of the academic literature's reform bias are especially apparent in the two cases unpacked below. In each case radicals – mainly anarchists – played

¹⁰ Kathleen J. Fitzgerald and Diane M. Rodgers, "Radical Social Movement Organizations: A Theoretical Model," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 41:4 (2000), pp. 573-574.

central roles, and their actions created opportunities for reformers but also for other radicals. Given the leading roles radicals played in each mobilization it makes just as much sense to speak of ‘moderate flank effects’ when accounting for how differing wings helped and hindered each other.

It is analytically and politically important to conceptualize radicals as more than subsidiary helpers in social change processes. While they generally form numerical minorities their political commitment and willingness to assume risk multiplies their impact. Moreover radicals can sometimes resonate *more* with popular publics than reformers. Che Guevara, for instance, still communicates a romance, excitement, and nobility that tireless reformers like Ralph Nader do not (Nader t-shirts are available, but less popular than those graced with Che’s now iconic image). The culturally attractive power of principled audaciousness was apparent during Occupy’s swift ascent as will be discussed below. Always assuming that radical tactics and ideas will lack popular support is analytically and politically limiting.

One of radicalism’s central contributions to social change efforts is its ideological focus on the root drivers of grievance. Without an effective analysis of causation (one open to complexity and uncertainty), strategies for addressing injustice will always be limited. Writing in his recent book *The Rebirth of Environmentalism*, Doug Bevington notes how:

[T]he word ‘radical’ is derived from the Latin word for root (‘radix’) and in a social change context it originally connoted going to the root of the problem. This definition raises a key question – why wouldn’t all social change groups strive to

be radical? If a group is not seeking to address the root of a problem, then it must somehow be constrained from doing so.¹¹

It is precisely this lack of constraint, or perceived lack of constraint, that frees radicals up to audaciously experiment ideologically, organizationally, and tactically. These experimentations can benefit radicals and reformers alike by accelerating ideational and organizational innovation within movements. Moreover, the insistence on *systemic* change that distinguishes radicals from reformers plays an important anchoring role. As conservative Bruce Bartlett recently argued in the *Fiscal Times*: “The disappearance of socialism as a viable political philosophy deprived liberals of their ideological anchor, causing liberalism itself to drift rightward with the tide.”¹² Without a radical program able to generate popular excitement and demonstrate results, reform efforts remain reactive and patchwork. While serving as an anchor for reformers, radicalism’s focus on root causes also helps accelerate overall progress towards systemic change.

The theoretical social movement literature’s reform bias has limited its capacity to account for movement dynamism. A growing body of research rooted in radical Left tendencies better accounts for radicalism’s value, and how it can articulate with reform efforts in 21st century social movements.¹³ There is no sustained account, however, in either the canonical or critical social movement literatures, of how relations between different tendencies impacted success and failure during the Battle of Seattle and Occupy

¹¹ Douglas Bevington, *The Rebirth of Environmentalism: Grassroots Activism from the Spotted Owl to the Polar Bear* (Washington: Island Press, 2009), p. 245.

¹² Bruce Bartlett, “How Democrats Become Liberal Republicans,” *The Fiscal Times*, (December 21st, 2012). < <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Columns/2012/12/21/How-Democrats-Became-Liberal-Republicans.aspx#page1>>.

¹³ See Leo Panitch, *Renewing Socialism* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2008); Robin Hahnel, “Fighting For Reforms Without Becoming Reformist,” *Znet* (March 25, 2005), <<http://www.zcommunications.org/fighting-for-reforms-without-becoming-reformist-by-robin-hahnel>>; and Chris Dixon, *Against and Beyond* (University of California Press, forthcoming).

Wall Street – two of the Left’s most impactful mobilizations in the past fifteen years. These cases help demonstrate how Left dynamism is central to political success in the current conjuncture, and deserves more attention from social movement analysts and activists alike. Before telling the stories of Seattle and OWS we briefly turn to the changing meaning of the reform/radicalism binary today.

Reform or Radicalism in 21st Century North America

A key factor that has changed the reform/revolution debate in the 21st century is the failure of communist revolutions – from Russia to China – to deliver on their promises of equity, justice, and freedom. The ultimate failure of Soviet communism has changed the contours of radical politics today. For one there is no consensus on what the positive content of radical systemic change should be. This reality should caution more ideological openness to differing tendencies than it often does.

Another effect of Soviet communism’s failure is anarchism’s accelerated influence on the Left. According to Bill Fletcher:

Anarchists have reemerged as a potent force on the Left particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Their critique of actually existing socialism...is frequently persuasive...And they have become very active forces in the global justice movement, environmental movements, and certainly in the Occupy movement.¹⁴

¹⁴ Bill Fletcher, “Marxism, the 21st Century and Social Transformation (Part 3),” *Organizing Upgrade* (2012). < <http://www.organizingupgrade.com/index.php/component/k2/itemlist/category/37-bill-fletcher>>.

Contemporary anarchists share a commitment to systemic transformation with radicals from other Left tendencies. But there is considerable debate over the precise shape of the required transformations, and the strategies and organizational forms needed to achieve them. Anarchists, for example, are not only opposed to the state-form, but are also weary of formal organizations like unions and NGOs marked by hierarchy or ‘verticality.’

While contemporary Marxists share with anarchists an interest in systemic change, they often have more in common with social democratic reformers interested in harnessing state power and vertical organizational forms to affect change.¹⁵ Likewise Autonomist Marxists, who form an increasingly influential tendency among North American radicals, often have more in common with anarchists than Marxists and Social Democrat reformers committed to harnessing state power.¹⁶

Given the increased influence of anarchism and autonomism, engagement with the state has become a key dividing line for contemporary radicals and reformers. Again, the anti-state position does not monopolize the radical pole – many Marxists still see the state as crucial vehicle – but it does currently enjoy wide support among radicals. Nick Dyer-Witford nicely narrates contemporary divisions on the Left when he notes how:

The movement of movements has been tacitly split between autonomist and anarchist groups, with strong anti-statist perspectives, and socialist and social democratic movements, committed to governmental planning and welfare

¹⁵ See Bhaskar Sunkara and Peter Frase, “The Welfare State of America: A manifesto on building social democracy in the age of austerity,” *In These Times* (October 22nd, 2012).

<http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/13998/the_welfare_state_of_america/>.

¹⁶ While many autonomists share a basic politics with anarchists, they emerge from different traditions, with the former rooted in a reformulated Marxism. See John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2010). See also Kevin Young and Michael Schwartz, “Can prefigurative politics prevail? The implications for movement strategy in John Holloway’s *Crack Capitalism*,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 12:220 (2012).

functions. Rather than repressing this tension, or replaying it *ad infinitum*, it may be both more interesting for both sides and closer to the real practice of many activists to think about the potential interplay of these two poles.¹⁷

Our argument supports Dyer-Witheford's claim that real activist practice challenges simplistic divisions even when activists themselves often remain attached to them as a way of shoring up desired identities (as the below analysis reveals). Given the popularity anarchism and autonomism enjoys among contemporary radicals, the division Dyer-Witheford names can be grafted onto the radical/reform binary, but only very roughly so. Indeed a central purpose of this section has been to demonstrate that contemporary reality bucks any simplified applications of the radical/reform binary.

Our aim in this analysis is to demonstrate how concrete political practice in the contemporary conjuncture challenges the radical/reform divide and demands a more complex accounting of how different tendencies dynamically combine to yield political victories (even when the differing parties themselves are not aware of each other's contributions). Our argument is that the distinction between systemic transformation (radicalism) and systemic repair (reform) softens in the heat of political struggle even as important political differences remain. We now turn to two recent cases demonstrating the benefits of movement dynamism and the limits of excessive differentiation.

The Battle of Seattle

The WTO's third ministerial meeting in Seattle served as a lightening rod for frustrations with neoliberal capitalism that had been accumulating through the 1990s.¹⁸ By 1999

¹⁷ Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Commonism," in Turbulence Collective (eds.), *What Would It Mean to Win*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2010). P. 111.

almost the entire Left infrastructure in North America was directed towards Seattle. Pick an organization – The Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Council of Canadians, the AFL-CIO – and it was focusing its energies on coming protests in Seattle. There were, however, differences in organization. While the massive street marches were organized by the large organizations like the AFL-CIO, it was more grassroots groups that planned the civil disobedience – the actual blocking of delegates from the Convention Center. The planned blockage was coordinated by the Direct Action Network which included activists from the Ruckus Society, Rainforest Action Network, Food Not Bombs, Global Exchange, Earth First!, and Jobs with Justice.¹⁹

While there were disagreements between groups focused more on public awareness, sanctioned marches, and lobbying, and those on direct action to block the proceedings, the tensions were not pitched. In fact dockworkers from San Diego to Vancouver staged a solidarity work stoppage from 10:00 AM until 1:00 PM on the first day of protest – direct action *par excellence*. “In Seattle,” reflected Barbara Epstein after the protests, “relations among trade unionists, environmentalists and direct actionists seem to have been governed by a spirit of respect and mutual support that I do not remember from the sixties.”²⁰ And as Epstein reports, this spirit of respect extended beyond tactical questions onto ideological terrain:

¹⁸ For helpful accounts of Seattle’s pre-history see Chris Dixon, “Five Days in Seattle: A View from the Ground,” in David Solnit and Rebecca Solnit (eds.), *The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2009); and James O’Connor, “On Populism and the antiglobalization movement,” in Eddie Yuen, Daniel Burton-Rose and George Katsiaficas (eds.), *Confronting Capitalism: Dispatches from a Global Movement*, (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2004), p. 187.

¹⁹ The typical head count for Seattle is 50 000. Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair count the direct action contingent at 2000. See *5 Days That Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond* (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 32.

²⁰ Barbara Epstein, “Not your parent’s protest,” in Eddie Yuen, Daniel Burton-Rose and George Katsiaficas (eds.), *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenges to Capitalist Globalization* (Brooklyn: Soft Skull, 2002), p. 55.

The differences in Seattle over what should be done with the WTO and, by implication, the global corporations were friendly and fluid. Many of the people whom I talked with, from labor, mainstream environmental movements, and the direct action movement, agreed that no one has the answer to the question of how the global economy should be reorganized, and discussion of these issues should continue.²¹

Epstein is describing a broad-based social movement sensitive to political context *and* more radical possibility, one open to both incremental and more transformative agendas. This was the global justice movement at its most dangerous.²²

Given the impressive solidarity filling Seattle's streets, how is it possible that in the months following November more hardened divisions would replace the dynamic sensibility Epstein documents? The denouncements would reach their apex when in an article entitled "Seattle '99: Wedding Party of the Left and Right?" Dutch activists Eric Krebbers and Merijn Schoenmaker argued that "after reading their articles and books it becomes very clear: the IFG [International Forum on Globalization] is politically right wing and very conservative."²³ The IFG includes activist intellectuals Maude Barlow,

²¹ Ibid., 54.

²² Earlier movement precedents for this fluid sensibility include Judi Bari and Earth First's efforts to build concrete links in the Pacific Northwest between radical environmentalists and loggers, and also Bari's insistence on seeing continuities between direct action and the ballot box. From the other coast came the influence of New York's AIDS activist group ACT UP. They used militant and creative direct action to further their demands, but were also highly attuned to strategic considerations and messaging. As L.A. Kauffman explains: "ACT UP wanted -- *needed* -- results, the sooner the better; it had no patience for the kind of radical purism that dismisses actual accomplishments as mere reformism." See "A short history of radical renewal," in Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk (eds.), *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 38.

²³ Eric Krebbers and Merijn Schoenmaker, "Seattle '99: Wedding Party of the left and right?" in *The Battle of Seattle*, p. 197.

Walden Bello, and Vandana Shiva as board members; it is hardly a hotbed for conservatism.

How could the apparent solidarity of Seattle have dissolved into division so quickly? An easy explanation is that differences over tactics – mainly property destruction – caused a rift when a handful of protestors, operating a few blocks away from the coordinated direct action, smashed the windows of carefully targeted corporations thus throwing the movement into a fractious debate over ‘violence.’ This is partly true, but misses that before, during, and even after the protests, organizers from *all* the aforementioned organizations agreed the protests would not include property destruction.²⁴ How could a few unaligned protestors breaking a larger agreement have caused such a movement-wide rift?

Enter the black bloc. The Seattle black bloc was a small group of mostly young people frustrated not only with social change traditions emphasizing violence but also non-violence.²⁵ They worried that being symbolically arrested – and likely beaten – by police was disempowering and of little political value. As one communiqué poetically put it: “Let’s not train the thousands of people who gather in Seattle to do no more than be herded by the police, hold signs, and offer themselves up as sacrificial lock-down lambs. I’m not advocating a riot. The ground between violence and pacifism is wide, much larger than the ivory tower of either. Meet me there.”²⁶ It is important to note the black bloc is more tactic than organization. And the actual tactics deployed depend on participants. They can be generalized, however, as a non-deferential attitude towards

²⁴ Chris Dixon, “Five Days in Seattle,” p. 92.

²⁵ Jeffrey St. Clair numbered the black bloc at fifty. See *5 Days That Shook the World*, p. 29.

²⁶ See L.A. Kauffman, “Who are those masked anarchists?” in *The Battle of Seattle*, p. 128.

property and those empowered to protect it: The police. Corporations targeted in Seattle included Starbucks, Banana Republic, and Nike.

As noted the black bloc's actions were roundly condemned by all major players from the Direct Action Network to the Citizens Trade Campaign. The painful problem for radicals, however, was the form many of these condemnations took. In the context of overwhelming police violence, violence beginning two hours before the first window broke, key progressives chose arrest warrants as their mode of criticism. Medea Benjamin of Global Exchange, Lori Wallach of Public Citizen, and later Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians all independently named prison the proper place for the black bloc. The highest profile denouncement was Medea Benjamin, quoted in the *New York Times*, lamenting that "these anarchists should have been arrested."²⁷ The effects of these progressive-issue warrants were sweeping. Benjamin, Wallach and Barlow's embrace of police power raised black flags for many who organized alongside them in preparation for the protests. Why side with the police who were visiting violence on peaceful protestors, who visited daily violence in communities of color across the US, and embodied many of the injustices inspiring the movement? For many radicals this progressive infatuation with authority betrayed suspect political commitments and allegiances. More simply it highlighted and hardened basic political differences between Leftists who see the state as a vehicle for redress, and radicals who see it as a driver of injustice.

Benjamin, Wallach, and Barlow's invocation of police power to criticize the black bloc was a political mistake. It was perfectly possible to publicly criticize property

²⁷ Timothy Egan, "Talks and turmoil: the violence; black masks lead to pointed fingers in Seattle," *New York Times* (December 2nd, 1999).

destruction while condemning police violence in the same breath. The line could have been: ‘We don’t think the smashing of windows is going to help anybody suffering from the effects of neoliberal economic policy, but let’s talk about the real violence we’re witnessing today: the Seattle police pepper-spraying and beating peaceful protestors.’ This framing would have distanced the 50, 000 strong from the black bloc, consistent with action agreement emphasizing strategic non-violence, while forging solidarity between the weary direct actionists and those who protested the WTO in other ways. In other words, it would have maintained and possibly strengthened the powerful coalition that carried the day in Seattle – that succeeded in shutting down the Ministerial on the first day, and compelling its ultimate collapse three days later.

Instead the opposite began taking hold in the months following November. A wedge had been driven between the grass-roots direct actionists and more institutionalized progressives. While direct actionists were frustrated with the black bloc themselves, the NGO response actually enabled a more general drift towards a fetishized militancy.²⁸ In other words, while remaining critical, many radicals now found themselves more aligned with the marginal black bloc than the institutional progressives they were in earlier coalition with. Movement dynamism was stagnating.

In the months following the protests activist Geov Parrish would reflect: “I remain convinced that the Seattle property damage was, at best, one of the great tactical mistakes of US protest history; at worst, a tragic, intentional act of sabotage that knowingly did the work of the corporate state more effectively than the state could ever have done.”²⁹ But it

²⁸ On the dangers of fetishizing street militancy see Chris Hurl, “Anti-Globalization and ‘Diversity of Tactics,’” *Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action*, n1, 2005, p. 62. See also David McNally, *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2002), p. 252.

²⁹ Geov Parrish, “Imagine,” in *Battle of Seattle*, p. 121.

is not at all clear the window smashing was a major setback – the movement moved on. Moreover even if Seattle remained shard-free, someone – whether black bloc or *agents provocateurs* – would have defaced property at subsequent protests. Instead, the big tactical mistake made in Seattle was the institutional progressives’ rhetorical alignment with police and the wedge it drove between themselves and radical direct-actionists.

But failing vision – the inability to see how one’s position will alienate important parties in your coalition and is grounded in an overly optimistic attitude towards state power – is not grounds for dismissal. The amount Benjamin, Wallach and Barlow had contributed to the movement, and the ultimate success in Seattle, earned them a ‘get out of jail free’ card from direct actionists. Thus if the NGO position betrayed a lack of vision, the radical wing lacked largesse in the period following Seattle. This was occasion for comradely criticism more than dismissal. The former happened, and movement dynamism was not lost, but a hardening of position began advancing.

Despite emerging differences, the coordinated efforts of thousands of people had stopped a very powerful organization in its tracks – not only were meetings on the first day cancelled, but talks ultimately collapsed three days later. The movement *en masse* had delivered a serious blow to the neoliberal agenda. “On the Tear-gas shrouded streets of Seattle,” reflected the *Los Angeles Times*, “the unruly forces of democracy collided with the elite world of trade policy. And when the [WTO] meeting ended in failure...the elitists had lost and the debate had changed forever.”³⁰

³⁰ Jonathan Peterson, “Inside, outside forces change WTO forever,” *Los Angeles Times* (December 5th, 1999).

There are different accounts, however, of what actually led to a failed deal. “In the annals of popular protest in America,” write Cockburn and St. Clair, evincing the hardening of position following Seattle:

These were shining hours, achieved entirely outside the conventional arena of orderly protest, white paper activism and the timid bleats of the professional leadership of big labor and establishment greens. This truly was an insurgency from below in which all those who strove to moderate and deflect the turbulent flood of popular courage managed to humiliate themselves.³¹

But for Paul Hawken, there were different lessons to draw from Seattle: “it was not on the streets that the WTO broke down. It was inside. It was a heated and rancorous Ministerial, and the meeting ended in a stalemate, with African, Caribbean, and some Asian countries refusing to support a draft agenda that had been negotiated behind closed doors without their participation.”³² The common ground between these two positions is that street protests emboldened Southern countries in negotiations.

But again, the particulars matter. The primary substantive disagreement disabling talks was President Clinton’s last-minute call to include binding labor standards. Many Southern governments were concerned this was cover for Northern protectionism. High labor standards meant increased production costs, reduced foreign investment, and reduced competitiveness for their export goods. If not coupled with guaranteed commitments of long-term development aid and debt cancellation, labor standards may have had protectionist effects. But contrary to commentators who saw the Southern

³¹ *5 Days That Shook the World*, p. 113.

³² Paul Hawken, “Skeleton woman visits Seattle,” in *Globalize This!*, p.28.

eschewal of labor standards as Third World endorsement of neoliberal economic policies there were many Southern trade unionists in Seattle who supported the standards.³³ Moreover not all Southern governments opposed the standards (a precursor to the ‘pink tide’ that would sweep Latin America in the new millennium). The crucial point for our purposes is that Clinton’s call for labor standards in Seattle – at the AFL-CIO’s behest – played a central role in the Ministerial collapse. Labor lobbying for standards was not Machiavellian magic secretly meant to stall negotiations – labor saw the WTO as a strong intergovernmental organization capable of enforcing binding international labor standards. But ultimately this effort *was*, even if inadvertently, central to sinking negotiations.

Clinton’s last-minute appreciation for binding standards resulted from labor’s lobbying and the AFL-CIO’s strategic relationship with the Democratic Party. But labor’s bargaining power was strengthened by the gritty determination of the direct actionists, and having almost the entire progressive infrastructure mobilized for Seattle. Ultimately it was an impressive combination of ‘white paper activism’ *and* ‘popular courage’ that ground the WTO to a halt. Contrary to fast forming opinions, Seattle would not have been the success it was without the efforts of institutional reformers and more grassroots radicals. Not only did the Ministerial end in collapse, but the WTO has not been the same since. The needs of poor countries have been given much higher priority in the Doha round of trade talks that followed Seattle. Because these needs are difficult to meet without reconciling the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism, trade liberalization via the WTO has significantly slowed. The combined efforts of radical direct actionists and

³³ Kevin Danaher and Jason Mark, *Insurrection: Citizen Challenges to Corporate Power* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 285.

institutional reformers in Seattle did not reverse the process of neoliberalization, but they played a significant role slowing it down and changing its course.³⁴ Sadly this reality was actively forgotten in the period following Seattle.

Social movement theory predicts that fractious debates over tactics, particularly violence, often drive movement decline.³⁵ But in Seattle it was less the property destruction and more the ideological denunciations from institutional progressives that drove a wedge between radicals and reformers. Progressives failed to understand how invoking police power would alienate their radical allies. But similarly many direct actionists had difficulty looking beyond ideological preference to see that a motley assemblage of radicals and reformers had collectively carried the day. Left movements can heighten their success in the current conjuncture by more self-consciously pursuing the dynamic assembling that contributed to the success in Seattle.

The Road to Wall Street

The original call for an occupation of Wall Street was issued on July 13th 2011 by Vancouver-based *Adbusters* Magazine. The *Adbusters* dispatch captured a growing desire for homegrown action aligning with revolutionary events in the Middle East and the encampments in Spain.³⁶ Occupation of the Wisconsin State Capitol to protest Governor Scott Walker's ultimately successful curtailment of collective bargaining rights in February 2011; occupations of campuses in California to protest tuition hikes and

³⁴ For a discussion of how events in Seattle and subsequent global justice protests contributed to the discourse and practice of corporate social responsibility, with unexpected and sometimes enabling results, see James Rowe, "The United Nations Global Compact and Sustainable Economies: Preserving Neoliberal Capitalism or Prefiguring Alternatives?" in Catia Gregoratti and Bart Slob (eds.), *The UN Global Compact: Alternative Voices* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

³⁵ See Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, p. 148-149.

³⁶ See Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

generalized austerity from 2009 onward; and mass civil disobedience in Washington DC protesting the Keystone XL pipeline in the summer of 2011 were key instances of progressive escalation prior to OWS. New York was also home to encampments in the summer months of 2011. For three weeks in June and July a group called New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts (NYABC) formed a tent city – ‘Bloombergville’ – across the street from City Hall to protest budget cuts and layoffs.³⁷ In early July the contested budget was passed to the dismay of Bloombergville’s citizens, but city council amended the Mayor’s proposal, deleting most of the planned teacher layoffs (the encampments were not as successful as activists hoped for, but still had concrete impact).³⁸

The *Adbusters* dispatch, which arrived on the heels Bloombergville, helped connect the dots between multiple struggles. If there was occupied space that could best articulate growing domestic grievances and link them to global dynamics it was Wall Street: home to increasingly powerful investment banks and the New York Stock Exchange. Economic crisis, rising inequality, austerity budgets, and slowed progress on climate change all shared a common driver: massive concentrations of economic power being deployed for political gain so to accrue more economic power. Nobel-prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz captured this dynamic elegantly in an influential *Vanity Fair* article – “Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%” – published in May 2011: “Wealth begets power, which begets more wealth.”³⁹

³⁷ According to David Graeber NYABC had a diversity of participants but was largely led by NGOs, Unions, and Socialist organizations. See Graeber, “What Did We Actually Do Right? On the Unexpected Success and Spread of Occupy Wall Street,” *AlterNet.org* (October 19th, 2011), <http://www.alternet.org/story/152789/%E2%80%9Cwhat_did_we_actually_do_right%E2%80%9D_on_the_unexpected_success_and_spread_of_occupy_wall_street>.

³⁸ Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street: The Inside Story of An Action that Changed America*, (Chicago: Haymarket, 2012), p. 10.

³⁹ Joseph Stiglitz, “Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%,” *Vanity Fair* (May 2011), <<http://www.vanityfair.com/society/features/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105>>.

The line from Wall Street to La Puerta del Sol in Madrid was clear given the bundling and global selling of toxic mortgages pioneered by American investment banks that sparked the 2008 crisis. Similarly commodity speculation was central to the record food price increases that helped ignite the Arab Spring. For economist Jeffrey Sachs:

While each country swept up in protest has its distinctive political and economic grievances...the protests can reasonably be labeled Occupy Global Capitalism. They mark a popular revulsion against a global economic system that has caused vast inequalities in income, claimed new victims of poverty and mass unemployment, and that lacks a moral and political framework oriented to the needs of the millions of people being left behind by global economic change.⁴⁰

That a reformer like Sachs would name capitalism the systemic problematic is indicative of increasing ideological convergence on the Left.⁴¹ After the financial crisis in 2008 criticism of neoliberalism – the primary systemic target in 1999 – became mainstream. While criticizing capitalism itself remained the work of radicals in 1999, this concern has broadened – another contributor to the growing movement dynamism that was afoot in the very call for occupation and its uptake by New York activists.

The July 13th *communiqué* supported the “revolutionary” tactic of occupation while emphasizing the forging of a single demand:

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Sachs, “Occupy Global Capitalism,” in Janet Byrne (ed.), *The Occupy Handbook* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012).

⁴¹ Sachs is an interesting example of this trend given his role advising swift marketizations – sometimes referred to as economic shock therapy – in Bolivia, Poland and Russia during the late 1980s and early 1990s. See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Random House, 2007). For Sachs’ response to criticisms like Klein’s see “What I Did in Russia,” <<http://jeffsachs.org/2012/03/what-i-did-in-russia/>>.

Tahrir succeeded in large part because the people of Egypt made a straightforward ultimatum – that Mubarak must go – over and over again until they won. Following this model, what is our equally uncomplicated demand?⁴²

The demand offered by *Adbusters* – “a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington” – was a modest ask. For *Adbusters* this simple reform was strategic “because cleaning up corruption in Washington is something all Americans, right and left, yearn for and can stand behind.”⁴³ The vision shared in the dispatch is the building of mass support for winnable reforms – wins that can nurture a more revolutionary dynamic in coming years. But it was less the specific reforms that caught activist attention in New York, and more the call for deploying a “revolutionary” tactic and forging democratic community in liberated space. The revolutionary romanticism of the *communiqué* – captured in the striking image of the ballerina perched atop the Bowling Green Bull as street battles rage in the background – had more impact than the call to forge a single demand like the Presidential Commission.

Grassroots activists in New York widely acknowledge the importance of the July 13th dispatch, but have been quick to distance their actions from it. Indeed Marisa Holmes who played a key leadership role in the encampments notes how she was originally weary of the call because of her desire to avoid the institutional Left and its trappings of vertical organization.⁴⁴ Our argument, however, is that OWS began with a well-resourced Left organization issuing a dynamic *communiqué* with appeal for radicals and reformers alike.

⁴² *Adbusters*, “#OCCUPYWALLSTREET: A Shift in Revolutionary Tactics,” (July 13th, 2011), < <http://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/occupywallstreet.html>>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See Marisa Holmes, “The Center Cannot Hold,” in Kate Khatib, Margaret Killjoy, and Mike McGuire (eds.), *We are Many: Reflections on Movement Strategy from Occupation to Liberation* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), p. 151.

As we will learn below the concrete occupation of Wall Street on September 17th was organized by grassroots activists with a largely radical orientation. And yet movement growth and maintenance required significant material assistance from reform-oriented organizations. While not always recognized by participants, movement dynamism was key to Occupy's origins and development.⁴⁵

Occupying Wall Street

Following the July 13th *communiqué* NYABC put out a call for a General Assembly (GA) at Bowling Green Park on August 2nd to plan for the possible occupation on September 17th. General assemblies are a form of directly democratic decision-making popularized in previous occupations, particularly in Spain. Decision-making in Bloombergville roughly followed the General Assembly format, but the August 2nd GA fast became a traditional rally led by the sectarian socialist organization Worker's World who self-selected themselves to dictate the event's flow.⁴⁶ This irked anarchist attendees who were expecting the more horizontal process typically associated with the GA form. They loudly protested and broke away to begin a more democratic assembly. They started with a small group, but ultimately many of the rally participants and organizers joined them.⁴⁷ This anti-authoritarian coup proved critical, helping infuse anarchist principles into what would become the Occupy movement. Indeed these principles were central in enabling a

⁴⁵ Anarchist David Graeber is oft-credited with the meme 'We are the 99%.' In a metaphoric but also concrete instance of movement dynamism, this slogan was enabled by research on 'the 1%' by reform-minded economists like Joseph Stiglitz, Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez. See David Graeber, "Occupy Wall Street's Anarchist Roots," in Janet Byrne (ed.), *The Occupy Handbook* p. 141. See also Graeber's discussion of Stiglitz in *The Democracy Project: A History, A Crisis, A Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), p. 39.

⁴⁶ See Graeber, "What Did We Actually Do Right?" *AlterNet.org*.

⁴⁷ See Drake Bennett, "David Graeber, The Anti-Leader of Occupy Wall Street," in *BloombergBusinessweek*, (October 26th, 2011), <<http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/david-graeber-the-antileader-of-occupy-wall-street-10262011.html>>.

meeting of eighty people on August 2nd to become the impactful Occupy movement it did two months later. The crucial point for our purposes is that radicals jump-started the Occupy movement.

There are three key offerings made by radical – largely anarchist – organizers that conditioned OWS’ transformation into a broad-based and successful movement: the insistence on a radically democratic general assembly process, avoiding concrete demands, and the practice of militant non-violence. These contributions are controversial among progressives and have context-specific value. But below we unpack how these offerings won popularity for the emerging Occupy movement. Occupy’s cultural resonance challenges the common sense view that radical tactics and ideas are necessarily alienating to popular publics.⁴⁸

The General Assembly

The consensus-based general assembly process ensured that differing participants felt welcome, heard, and important.⁴⁹ Richard Kim, writing in the *Nation*, nicely captures the unifying effect of the assemblies:

OWS organizers are...acutely aware that the movement’s extraordinary potential lies in its ability to bring together a range of participants who coalesce maybe once in a generation: anarchists and Marxists of a thousand different sects, social democrats, community organizers, immigrants’ rights activists, feminists, queers,

⁴⁸ Recent books on US social movement history by Francesca Polletta and Douglas Bevington also help challenge the rigid distinction between principle and strategic pragmatism that operates as cultural common sense. These works detail the strategic value that can be yielded by enacting radical principles. See Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Bevington, *The Rebirth of Environmentalism*.

⁴⁹ See Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 27.

anti-racist organizers, capitalists who want to save capitalism by restoring the Fordist truce, the simply curious and sympathetic...the movement's emphasis on direct democracy, derived from anarchism...has allowed such an unwieldy set of actors to occupy the same space.⁵⁰

Without the persistence of occupiers who held the park, OWS would not have taken off. The general assembly process was critical for facilitating commitment and solidarity among a diverse body.

Refusing Demands

The resistance of concrete demands had similar effects. Once the occupation began many participants were keen to form demands.⁵¹ But anarchists and other radicals resisted these calls on principle. According to anarchist anthropologist David Graeber who was a key OWS organizer in the lead up to September 17th: “A reason for the much-discussed refusal to issue demands is that issuing demands means recognizing the legitimacy – or at least the power – of those of whom the demands are made.”⁵² For anarchists and autonomists resisting demands was a radical refusal to legitimate hierarchical market and state institutions. This refusal, far from universal among participants, had the practical effect of making room for political diversity. Anarchists and autonomists felt represented while others could assume demands would coalesce with time.⁵³ This was not a sustainable compromise, but it worked to keep OWS a big-tent affair in the short-term.

⁵⁰ Richard Kim, “The Audacity of Occupy Wall Street,” in *The Nation* (November 2nd, 2011), <<http://www.thenation.com/article/164348/audacity-occupy-wall-street#>>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See Graeber, “Occupy Wall Street’s Anarchist Roots,” p. 141.

⁵³ See Kim, “The Audacity of Occupy Wall Street.”

Militant non-violence

The final contribution we'd like to highlight is militant non-violence: working within the non-violent frame while making room for decentralized assertiveness.⁵⁴ As we saw with Seattle, poorly handled debates over 'violence' – mainly property damage – contributed to unnecessary movement rigidity. Significant learning has occurred since then. The diversity of tactics framework that emerged in the wake of Seattle remains influential among anarchists and other radicals, but has taken on important nuance.⁵⁵ While it can become a code for 'anything goes,' making it difficult for movements to hold individuals accountable, this is not what happened in New York.⁵⁶ Anarchist organizers strongly supported both a Gandhian approach to non-violence *and* a diversity of tactics framework in the lead up to September 17th. It is worth quoting David Graeber at length in this regard:

'Diversity of tactics' means leaving such matters up to individual conscience, rather than imposing a code on anyone. Partly this is because imposing such a code invariably backfires. In practice, it means some groups break off in indignation and do even more militant things than they would have otherwise...as happened...in Seattle...After the fiasco in Seattle, of watching some activists actively turning

⁵⁴ See Barbara Epstein, "Occupy Oakland – The Question of Violence" in Leo Panitch, Greg Albo, and Vivek Chibber (eds.), *The Question of Strategy: The Socialist Register* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2013). See also Alex Vitale, "NYPD and OWS: A Clash of Styles," in Astra Taylor, Keith Cessen et al. (eds.), *Occupy! Scenes from Occupied America* (New York: Verso, 2011).

⁵⁵ This discourse, for Chris Hurl, "was first and foremost a call for solidarity, respectfully disagreeing with other activists rather than demanding their arrest. The call to respect a 'diversity of tactics' was articulated as an attempt to build a basis of solidarity between the different groups involved in action without recourse to a broad organizational unity." See "Anti-Globalization and 'Diversity of Tactics,'" p. 56.

⁵⁶ See Starhawk, "Strategic Nonviolence," in Andrew Boyd and Dave Oswald Mitchell (eds.), *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution* (New York: O/R, 2012), p. 88.

others over to the police – we quickly decided we needed to ensure this never happened again. What we found is that if we declared ‘we shall all be in solidarity with one another. We will not turn in fellow protestors to the police. We will treat you as brothers and sisters. But we expect you to do the same to us’ – then those who might be disposed to more militant tactics will act in solidarity as well, either by not engaging in militant actions at all for fear they will endanger others...or do so in ways that run the least risk of endangering fellow activists.⁵⁷

This formula worked well in New York where spectacular property damage and police confrontation, unlike Seattle 99, were exceptionally rare.⁵⁸ And yet the diversity of tactics framework made room for activists wanting to autonomously push the tactical envelope. While remaining technically non-violent, the assertiveness in OWS actions was crucial to the movement’s mainstreaming. The occupation and holding of Zuccotti Park on September 17th is of obvious importance in this regard. But there were two flashpoints after the 17th that drastically heightened media exposure – the September 24th pepper-spraying and arrests at Union Square and mass arrests during the Brooklyn Bridge march on October 1st. Both these events find their roots in the militant non-violence practiced by occupiers.

OWS Occupies the Agenda

⁵⁷ David Graeber, “Concerning the Violent Peace Police: An Open Letter to Chris Hedges,” *n+1*, (February 9th, 2012), <<http://nplusonemag.com/concerning-the-violent-peace-police>>.

⁵⁸ This formula was strained during Occupy Oakland where more property destruction occurred. For an excellent analysis see Epstein, “Occupy Oakland – The Question of Violence.” Following events in Oakland Chris Hedges denounced black bloc activists as ‘The Cancer in Occupy.’ Hedges expressed important concerns in his essay, but reducing fellow activists to a life-threatening illness often treated with surgical excision is exemplary of the excessive differentiation that continues to weaken the Left. See the response from Graeber, “Concerning the Violent Peace Police.”

On September 24th the occupation was a week old but largely unknown – it was unclear that interest would soon come from both Kanye West and the West Wing. Indeed on the 24th Michael Kazin wrote an editorial for the *New York Times* lamenting the Left’s silence in the wake of the 2008 crisis. The piece was titled “Whatever Happened to the American Left?” Kazin wouldn’t have to wait long for an answer. That very afternoon OWS activists went on an unpermitted guerilla march up Broadway and against traffic.⁵⁹ Police were caught off guard and overreacted. Protestors were fenced in, and a group of rightfully frightened young participants were wantonly pepper sprayed by police. The incident was filmed and became a YouTube sensation watched over a million times. The optics of non-threatening young protestors being attacked helped galvanize support and interest for the nascent movement. On September 24th Google searches for ‘Occupy Wall Street’ surpassed those for ‘Tea Party.’⁶⁰

One week later – on October 1st – activists organized a march across Brooklyn Bridge in response to police aggression. The first group to reach the bridge took the pre-approved pedestrian walkway, but another group of activists defiantly took the road with many following.⁶¹ The bridge was swarmed and traffic snarled. Protestors slowly marched across the bridge while police set up barricades on both ends, fencing activists in. The police proceeded to mass arrest 700 protestors, many of whom were surprised since they did not hear warnings and were not given choice between dispersal and prison. Once again the scene was filmed and posted to YouTube.

⁵⁹ Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ See Time Magazine, *What is Occupy? Inside the Global Movement* (New York: TIME Books, 2011), p.4.

⁶¹ Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 36.

It was after these two events that popular interest in the movement exploded. Images of young people putting their bodies on the line to protest rising inequality, and being aggressively handled by police, struck a popular chord. These spectacular events coupled with the ongoing occupation of Zuccotti Park created a dramatic narrative of will, sacrifice, and heroism that proved compelling for media and audience alike.⁶² By October 1st significant amounts of moral authority had been won by OWS. This was strategic non-violence at its finest: defying rules and sacrificing personal safety for a noble cause, prompting an aggressive response from authorities, and winning moral authority in the process. But while non-violent discipline was maintained, a key ingredient of these two actions was decentralized tactical assertiveness enabled by the diversity of tactics framework. Analyzing the Union Square and Brooklyn Bridge actions Nathan Schneider notes how:

In both cases, the arrests directly followed instances of autonomous action by small groups, which splintered away from the plan established by the Direct Action Committee...In both cases, too, the police responded to such autonomous action with violent overreaction, which in turn garnered tremendous interest from the media...I've been forced to recognize that the messy stuff seems to work.⁶³

⁶² See Micah L. Sifry, "#OWS, The Other 98%, US Uncut & Rebuild the Dream: A Look at the Shoes That Didn't Drop," in *TechPresident* (October 19th, 2011), < <http://techpresident.com/blog-entry/ows-other-98-us-uncut-rebuild-dream-look-shoes-didnt-drop>>.

⁶³ Nathan Schneider, "No Leaders, No Violence: What Diversity of Tactics Means for Occupy Wall Street," in Sarah van Gelder (ed.), *This Changes Everything: Occupy Wall Street and the 99% Movement* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2011), p. 41.

The militant non-violence of radicals was integral to the movement's stratospheric rise.⁶⁴ But broader support was crucial for movement maintenance.

Since the first General Assembly on August 2nd radical organizers were intent to engage labor knowing that unions could help broaden the movement and supply needed resources. A labor working group was formed in the early days of the occupation, and these efforts would provide crucial returns.⁶⁵ On September 29th a coalition of community and labor groups including the United Federation of Teachers, SEIU 1199, and the Transport Workers Union Local 100, announced a Community and Labor Rally in support of OWS to be held on October 5th.⁶⁶ By then the labor working group had secured an endorsement from the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of unions in the US. The rally held in Foley square attracted over 20,000 participants – the largest turnout since the encampments began – who marched to Zuccotti Park in solidarity with occupiers.⁶⁷

The occupation's endurance, effective practices of militant non-violence, and buy-in from labor and NGOs *together* created snowballing interest: increasing media coverage, well-publicized celebrity visits, and political endorsements. The 'cool-factor' crafted through righteous, risky, and audacious action coupled with the legitimating force of more established reform-oriented organizations created a powerful engine of popularity for Occupy. The Pew Research Centre's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) reported that during the week of October 10-16 OWS captured 10% of *all* news

⁶⁴ According to Nate Silver sustained spikes in news coverage occurred after police confrontations on both the 24th and the 1st. See "Police Clashes Spur Coverage of Wall Street Protests," *New York Times* (October 7th, 2011), < <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/police-clashes-spur-coverage-of-wall-street-protests/>>.

⁶⁵ See Sarah Jaffe, "When The Progressive Community Embraced the Occupation," in Don Hazen, Tara Lohan, Lynn Parramore (eds.), *The 99%: How the Occupy Wall Street Movement is Changing America* (San Francisco: AlterNet Books, 2011), p. 94. See also Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 58.

⁶⁶ Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 54.

⁶⁷ Sarah Jaffe, "When The Progressive Community Embraced the Occupation," p. 93.

reporting in the US – the most popular story of the week. For comparison the Tea Party, at its high point in April 2009, only captured 7% of the national ‘newshole.’⁶⁸

The high point of OWS dynamism – also a high point for media coverage – was the successful resistance to eviction on October 14th. At 8am on October 13th occupiers received notice that in less than twenty-four hours Brookfield properties – owners of Zuccotti Park – wanted people cleared out for park cleaning. Brookfield also planned to implement new rules prohibiting the use of sleeping bags and tarps – rules that would have ended the occupation.⁶⁹

Occupiers immediately organized and decided that part of their resistance would be cleaning the park themselves. An impressive frenzy of activity followed as activists rigorously cleaned Zuccotti with assistance from NYC unions, particular park employees, sanitation workers and custodians contacted by the Labor Working Group.⁷⁰ While occupiers cleaned, an impressive mobilization was launched: The Communication Workers of America, The United Auto Workers, SEIU 1199, the United Federation of Teachers, and the NYC AFL-CIO all pledged to contact members and encourage their participation in park defense. Unions were also calling the mayor and other elected officials and encouraging them to call the mayor.⁷¹ Meanwhile lawyers with the National Lawyers Guild were investigating Brookfield’s claims and preparing a statement to the company and mayor denouncing the violation of First Amendment rights and warning that “prior court approval” was required for police action.⁷² Online, progressive

⁶⁸ Mark Jurkowitz, “Coverage of Wall St. Protests Keeps Growing, Gets More Political,” *PEJ* <http://www.journalism.org/index_report/pej_news_coverage_index_october_1016_2011?src=prc-headline>

⁶⁹ Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 99.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 101.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 102.

organizations like MoveOn.org and Working Families were encouraging New Yorkers to turn up for occupation defense.⁷³ Across the border a Canadian variation on MoveOn – Leadow.ca – launched a nimble letter-writing campaign to Brookfield properties, a Canadian company. In less than 24 hours Leadnow organized over 10,000 online letters from Canadians delivered to Brookfield properties (with messages arriving straight to the blackberries of Brookfield executives after activists located their personal contact information).⁷⁴

By 6am on October 14th – one hour before Brookfield’s scheduled cleaning – Zuccotti Park was teeming with thousands of supporters. Richard Kim of the *Nation* likened the scene to *Lord of Rings: The Two Towers* when elves arrive as reinforcements in the final battle.⁷⁵ The pressure applied from multiple directions convinced Brookfield to walk away from eviction. This victory ensured that income inequality would occupy the media-scape for another month, and help solidify the movement.

Eviction defense on October 14th is a singular example of impactful movement dynamism, but this was an ongoing phenomenon during the encampments. As noted radicals jumpstarted the movement, but right from the beginning reform-minded groups and individuals provided material support. There was thousands of dollars worth of pizza paid for by unions and donors from all over the world.⁷⁶ Once Occupy transitioned into food preparation cooking was done at a local soup kitchen that donated its facilities.⁷⁷ The New York Civil Liberties Union facilitated OWS’ successful procurement of

⁷³ Sarah Jaffe, “When The Progressive Community Embraced the Occupation,” p. 98.

⁷⁴ Jamie Biggar, personal communication (November 5th, 2012).

⁷⁵ Sarah Jaffe, “When The Progressive Community Embraced the Occupation,” p. 98.

⁷⁶ See Kim, “The Audacity of Occupy Wall Street.” See also Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 20.

⁷⁷ Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 69.

permitting for portable toilets.⁷⁸ Energy for the encampment was, for a period, supplied by Greenpeace's mobile solar power center.⁷⁹ Medical supplies were donated by SEIU 1199 and National Nurses United and the Medic group was staffed by nurses, doctors, therapists, EMT workers, and acupuncturists (likely not all self-identified radicals).⁸⁰ The United Federation of Teachers provided a mailroom nearby for the flood of donated goods.⁸¹ Finally Occupy's legal support was provided by the National Lawyers Guild, which by October's end had twenty attorneys undertaking research and litigation for OWS.⁸²

When the final eviction was executed on November 15th, encampments had spread to 750 cities worldwide and Occupy's concerns about growing inequality were firmly planted in public consciousness.⁸³ Indeed a month prior the former Governor of New York, Eliot Spitzer, had already declared victory for the movement, noting how:

Suddenly, the issues of equity, fairness, justice, income distribution, and accountability for the economic cataclysm—issues all but ignored for a generation—are front and center...until these protests, no political figure or movement had made Americans pay attention to these facts in a meaningful way.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Stephen Gandel, "The Leaders of a Leaderless Movement," in *What is Occupy? Inside the Global Movement*, pp. 37-38.

⁷⁹ Peter Hanlon, "Solar Powers Occupy Wall Street," *ECOcentric* (October 27th, 2011), <<http://www.ecocentricblog.org/2011/10/27/solar-powers-occupy-wall-street/>>.

⁸⁰ See Sarah Jaffe, "The Radical Infrastructure of Occupy Wall Street," in Don Hazen, Tara Lohan, Lynn Parramore (eds.), *The 99%: How the Occupy Wall Street Movement is Changing America* (San Francisco: AlterNet Books, 2011), p. 66. See also Kim, "The Audacity of Occupy Wall Street."

⁸¹ Ketcham, "New Populists."

⁸² Writers for the 99%, *Occupying Wall Street*, p. 78.

⁸³ Simon Rogers, "Occupy protests around the world: full list visualized," *The Guardian* (November 14th, 2011), <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/oct/17/occupy-protests-world-list-map>>.

⁸⁴ Eliot Spitzer, "Occupy Wall Street Has Already Won," *Slate* (October 13th, 2011), <http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_best_policy/2011/10/occupy_wall_street_s_victory_it_has_shaken_up_american_politics_.html>.

Supporting Spitzer's argument Dylan Byers from *Politico* found that by October's end weekly media uses of the term 'income inequality' had increased by a factor of five since Occupy's origins.⁸⁵ OWS also succeeded in popularizing a new frame for political struggle: the 1% vs. the 99%. On October 16th, two days after successful eviction defense and the accompanying media spike, the White House issued a statement claiming that Obama was fighting for the interests of the 99%.⁸⁶ All the supportive resource institutional reformers provided is an example of the 'moderate flank effect' at work. And yet the anarchist leadership that made Occupy culturally resonant, and placed economic inequality on the political agenda, is the 'radical flank effect' in action. In sum OWS demonstrates the benefits of dynamic exchange between different movement wings.

Occupy's messaging likely helped Obama's successful re-election bid, turning Romney's private equity experience into a liability. For Justin Ruben from MoveOn.org, the Occupy-effect led Newt Gingrich to label Romney's Bain Capital "exploitative" during the Republican primaries.⁸⁷ Democrats successfully deployed this line of attack during the election a year later. Prior to the election, however, Ruben also noted how: "We know that whoever wins in November, they are still going to be listening more to the 1 percent than to the rest of us because our political system is completely broken. So

⁸⁵ Dylan Byers, "Occupy Wall Street is Winning," *Politico*, (November 11th, 2011), <http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1111/Occupy_Wall_Street_is_winning.html>.

⁸⁶ Zeke Miller, "White House Draws Closer To Occupy Wall Street, Says Obama Is Fighting For The Interests Of The 99%," *Business Insider*, (October 16th, 2011), <<http://www.businessinsider.com/white-house-draws-closer-to-occupy-wall-street-says-obama-is-fighting-for-interests-of-the-99-2011-10#ixzz2BGyTiXRd>>.

⁸⁷ Josh Harkinson, "How Occupy Co-Opted MoveOn.org," *Mother Jones* (April 13th, 2012), <<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/04/99-spring-moveon-occupy-wall-street>>.

we don't have the luxury of not engaging in [direct] action.”⁸⁸ Sentiments like these from prominent progressives mark another key short-term success.

OWS's sharp rise has forced a tactical rethink on the institutional Left. The clearest expression of this shift was the 99% Spring campaign launched by a coalition of 60 progressive groups including MoveOn, major unions, and grassroots groups like National Peoples Action and the Ruckus Society. The goal of the campaign was to train 100,000 people in non-violent direct action during April 9-15th 2012. The week after trainings concluded there were over 1000 actions held targeting companies like Bank of America, Verizon, Wal-Mart, and GE.⁸⁹ Speaking about individual participants from Occupy who helped develop training curriculum, Joy Cushman from the New Organizing Institute, notes how: “The energy they bring, the moral clarity is very helpful for more institutional groups – unions, MoveOn. It's radicalizing them, in a way.”⁹⁰

Occupy has accelerated the trend towards tactical and ideological escalation on the Left. This should be cause for celebration among radicals: their message is broadening. And while some have engaged the 99% Spring with enthusiasm, there has been an influential move to denounce it as stealth co-optation. The argument runs like this: the 99% Spring is a front group for MoveOn.org that fronts for the Democratic Party. Democrats, the argument continues, are sneakily seeking Occupy's energies for its

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Joshua Kahn Russell and Harmony Goldberg, “99% Spring: New radical alliances for a new era,” *rabble.ca* (May 10th, 2012), <<http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/joshua-kahn-russell/2012/05/99-spring-new-radical-alliances-new-era>>.

⁹⁰ Jake Olzen, “The “99% Spring” Movement to Train 100,000 Activists: Co-Opting Occupy or Helping Spread its Message?” *AlterNet.org* (March 26th, 2012), <http://www.AlterNet.org/story/154706/the_%2299_spring%22_movement_to_train_100,000_activists%3A_co-opting_occupy_or_helping_spread_its_message?page=0%2C2&paging=off>.

electoral work.⁹¹ As aforementioned there are genuine differences between radicals and many of the institutional reformers comprising the 99% Spring coalition. These differences can make working together difficult and in some instances counter-productive. But the campaign of criticism against the 99% Spring is a classic instance of the excessive differentiation common on the Left: disregard that exceeds political reality and efficacy. Co-optation at the hands of MoveOn.org, according to activists Joshua Kahn Russell and Harmony Goldberg, is a “reasonable concern that has received an unreasonable amount of attention.”⁹² For one 99% Spring is a genuine coalition of agential organizations; it is *not* a MoveOn.org front group. Moreover the Obama campaign, the Democratic Party, and even electoral politics were *not* included in trainings.⁹³ Finally, it is hard to imagine how having 100,000 more peoples trained in non-violent direct action will harm radical aspirations.

Writing in *Counterpunch* activist Mike King recently argued that: “History will not forgive us if we let the 99% Spring Trojan horse into our movement so that the injustices we rose up against can be perpetuated with our own sanction, in our own name.”⁹⁴ King’s rendering of Occupy as a *purely* radical movement requiring protection from reformers at the gate is rooted in a misreading of reality; it misses how from the

⁹¹ See Adbusters, “Battle for the Soul of Occupy,” (April 12th, 2012), <<http://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/jump.html>>. Insider, “99 Percent Spring: the Latest MoveOn Front for the Democratic Party,” *Counterpunch* (March 2012), <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/03/16/99-percent-spring-the-latest-moveon-front-for-the-democratic-party/>>. Charles M. Young, “Yes, the 99% Spring is a Fraud,” *Counterpunch* (April 2012), <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/04/13/yes-the-99-spring-is-a-fraud/>>. Mike King, “Counter-Insurgency as Insurgency,” *Counterpunch* (April 2012), <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/04/05/counter-insurgency-as-insurgency/>>.

⁹² Joshua Kahn Russell and Harmony Goldberg, “99% Spring: New radical alliances for a new era,” *rabble.ca*

⁹³ Ibid. See also Charles Lechner, “Reportback: The 99% Spring Training for Trainers and the Plot to Coopt #Occupy,” *New York General Assembly: Technology Operations Group* (March 25, 2012), <<http://tech.nycga.net/2012/03/25/reportback-the-99spring-training-for-trainers-and-the-plot-to-coopt-occupy/>>.

⁹⁴ Mike King, “Counter-Insurgency as Insurgency.”

beginning a dynamism between differing movement wings brought Occupy into the world and then sustained it. Radical leadership – ideologically and tactically – was integral to the movement’s success, but without significant contributions from the institutional Left, OWS would not have had the staying power and impact it did. Because radical leadership was so important to success, institutional progressives have become more open to ideological and tactical learning. It is worrisome that increasing dynamism, and the openings it brings, has been met with hyper-vigilant identity attachment.

And yet there is intelligibility to the concerns King raises. Institutional reformers have a history of poor alliance building. In his recent book *The Democracy Project*, David Graeber raises concerns about how the violent eviction of encampments in November 2011 was met with general silence from groups like MoveOn.org, Rebuild the Dream, and the wider liberal establishment. Graeber writes:

Occupy succeeded brilliantly in changing the national debate to begin addressing issues of financial power, the corruption of the political process, and social inequality, all to the benefit of the liberal establishment, which had struggled to gain traction around these issues. But when the Tasers, batons, and SWAT teams arrived, that establishment simply disappeared and left us to our fate.⁹⁵

Even if institutional reformers felt that encampments had run their course, and that evictions offered an exit-strategy, strongly condemning police violence would potentially have limited the force used as evictions swept the country. Choosing to condemn police violence would also have communicated solidarity to those who

⁹⁵ David Graeber, *The Democracy Project*, p. 141.

physically occupied Zuccotti Park. This act of solidarity could have opened radicals more fully to the potential inhered in the 99% Spring campaign.

Concluding

Our basic aim in this article has been to demonstrate how dynamism between radicals and reformers explains Left successes in the current conjuncture. Even when differing wings have doubted each other's contributions – as we saw during and after Seattle 99 and New York 2011 – the totality of efforts has driven success. The implication of this claim is that movement dynamism, often only occurring *in-itself*, will have more impact if activists recognize its power, and remain open to it (*dynamism for-itself*). What this means practically is cultivating persistent openness to dynamic alignment with activists and organizations rooted in different tendencies.

Being politically open and flexible doesn't mean seeking alliance and consensus with all parties. Politics is an oppositional struggle. But given the forces arrayed against modest redistributive efforts, the paradoxical outcomes of past revolutions, and the uncertainty surrounding transformational politics in advanced capitalist societies, it behooves those looking to make structurally manifest the basic dignity of all beings to seek out support where it can be found. Comradely criticism will always be required, and alliances may need breaking, but these determinations are best made contextually instead of basing them on abstract antipathy towards 'tepid reform' and 'unrealistic radicalism.'