

## Occupy Baltimore

Written by R.B. Jones

Friday, 02 December 2011 19:55

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I have visited Occupy Baltimore at McKeldin Square at the Inner Harbor twice. It is an ideal location for a protest against economic injustice. Several buildings owned by banks and financial institutions ring the site so the enemy is under surveillance from the encampment. Even the weather seems to be on the side of the protesters since there hasn't really been any cold, cold weather after the robotic mayor cut off the electricity. Jack Frost is the enemy of the Occupy Movement across the country. When the weather turns bitterly cold, the encampments will in all likelihood empty out however, but I doubt seriously if the movement will dissipate.

There is outrage against the government policies that favor the rich so completely that the bought and paid for federal government is cavalierly following policies that will destroy the country while trying to protect the financial elites. The America that the neo-conservatives, whom I call Fascists Lite, claim to love with such syrupy hypocrisy is being choked to death by the "one percenters" and I see not one glint of compassion in their eyes for the middle-class or the poor.

I enjoyed my two visits and my conversations with the protesters. They represent in many cases people who have been activated by the grim prospects in this broken economy. They represent elements of the traditional left in America, but there are many others who have had the ice water of economic oppression thrown into their middle-class faces more blatantly than ever before. Many of the protesters are people who can fall permanently out of the middle-class and they are terrified by their bleak prospects and the incessant screaming of the "one percenters" for more and more of the national wealth. It is not enough for the economic elites to rig the tax system in their favor. They want to totally shred what is left of the social safety net so that the poor can hit rock bottom even harder.

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I believe that the Occupy Movement is one of the last chances this country has to make change without lakes of blood pooling in the nation. The principles of the Occupy Movement as delineated to me downtown are complete democracy; everybody's voice is equal and nonviolence although they have been recipients of police violence across the nation. Also, the Occupy Movement embraces homeless people and provides them with food and shelter as part of their vision of economic justice.

Many commentators, even those who are supportive have said that the Occupy Movement needs to develop specific demands and it should develop hierarchical leadership. They suggest that having identifiable leaders would enhance their ability to make deals and win concessions. I think it is good that they have not. With collective decision-making there is collective accountability and less chance that a compromised leader will sell out the movement or deliberately sabotage it. The democratic decision making forces people to think for themselves when they are accustomed to follow whichever charismatic Pied Piper is leading them to destruction.

The Occupy Movement is good for the country and I hope that the mayor does not attack the demonstrators and force them out because then the energy of the economic justice movement could morph from peaceful civil disobedience to outright rebellion. Repression and dispersal by police forces will not destroy the Occupy movement. It is grounded in the realization that class warfare in America is as old as the nation itself and the losing side is waking up to the nature of power relations in America. The naked, predatory behavior of the economic elites is not even covered by a fig leaf any more. The police can clear McKeldin Square, but the lessons have already been learned. A police attack here like the ones in Oakland, California and other parts of the state and the forcible clearing of the occupiers in New York City will not destroy the movement. Many people formerly members of the middle-class or despairing aspirants to the middle-class believe their prospects are bleak. Not many people believe in the Horatio Alger myth that all one needs to prosper in America is hard work and a plucky attitude.

The looting of stockholders in Enron and other corporate ponzi schemes has sent a message loud and clear. The class war is intensifying and the losers are forced to subsidize the winners as the nation has spent trillions of dollars of taxpayer funds to bailout banks and other financial institutions while they lay off workers when their pockets are full.

The members of the Occupy Wall St. movement have not reached a critical mass yet but their slowly building momentum could easily make them a force to be reckoned with by the 2012 elections. They represent a current of unrest that will not easily be pacified and might not be bamboozled the way they were in 2008. I don't think the movement will disappear and

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repressing it is a major political mistake in a time when there is very little optimism about America's shrinking economy. James Baldwin used to say "Man shall not live by profit alone." I would add that America will not last long with money flowing one way to the one percent alone.