

Occupy Movement: Next Step Convergence

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There is a growing convergence of thinking about where the US Occupy movement should go as a next step to turning its values, concerns and commitments into changing what most Americans see as broken government under control of corporate interests. When it comes to political and social movements, history shows us that they usually fail not because they disappear, but rather because they become marginalized, unimportant despite a core group of committed people and groups.

They lose popular appeal and support or never expand beyond a small early group of supporters. The nation and many supporters move on. Other movements grab the interest of the most informed, dissident-type people seeking truth, justice or change. A good example of such a failed contemporary movement is the 911 truth effort. The groups, websites and true believers keep on pushing their objectives a decade after the historic event. But the goal of revealing what really happened that the official government story does not divulge is like a mouldy piece of forgotten food in the refrigerator.

Movement death by inattention happens despite good resources, charismatic leaders and even great organization and communication skills. Critical mass of public support simply never materializes, in large measure because diverse segments of the population never buy into the central arguments of the movement. The Internet is littered with websites of activist groups that persist despite clear evidence of decay and wide disinterest. True believers have a mission in life tied to their egos that prevent them from admitting defeat. They do not move on.

The biggest mistake that passionate advocates for a cause make is overestimating their ability to reach critical mass and underestimating the competition of other movements with greater appeal which rob them of both attention and supporters.

Make no mistake; I totally and enthusiastically support the Occupy movement because it offers the prospect of producing reforms to fix our broken government and attracting very wide public support for a non-violent Second American Revolution. What worries me, however, is that many of its participants seem over confident, as if they cannot fail. On the other hand, I have become impressed by a convergence of thinking about what the next big step for the Occupy movement can and should be. I will briefly identify examples of this convergent thinking.

Canadian author Erich Koch has written a compelling article: An Objective for the U.S. Occupy Movement: A Constitutional Convention. He buys into the view that the Occupy movement could embrace the thinking of Harvard Professor Lawrence Lessig who has presented the case for amendments to fix Congress. Like others Koch is correct in saying that "No one in the movement would disagree with its main point: the fundamental problem

is the corruption of Congress.” Unlike others, Koch recognizes the path for obtaining reform constitutional

amendments is using the provision in Article V for a convention of state delegates, having the same power as Congress in proposing amendments that still must be ratified by three-quarters of the states. It has never been used despite many hundreds of state requests for a convention because, clearly, Congress and most status quo forces fear such a convention.

Koch cited a great article by Alesh Houdek: Has a Harvard Professor Mapped Out the Next Step for Occupy Wall Street? Most is a review of Lessig’s book. Correctly noted about using the convention option is “it bypasses the usual means of reform (Congress, presidential elections, etc.) which the lobbyists and other interested parties have learned so well to manipulate. And lastly, such a convention would be free to propose solutions that would otherwise be subject to be stricken as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.” This is critical to understand. Houdek concludes: “Properly presented, the strategies and aims of Lessig’s book could make it the handbook the protesters have been looking for — and provide a pathway for them to ride out the winter ahead.”

Dan Froomkin also has presented the same case in: Lawrence Lessig’s New Book On Political Corruption Offers Protesters A Possible Manifesto. He quoted what Lessig himself had said in an article about the Occupy movement and the concern that I share, namely that the Occupy movement “will become too diffuse and not focused” on the root issue of corruption of government. And that the movement will only grow “if a wide range of people can be part of it.” This requires coalescing around an issue “as fundamental as the corruption of the system.” Only a constitutional amendment can fix the corrupting impact of money in politics. This is also the focus of Dylan Ratigan’s fine effort, except that the use of the convention path has not been emphasized.

A specific call for an Article V convention was made by the pro-Occupy US Day of Rage group: “We are organizing a coordinated national campaign at local and state levels, including where necessary the occupation of state capitols, in order to demand an article V constitutional convention be called to restore representative democracy to our nation.” A set of specific reforms to fix the corruption-money problem are presented.

The 99 Percent Declaration group has also presented an important statement centered on the call for a National General Assembly, where delegates would formulate a petition of a list of grievances that would be delivered to the main parts of the federal government on behalf of 99percent of Americans. A suggested list of grievances includes the need for constitutional amendments to achieve solutions, but only for a few of the issues. Not explicitly acknowledged, however, is that constitutional amendments, not ordinary laws, would be necessary for other solutions, such as term limits for Congress and abandoning the Electoral College. Moreover, there is no specific recognition that serious amendment reforms will not be proposed by Congress, and that an Article V convention is needed. Inattention to method was also the shortcoming of a similar list of solutions by Ralph Lopez.

Author Scott Turow has presented: How Occupy Wall Street Can Restore Clout of the 99%. His

recommendation to the Occupy movement is “work across the nation for a constitutional amendment requiring Congress to regulate the expenditure of private money on elections.

...The best antidote to this imbalance of income and influence would be to greatly reduce the role of private funding in our elections. ...As for the Occupy Wall Street movement, it has been criticized by some for not having a realistic agenda, even though polling shows that millions of Americans, including me, are sympathetic to the basic message of the protests." His prescription: "rally around a single goal and reinvigorate their movement." Fine, but missing from his analysis is the recognition that Congress will never propose reform amendments, only an Article V convention will do the job.

This sampling of recent writings clearly shows convergent thinking that the Occupy movement can and should focus on key reform constitutional amendments and, second, that some better-informed critical thinkers recognize, this requires advocacy for using the Article V convention option that Congress has refused to honor.

As to Occupy movement success, I want again to emphasize that there is always competition for the attention and support of concerned Americans who recognize how broken our system is. In particular, the well financed Americans Elect effort is impressive. Because it is offering an alternative path to nominating a presidential candidate in 2012, over 2 million Americans have already signed up to be delegates for a web convention, with millions more very likely as the mainstream media keeps giving this effort attention. The Get Money Out campaign has over 250,000 signatories.

Disgust with the two-party plutocracy is surely shared by Occupy participants and supporters. But for movement success based on enticing many millions of Americans, the Occupy movement cannot ignore competition such as Americans Elect. This means that the Occupy movement must explicitly start making the case to the broad public why their effort can achieve more of what is needed. This is easily done.

Here are some key concepts that the Occupy movement could use. No matter who is nominated by Americans Elect, the odds are that either the better financed Democrat or Republican candidate will win the presidency. This may just require spending even more millions of dollars on campaigns. And whoever is nominated by the group will likely be strongly linked to one of the two major parties, rather than some courageous reformer and enemy of the status quo. Moreover, this group does not offer a realistic path to getting the key reforms of the system that most of us see critically needed, such as constitutional amendments, already recognized by many Occupy supporters.

A sign of trouble for the Occupy movement is a recent national poll that found: "In the latest survey, 33 percent voiced support for Occupy Wall Street, down from 35 percent in a previous poll, while opposition to the movement climbed from 36 percent to 45 percent. Twenty-two percent were unsure." These results are worse than earlier polls. From the left, Chris Bowers commented: "the decline in Occupy Wall Street's image is probably more connected to the

increasingly negative coverage of the clashes between protesters and police than it is to declining support for movement's message." Now is the time to move the message from what's wrong to solutions, using an Occupy Congress approach. Otherwise, this view from the conservative right might prevail: "OWS will linger ... but I'd argue we've seen the movement's high tide. It will now recede into a mere annoying shadow of itself as support is withdrawn by political figures and organizations."

True, Occupy movement success is not inevitable. The movement must better define what

success means and how it can be achieved if it is to attract and keep the support of many millions of Americans. It needs specificity for its solutions that ordinary Americans can relate to. Never underestimate the power and commitment of status quo forces to maintain control over the political, government and economic system that has so harmed most Americans. The fight against the Occupy movement mostly seen as local police violence against peaceful demonstrators and protesters as well disinformation from some news outlets and pundits are nothing compared to what could be mounted if the movement is viewed as more threatening to the status quo delusional democracy with its delusional prosperity.

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