



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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We are the 99% -- The Occupy Movement

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EXPERIENCE

8th Day Center for Justice has worked on economic issues since its founding in 1974. We have witnessed the ongoing struggles of communities made poor to claim a space in a cultural imagination and political discourse that is not shaped by the misconception that poverty is a choice.

The current discourse on poverty in the United States is shaped by the financial downturn that erupted in 2008. However our experience has shown us that many different communities locally and globally were struggling long before the "meltdown."

- Hospital workers struggling since the late 90s for a union that would protect basic rights for a 40 hour work week, appropriate salary, and benefits
- Poor Peoples Economic Human Rights Campaign strategies since the 80s to draw attention to the fact that economic security is a human right guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The work of the Inter-ecclesial Commission of Justice and Peace in Bogota working since the 90s for the rights of *campesinos*

displaced from their lands, lacking access to education, healthcare, justice, and a safe way to farm land that has been in their communities for generations

- Hyatt hotel workers who have been organizing since 2006 asked to choose between annual cost of living raises and health care.
- The Assembly to End Poverty formed at the U.S. Social Forum in 2010 to link local struggles to national trends and solidarity

Our participation in each of these different struggles has taught us that:

- Poverty is often mistaken as a personal problem rather than a systemic abuse
- Workers' rights have come to be seen as a "block" rather than an indication of progress
- International partners face struggles for economic justice with foreign governments and multi-national companies which are robbing the resources and rights of local communities
- The intersection of oppression related to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ability, and religion further complicate the obstacles communities face
- A seismic shift has occurred in the

response of companies and the government to the question of economic justice. Companies can find cheap labor all over the world. There is no need to care about the welfare of American workers

In the face of all these realities, enter **Occupy** in the fall of 2011 carrying one clear message: How the American worker, the 99%, survives is important and vitally so.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Notwithstanding the depth and breadth of human history let us go as far back as the 1980s. Let us return to President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the birth of trickle-down economics, the freeing of the free market, and the

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beginning (or return) of union busting.

They both busted unions, slashed social programs, “freed” corporations from pesky regulations while ushering in a new age of privatization. They laid a foundation that was expanded by President George H.W. Bush’s austerity measures, President Clinton’s free trade dream, and President George W. Bush’s privatization, deregulation, and war-making.

Enter 2008 when the mortgage sub-prime loan bubble burst on a scene that the previous leadership had stripped bare. Thirty years of economic policies that had left not just an empty warehouse, but rubble. The debris of once healthy unions, a comprehensive social safety net, and robust regulation was all that was left in the wake of 30 years of free market or, as many have called it, casino capitalism.

The Occupy movement is a direct answer to the last years of profit over people and earth. It challenges the notions that the government cannot afford social programs, that regulations kill profits, and that unions are crippling the public and private sectors. Occupy actively pushes against these economic mistruths while also pushing the boundaries of how we understand the economy.

The economy cannot be a project of elite intellectuals or corporate financiers. It must be a project of the people, by the people, and for the people. Occupy asks the question, who have we become? Have we become a society that only sees the dignity and rights of the 1%? Have we become a society that is leaving behind children, elderly, disabled, and more to ensure that the inheritance tax does not return? Occupy reminds us that the pressing social-economic concerns of the day are not answered by *if* we fix them but *when*.

REFLECTION

What is the America we envision? What is the America that will be? 8th Day’s social analysis process defines the economic system as, “the patterns of ownership and decision-making about land, capital,

technology, labor, resources.” It asks: Who owns? Who controls? Who gets? Who loses? Who bears the burden? The birth of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) came from a call to respond to the signs of these times and answer these questions. OWS is a leaderless resistance movement of people of many colors, genders, and political persuasions. The one thing all have in common is the knowledge born from experience that they represent the 99% who “bear the burden” of a grossly unjust economic system. They know, too, it is a system designed by the 1%, for the benefit of the 1% and is controlled by the 1%.

Contrast this to Catholic Social Teaching that urges us to ask how our most vulnerable members are faring. “In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.” www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/page.aspx?pid=297

Barbara Marx Hubbard, author, visionary, social innovator, evolutionary thinker, and educator reminds us that though we are in a time of crisis, we are the first species to realize that all life is interdependent and that we could render ourselves and all life forms extinct by our own actions. This realization is the greatest wake-up call we have ever had. It means our crisis is potentially a birth toward a co-creative, co-evolving humanity. It is by our choices that we can either be overcome by the problem or we can see this time of crisis for the possibility that it provides.

What does this mean for us? Dr. Marx Hubbard suggests, “It means that we have to develop synergistic cooperative social structures to evolve beyond the top down pyramidal systems that built civilization for the past 5000 years. They are not capable of helping us evolve the system because they are structured for separation and competition. We see it in politics, in religion, in business, in separate disciplines in our great universities.” As women religious who believe in our bones the interconnectedness of all life and desire to partner with others for good, how might we join forces with

such movements as Occupy Wall Street? How can we together imagine a different way of being for America? Dr. Marx Hubbard enthusiastically states, “American women religious are one of evolution’s most potent forces! Now is the time for the next level of evolutionary leadership to come forth consciously from this amazing group of prophetic, pioneering women.” (B. Marx Hubbard, *Centerings*, Chicago: 8th Day Center for Justice, Spring 2012.)

ACTION

Educate yourself about the history, philosophy, and strategies of the OWS movement.

- The Spark for Occupy Wall Street by Erin Middlewood in *The Progressive Magazine*: March 2012 mail.progressive.org/node/174846
- Oakland-Nonviolence & the Future of Occupy by Stephan Said, February 2, 2012 progressive.org/future_of_occupy.html
- Read the Shock Doctrine by Naomi Klein. It is the gripping story of how America’s “free market” policies have come to dominate the world—through the exploitation of disaster-shocked people and countries.

Participate with the local Occupy group in your city by attending their assembly gatherings.

Support the Occupy Movement with a personal or local house donation.

Listen to Democracy Now with Amy Goodman at www.democracynow.org/

Watch the evening news with questions in mind such as: Who decides? Who benefits from the decision? Who bears the cost/burden? What values are being promoted (or not) in this decision?

Join the May Day General Strike suggested by OWS—a general strike of the 99 percent on May Day—May 1—“No Work, No School, No Housework, No Shopping.” For more information visit wagingnonviolence.org/2012/02/occupy-wall-street-calls-for-may-day-general-strike/

Join JubileeUSA Network whose focus addresses International Debt relief.

www.jubileeusa.org

Invite 8th Day Center for Justice Staff to facilitate a social analysis process for your Congregation. www.8thdaycenter.org