

The Democratic Party: An Insidious Threat to the Occupy Wall Street Movement

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The threat I am referring to is not that of being pepper-sprayed, arrested, beaten or imprisoned. It is a different type of threat: a stealthy challenger that while pretending to advance the goals of the Occupy Movement tends to undermine it from within—more or less like the proverbial *elephant in the room*. I am referring to the threat of preemption, or cooptation, posed by the Democratic Party and union officials. In light of their unsavory record of undermining the revolutionary energy of social movements, projections of sympathy for the anti-Wall Street protesters by the White House, the Democratic Party officials and union leaders can be viewed only with suspicion.

Expressing sympathy for the protester, [President Obama recently stated](#): “I think people are frustrated, and the protesters are giving voice to a more broad-based frustration about how our financial system works.” At the same time he also defended the decision to bail out banks and other Wall Street speculators, arguing that the decision was necessitated by the need to salvage our financial system. It is obvious that, as usual, the president is talking from both side of his mouth.

On the same day (October 6th) that the president projected sympathy for the protesters, [Vice President Biden also expressed](#) similar sentiments. Comparing the Wall Street protests with the Tea Party, he stated: “The Tea Party started, why? TARP. They thought it was unfair – we were bailing out the big guy.” The vice president’s reference to the Tea Party is by no means fortuitous; there are clear indications the Democrats are trying to utilize the Occupy movement the way the Republicans do the Tea Party. “The mushrooming protests could be the start of a populist movement on the left that counterbalances the surge of the Tea Party on the right, and closes what some Democrats fear is an ‘enthusiasm gap,’” reported the *New York Times* on Friday, October 7th.

Projections of sympathy for the Occupy movement have not been limited to the White House. Many officials of the Democratic Party have either personally appeared at the Zuccotti Park to express support or sent statements of support for the protesters. Likewise, a number of union leaders joined a large protest rally held in New York City’s Foley Square on October 5th to show sympathy for the protesters.

Then there are the liberal political pundits and media outlets such as the *New York Times* that are also trying to build bridges between the Democratic Party and the Occupy movement in an effort to channel the protesters’ energy to the party’s electoral machine. For example, the *New York Times*’ columnist Paul Krugman recently wrote: “And there are real political opportunities here. Not, of course, for today’s Republicans. . . . But Democrats

are being given what amounts to a second chance. The Obama administration squandered a lot of potential good will early on by adopting banker-friendly policies. . . . Now, however, Mr. Obama's party has a chance for a do-over."

On the face of it there is nothing wrong with the Democratic Party officials or union leaders expressing support for the protesters. In light of their actual economic policies, however, that support can be characterized only as hypocritical. The Democrats are as much responsible for the economic problems that have triggered the protests as their Republican counterparts. The Obama administration has played an especially destructive role in pursuing a devastating neoliberal austerity agenda in term of bailing out the Wall Street gamblers, extending the Bush tax breaks for the wealthy, expanding the US wars of choice—and then cutting vital social spending to pay for the financial resources thus usurped.

Equally blameworthy are union bureaucrats who have enabled the White House and the Congress in the implementation of such brutal austerity programs. Hollow posturing aside, the AFL-CIO has opposed neither the neoliberal austerity policies at home nor the imperialist wars of aggression abroad. Well-paid union officials have not even seriously challenged factory closures; nor have they earnestly resisted brutal cuts in workers' wages and benefits.

In projecting sympathy for the Occupy Movement, the Democrats are essentially trying to have their cake and eat it too! Their efforts to express support for the protests can be interpreted only as opportunistic and utilitarian: to identify themselves with the rapidly spreading popular protests against the status quo, to mask the Obama administration's neoliberal devotion to Wall Street, and to harness the energy of the protesters in order to garner their vote in the 2012 elections.

If successful, this would not be the first time the Democratic Party would have derailed and dissipated social struggles for change; it has a long record of such policies of betrayal, going back all the way to the Populist Movement of the late 19th century. Barack Obama's promise of change in the 2008 elections in pursuit of garnering the grassroots' vote was only the latest of the Democrats' strategy of playing the *good cop* in order to contain radical energy. Two years earlier they had managed to undermine a vigorous antiwar movement by voicing the protesters' demands to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan if they won the majority seats in the Congress. Having thus gained the control of both houses of the Congress in the mid-term election of 2006, they shamelessly backed away from their promise to antiwar voters.

One can only hope that the Occupy Movement is armed with the knowledge of the Democratic Party's record of cooptation and betrayal of radical movements; and will therefore chart a political movement of the working people and other grassroots independent of both parties of big business.

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