

Next Steps for the Occupy Movement

By [Shamus Cooke](#)

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As the Occupy Movement gains strength nationally and internationally, questions of “what next” are popping up. Although there are no easy answers or ready- to-order recipes for moving forward, there are general ideas that can help unite the Occupy Movements with the broader community of the 99% — which is the most urgent need at the moment. Why the urgency? Writer Chris Hedges explains:

“The state and corporate forces are determined to crush this... They are terrified this will spread. They have their long phalanxes of police on motorcycles, their rows of white paddy wagons, their foot soldiers hunting for you on the streets with pepper spray and orange plastic nets...”

The only reason that surviving occupied spots have been spared is because of the broader sympathy of the 99% combined with the direct participation of large sections of working people at marches and demonstrations. The corporate elite fear a strong, united movement like vampires fear sunlight.

Therefore, city governments are slow-playing the Occupy Movement where it is especially strong — New York and Portland, Oregon, etc. — and are attacking quickly in cities where momentum hasn’t caught fire —, Denver, Boston, etc. The massive demonstrations in New York and Portland have protected the occupied spaces thus far, as the mayor, police, and media attempt to chip away at public opinion by exploiting disunity in the movement or focusing on individuals promoting violence, drug use, etc.

To combat this dynamic, the Occupy Movement people needs to unite around common messages that they can effectively broadcast to those 99% not yet on the streets; or to maintain the sympathy of those who’ve already attended large marches and demonstrations. And although sections of the Occupy Movement scoff at demands, they are crucially necessary. Demands unite people in action, and distinguish them from their opponents; demands give an aim and purpose to a movement and act as a communications and recruiting tool to the wider public. There is nothing to win if no demands are articulated.

One reason that the wealthy are strong is because they are united around demands that raise profits for the corporations they own: slashing wages and benefits, destroying unions, lowering corporate tax rates, destroying social programs, privatization, ending Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, etc.

To consolidate the ranks of the Occupy Movement we need similar demands that can inspire the 99%. These are the type of demands that will spur people into action — demands that will get working class people off their couches and into the streets! The immediate task of

the movement is to broadcast demands that will agitate the majority of the 99% into action.

On a national level these demands are obvious: Tax the Rich to create a federal public jobs program, fully fund Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security and other social programs, fully fund public education, single payer health care, end the wars. These are demands that can unite the Occupy Movement and working people nationally while preventing Democrats and Republicans from taking it over. Poll after poll has recorded that an overwhelming majority of the U.S. population strongly supports these demands, and many unions, including the national AFL-CIO have gone on record supporting them.

On a city and state level these demands can be translated to local issues; cities and states are facing budget deficits that are resulting in cuts to education, social services and resulting in more unemployment. Local Occupy Movements can demand that the local top1% pay more to make up for these, while also demanding that cities and states create jobs with this money.

Corporations are united in their purpose of profit chasing and social service slashing; so too must we be united in saving social services and taxing corporate profits, on a local and national level.

The Occupy Movement has more than room for an umbrella of demands from diverse sections of working class people, but now we must focus on what unites the vast majority, since the corporations have focused on dividing us for decades. The more diverse demands of the working class can find a safe place for expression and growth only within a mass, united movement.

There can be no doubt that the Occupy Movement will either continue to grow into a massive social movement or shrink until the corporate-elite are able to snuff it out. In order for the movement to grow, it must truly attract the broader 99%, not merely the most progressive 10%. Focusing on broad but specific demands that all working people will fight for will attract organized labor, the elderly, students, minorities, i.e., the whole working class.

A working class mass movement has not existed in the United States since the 1930s and 40s when it resulted in spectacular progressive change in America, even if it was cut short before European-style social programs were achieved. Nevertheless, the achievements of the mass movements of past generations are under attack — Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and a living wage, etc. Only a real working class movement can save these programs and expand them.

If the Occupy Movement fails, the far right will be emboldened. They are trembling at the potential power of the movement and have lost all momentum themselves. If we lose the initiative, they will immediately seize it to press their agenda further and faster. Only by expanding the movement can we extinguish the power of the corporate elite. We have history on our side; let's not squander it.

The Occupy Movement represents a turning point in history. But in order to achieve its potential, it must reach out to the 99% and draw the majority into its ranks. Then it will have the power to change the agenda of this country, redraw the political map, and create a government that will operate in the interests of the vast majority, not the 1%. Once this change begins to unfold, there are no limits to what it could accomplish.

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist and writer for Workers Action (www.workerscompass.org)

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