

## 12. Strange Contours: Resistance and the Manipulation of People Power\*

Edmund Berger

Without substantial social reform and redistribution of economic assets, representative institutions - no matter how 'democratic' in form - will simply mirror the undemocratic power relations of society. Democracy requires a change in the balance of forces in society. Concentration of economic power in the hands of a small elite is a structural obstacle to democracy. It must be displaced if democracy is to emerge.

Barry Gills, Joen Rocamora and Richard Wilson<sup>1</sup>

All reformers, no matter how radical they thought themselves to be, could be (and have been) caught up in reform structures whose underlying purpose is to reduce the inharmonics of the existing social system.

James Weinstein<sup>2</sup>

Even as attempts to curb protests through evictions and violence are conducted across the country, the movement is spreading - every day, more and more flock to their local parks and city centers, rallying under

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the banner of “Occupy!” First it was Occupy Wall Street, a call put out by Adbusters, a quasi-Situationist organization that has been at the forefront of the ‘culture jamming’ ethos since 1989. From there, it was Occupy Chicago, Occupy Los Angeles, Occupy Boston, Occupy Omaha. The movement has gone global, with protestors catching the *Zeitgeist* in London and Rome. Regionalized discontent led to international solidarity in Greece, as further austerity measures loom on the horizon - imposed by none other than a government that dares to call itself socialist.

The central concept of the OWS movement is populist in nature, harking back to those that resisted capitalism’s harsh realities in the earlier parts of the 1900s: there is a major disconnect between the 99% of the population and the 1% that acts as the center of wealth and power. At the core, this division is rooted in Marxist terminology, the proletariat versus the bourgeois and their exploitation. We demand democracy, the multitude is saying, from Lexington, Kentucky to Madrid, Spain. We demand freedom from economic exploitation, freedom from indentured servitude to the moneyed class, freedom to live our lives with a higher degree of autonomy than has been allowed by those who seek to manipulate and oppress for their own material gain. Be they students in the universities, underpaid workers who need government aid to live, or citizens horrified that a piece of every paycheck is going to bail-out reckless firms and to support foreign wars, the multitude is gradually realizing that *they* are the engine of this world, and that it is time for them to sit in the driver seat. But all is not right in the movement. It is in times of unrest and cries to social change that hegemony rears its ugly head. Since time immemorial, overt repression has been swapped for the far more subtle process of assimilation - the system acknowledges its defects, and then harnesses people power and guides it by hand into compromises that leave the primary mechanisms of domination intact. Radical change is exchanged for the more ‘mature’ approach of working *within* the system. This is a very real threat to the Occupy movement, one that needs to be acknowledged and resisted by any member who truly believes in striving for a better tomorrow.

### **Egypt: the Inspiration**

OWS’s genesis lies not just in Adbusters, but in the Spanish Indignants movement, a coalition advocating grassroots democracy in reaction to the impact of the international financial crisis on their nation. Leading

the coalition is a group by the name of ¡Democracia Real YA! (Real Democracy NOW!), which called for international solidarity and protests on October 15th. Adbusters responded with a poster portraying a dancer atop the Wall Street bull, and request for people to join together to occupy the 'second capital' of wealth and power in the United States - Wall Street.

¡Democracia Real YA!'s initial inspiration for the international protest was the shocking success of 'Arab Spring',<sup>3</sup> the multi-country revolt that succeeded in toppling one of the world's worst dictators, the US-backed Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. The opposing coalition, consisting mainly of tech-savvy youth organizations such as the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution and the 6 April Youth Movement, has been a consistent icon and inspiration for the Occupy movement, and rightfully so - it is one of the rare examples of people pushing for social change and *getting it*. So often we see revolt being crushed under the wheels of power, organization shattered, and violence suppressing hope. But even with Egypt, questions must be asked.

Ideological solidarity is giving way now to direct ties being formed between these desperate threads that are disrupting the international order. Egyptian activist Mohammed Ezzeldin gave a rousing speech to protestors in NYC's Washington Square Park, discussing the direct lineage between the two revolts. "I am coming from there - from the Arab Spring. From the Arab Spring to the fall of Wall Street," he said. "From Liberation Square to Washington Square, to the fall of Wall Street and market domination, and capitalist domination."<sup>4</sup>

*Wired* magazine has also reported that Ahmed Maher, one of the founding members of the 6 April Youth Movement, has traveled from Egypt to Washington D.C.'s McPherson Square to directly interact with the Occupiers there and advise them on courses of action. For sometime now Maher has been communicating with the protestors in the multitude's medium of choice - "We talk on the internet about what happened in Egypt, about our structure, about our organization, how to organize a flash mob, how to organize a sit-in, how to be non-violent with police"<sup>5</sup> - but this will mark the first time that he has come face to face with the people he refers to as his "brothers".

## Behind and Below the Masses: the Revolution Factory

The Egyptian revolt, much like its counterparts in Tunisia and Libya, was a direct fall-out from the processes of globalization; namely, the

domestic impact of US policies that were driving high the price of essential living commodities. As reported in the McClatchy Newspapers:

The Fed [Federal Reserve Bank] has been engaged in what economists call 'quantitative easing,' buying U.S. Treasury bonds to attack the threat of deflation - the phenomenon of falling prices across an economy.

Quantitative easing has the effect of raising asset prices, whether they're the prices of stocks or what traders are willing to pay for commodities such as wheat or corn. One of the side effects of this policy is that the dollar weakens against other currencies, and that's helped push up the global prices of commodities.<sup>6</sup>

As the article notes, the Fed's quantitative easing has led to wheat prices rising 70% over the past year, certainly bad news for the country of Egypt, which stands as the US's eight largest export market. With an economy pried open by the International Monetary Fund to a flood of international products under the banner of benevolent 'structural adjustments', the skyrocketing prices in the US means skyrocketing prices in Egypt. With an oppressive leader under the thumb of the United States military, the stage was ripe for revolution. In other words, Egypt, like the other countries involved in 'Arab Spring', was on the surface revolting against domestic policies; at its core; however, the revolt was against the structures of Late Capitalism, the mechanics of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri refer to as "Empire" - the international monetary system that is rapidly rendering the concept of the 'nation-state' obsolete.

So Mubarak is toppled and the Egyptian people seemingly liberate themselves. And what is the result? The country comes under the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Led by Mohamed Hussein Tantawi (a man described as "Mubarak's poodle" for his loyalty to the disposed leader<sup>7</sup>) the Council has declared to honor all existing political treaties and agreements, as well as maintaining the neoliberal stance of its predecessor. "We are not moving back to a socialist past," Egypt's temporary government has declared,<sup>8</sup> as the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, and the European Investment Bank plan to descend upon the country with an "action plan" for foreign investment and "sustainable growth".<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Washington and the IMF's program will go unchanged as it moves from Mubarak's dictatorship to the new parliamentary democracy. How did it happen? How did we get from point A (the

masses, infused with revolutionary potential) to point B (a cosmetic facelift of the prevailing economic system)? An analogous situation can be found in South Africa, where the spirit of the revolution was laid down in a document known as the Freedom Charter. In this document we can find declarations such as “the national wealth of our country, the heritage of South Africans, shall be restored to the people... the Banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole.”<sup>10</sup> Yet when the dust settled after 1994, a radically different picture emerged: the apartheid-era finance minister, Derek Keyes, remained in his position as head of the South African bank; the ANC signed onto the international General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; the World Bank was free to impose restrictions on socialized business models; and the IMF exerted authority over the approach to issues such as minimum wage. In the words of one activist, “they never freed us. They only took the chain from around our neck and put it around our ankles.”<sup>11</sup>

The dominant system will always resist widespread structural change, and the most common method of doing this is through the power of non-governmental institutions. (See also Merz, Chapter 10, Barker, Chapter 11, Berger, Chapters 18 and 19 and Fisher, Chapter 20.) Foundations constitute a main apparatus of this process - “everything the Foundation did could be regarded as ‘making the World safe for capitalism’, reducing social tensions by helping to comfort the afflicted, provide safety valves for the angry, and improve the functioning of government,” said McGeorge Bundy, the long-time president of the Ford Foundation.<sup>12</sup> There is also the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a brainchild of the Reagan administration that seeks to provide a capitalist economic framework for developing nations, and ease former left-wing states into a financial and militaristic stance in line with Washington’s key values. The NED receives its funding from the State Department through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and in turn funnels the money into four subsidiary organizations: the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), and the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center). The NDI and IRI are allied with their respective American political parties, while the CIPE is affiliated with the US Chamber of Commerce. The Solidarity Center, on the other hand, is a program of the AFL-CIO labor union consortium. Other NED funds flow into Freedom House, a US-based human rights organization that has been described as a “Who’s Who of neoconservatives from government, business, academia, labor, and the press.”<sup>13</sup> American

libertarian politician Ron Paul has provided an excellent analysis and critique of the whole ‘democracy promoting’ apparatus:

The misnamed National Endowment for Democracy is nothing more than a costly program that takes US taxpayer funds to promote favored politicians and political parties abroad. What the NED does in foreign countries, through its recipient organizations the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute would be rightly illegal in the United States. The NED injects ‘soft money’ into the domestic elections of foreign countries in favor of one party or the other. Imagine what a couple of hundred thousand dollars will do to assist a politician or political party in a relatively poor country abroad. It is particularly Orwellian to call US manipulation of foreign elections ‘promoting democracy.’ How would Americans feel if the Chinese arrived with millions of dollars to support certain candidates deemed friendly to China? Would this be viewed as a democratic development?<sup>14</sup>

After playing a role in the ‘color revolutions’ of Georgia and the Ukraine, the NED’s attention then turned to Egypt. (See also Berger, Chapter 19.) A recent *New York Times* article has revealed, citing WikiLeaks cables, that the disparate bands of dissident groups have been receiving “training and financing from groups like the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and Freedom House.”<sup>15</sup> Verification independent of the *New York Times* article can be found as well. Madeleine Albright, former Clinton-era Secretary of State and chairman of the NDI, appeared on MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow Show to give her analysis of the events in Egypt. “You mentioned that I was chairman of the board of the National Democratic Institute,” Albright says to Maddow in the interview, responding to the pundit’s questions concerning the post-Mubarak government. “We have been working within Egypt for a very long time, in terms of developing various aspects of civil society, and dealing with various and talking to opposition groups who are prepared to participate in a fair and free election.”

Freedom House also openly admits their role in fomenting the unrest. In a May 2009 report, the organization discusses their “New Generation Project” within Egypt, seeking to empower the nation’s “Youtube generation” by “promoting exchange” between “democracy advocates” and “emerging democracies” to “share best practices,” “providing advanced training on civil mobilization” and helping them

understand the benefits of ‘new media.’<sup>16</sup> In 2008, representatives from the organization attended the Alliance of Youth Movements, an activist summit funded by the State Department, Facebook, MTV, Google, and Youtube to provide a fertile meeting ground for ‘digital activists’ and the corporate leaders behind ‘new media.’ The summit has subsequently been the topic of a set of leaked WikiLeaks cables, describing an unnamed activist who presented there “his movement’s goals for democratic change in Egypt.” This same unnamed activist then met with a series of US Congressmen, discussing with them an “unwritten plan for democratic transition” of Egypt into a parliamentary democracy, a plan that had been accepted by “several opposition parties and movements.”<sup>17</sup>

Disturbingly, this is the same milieu that Ahmed Maher, now an adviser to OWS, travelled in. As researcher Tony Cartalucci has reported:

This of course isn’t Maher’s first trip to the United States. Years before the Egyptian revolution, the United States was quietly preparing a global army of youth cannon fodder to fuel region wide conflagrations throughout the world, both politically and literally. Maher’s April 6 organization had been in New York City for the US State Department’s first Alliance for Youth Movements Summit in 2008. His group then traveled to Serbia to train under the US-funded ‘CANVAS’ organization before returning to Egypt in 2010 with US International Crisis Group (ICG) operative Mohamed ElBaradei to spend the next year building up for the ‘Arab Spring’.<sup>18</sup>

CANVAS (Centre for Applied Non Violent Action and Strategies) was founded in 2003 by the Serbian youth organization Otpor! (Resistance!), which utilized nonviolent methods of revolt to bring down Slobodan Milošević. Not surprisingly in the least, the organization had received millions of dollars in funding from both the NED and IRI<sup>19</sup> while CANVAS itself has worked closely with Freedom House.<sup>20</sup> Given the close ties between these youth-based activist organizations and US State Department’s bureaucracy, perhaps it is distressing to note that former Otpor! Member and leader of CANVAS, Ivan Marovic, has given talks at the OWS rallies in NYC.<sup>21</sup>

## The Right's Favorite Boogeyman - and a Useful Opportunity

Perhaps the centerpiece of the Egyptian Revolution was the individual Mohamed ElBaradei, a director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency and presidential hopeful for Egypt's parliamentary democracy. ElBaradei, however, has ties of his own to suspicious Western interests - he sits on the board of trustees of the International Crisis Group, which has been described by Madeleine Albright as a "full-service conflict prevention organization." Despite this astute observation, the membership rosters of the Crisis Group's various chairmen, trustees, and directors shows a significant overlap with affiliates of the National Endowment for Democracy: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Morton I. Abramowitz, and Stephen Solarz are just a handful of Crisis Group members who represent the interests of both. Here we can find the favorite whipping boy of the right-wing media, the billionaire philanthropist George Soros. Vilified as some sort of a socialist by the likes of Glenn Beck and Michael Savage, Soros, in truth, is far from that sort of ideology. A key figure in the transition of former Soviet states into the world of globalized capitalism, Soros helped engineer the economic 'shock therapy' that thrust Poland into a financial tail spin as extensive structural adjustments rattled the already crumbling economy.<sup>22</sup>

Soros, despite being a clear member of the 1%, has publicly stated his support of OWS:

Billionaire financier George Soros says he sympathizes with protesters speaking out against corporate greed in ongoing protests on Wall Street... Soros says he understands the frustrations of small business owners, for instance those who have seen credit card charges soar during the current crisis.<sup>23</sup>

There are ties, albeit indirect ones, that can tie Soros to the fledgling Occupy movement. MoveOn.org, a regular recipient of Soros funding, has thrown its weight behind the protestors in an apparent sign of solidarity. As *TruthOut's* Steve Horn writes:

On October 5, Day 19 of Occupy Wall Street, MoveOn.org sent out an email calling on clicktivists (as opposed to activists) to 'Join the Virtual March on Wall Street.' "The 99% are both an inspiration and a call that needs to be answered.

So we're answering it today, in a nationwide Virtual March on Wall Street to support their demand for an economy that serves the many, not the few... Join in the virtual march by doing what hundreds have done spontaneously across the web: Take your picture holding a sign that tells your story, along with the words 'I am the 99%,' wrote Daniel Mintz of MoveOn.org.<sup>24</sup>

MoveOn.org has a long history of left-wing co-option; as people flooded the streets of American cities in protest of the Iraq War, the online institution dove right into the populist fervor and proceeded to utilize people's discontent with the Bush administration to garner support for John Kerry's presidential campaign. The same process was repeated just a handful of years later, with MoveOn.org acting the second largest lobbying organization for Barack Obama (aside from the President's own Organizing for America). Through a strategic ad campaign - one of MoveOn's personnel is John Hlinko, a "social media marketing expert" - the organization managed to create a literal army of voters for Obama, reinforcing that the same "hope and change" imagery that was being pumped out by the campaign itself. Both MoveOn and Organizing America's methodology was a foreshadow to the systems of new media utilized by the Arab Spring protestors; this tool is now being called "netroots," the transporting of traditional grassroots activities into the virtual sphere.

MoveOn.org is not the only group chiming in to support for OWS. Rebuild the Dream, a progressive-style organization founded by former Obama White House adviser Van Jones, has championed the protestors - "Let's all support Occupy Wall St." reads a blurb on their website homepage. During an MSNBC interview, Van Jones directly linked the OWS movement to the Arab Spring, stating "you are going to see an American Fall, an American Autumn, just like we saw the Arab Spring."

However, the institution changes that OWS is calling for contrast sharply with Jones' vision of how to take America back: "We're talking about U.S. senators who want to run as American Dream candidates - soon to be announced. We've reached out to the House Democratic Caucus; there are House members who want to run as American Dream candidates."<sup>25</sup> Simply put, Rebuild the Dream is an unofficial organ of the Democrat Party, much like how MoveOn.org utilized, mobilized anti-war protestors to generate a large sector of the Democrat's voting base. In actuality the ties run closer than that - Jones had worked hand in hand with MoveOn.org to initially launch Rebuild the Dream. Furthermore, he had been a senior fellow at Center for American Progress; the

progressive institution has received funding from both George Soros<sup>26</sup> and the Democracy Alliance organization, where Soros sits on the board of directors.

Co-option of social activism has always been the *modus operandi* of the Democrat Party. They play “the role of shock absorber, trying to head off and co-opt restive [and potentially radical] segments of the electorate” by posing as “the party of the people”.<sup>27</sup> President Obama, riding the crest of the MoveOn.orgs of the country - and not to mention a well orchestrated propaganda campaign - has fit this concept to a T, something that has even been noted by members of the liberal establishment:

Two and a half weeks after Obama’s victory in the 2008 presidential election, David Rothkopf, a former Clinton administration official, commented on the president-elect’s corporatist and militarist transition team and cabinet appointments with a musical analogy. Obama, Rothkopf told the *New York Times*, was following ‘the violin model: you hold power with the left hand and you play the music with the right’.<sup>28</sup>

Liberal commentator Thomas Frank has observed the process of “voting for one thing, getting another” at work in the Republican Party:

The trick never ages; the illusion never wears off. Vote to stop abortion; receive a rollback in capital gains taxes. Vote to make our country strong again, receive deindustrialization... Vote to get governments off our backs; receive conglomeration and monopoly everywhere from media to meatpacking... Vote to strike a blow against elitism; receive a social order in which wealth is more concentrated than ever before in our lifetimes, in which workers have been stripped of power and CEOs are rewarded in a manner beyond imagining.<sup>29</sup>

Is it really any different for the Democrat Party? Vote to end wars, receive troop escalation and change only years after the fact. Vote to allow workers to retain their rights, receive trade agreements that export jobs overseas. Vote to reign in the power of Wall Street, receive taxpayer-funded bail-outs that create moral hazards and prop up corrupt financial regimes. From the left to the right, the story is the same - the great violin keeps playing cheerfully as the world burns. It’s only the

hands grasping it, not the system that change.

One of the clearest portraits of co-option in recent history would be the history of the conservative Tea Party Movement. In its infancy, the Tea Party was a movement launched by libertarian politician Ron Paul, a staunch opponent of the government's infringement on civil liberties, its use of military force on foreign soil, the monopolization of the financial market by entities such as the Federal Reserve Bank, and the crony capitalism that eventually erupted into the bail-outs. Aside from certain economics view, there is certainly a great deal in Ron Paul's - and the early Tea Party Movement's - agenda that is entirely compatible with the demands of the Occupy Movement; it is for this very reason that libertarians have begun to reach out and join in solidarity with the protestors. Furthermore, given the anti-foreign aid and anti-Federal Reserve stance of the early Tea Party Movement, there can perhaps be observed an unspoken lineage between the Tea Party and the uprisings in Egypt and surrounding countries, triggered by Western support of the people's oppressors and the monetary policies of the Federal Reserve.

Just as Soros controls the purse strings to disrupt and redirect leftist movements into positions aligned with the Democrat Party, the right can find his counterpart in the Koch brothers, the billionaire owners of the little-known Koch Industries. With their money bankrolling organizations such as Americans for Prosperity, David and Charles Koch were able to train torrents of so-called Tea Party activists whose espoused viewpoints far more in line with typical Republican dialogue than with Ron Paul's libertarian ethos. The focus was shifted from attacking the Fed and ending the wars and towards union-busting, securing borders, and more often than not, reinforcing unequivocal US support for Israel - a direct clash with stance that Paul has taken on the topic.

This 'astro-turfing' of grassroots movements, of course, requires multiple organizations and front groups to create the veneer of a unified public opinion, and operating alongside Americans for Prosperity is FreedomWorks. Perhaps it is worthy to take into consideration that when the organization was created from a 2004 merger between the Koch-funded Citizens for a Sound Economy and the neoconservative Empower America, several prominent NED officials sat on the board of directors of the former - including Vin Weber (an adviser to Mitt Romney's ill-fated 2008 presidential campaign), Jeane J. Kirkpatrick (one of the most prominent of Cold War-era hardliners), and Michael Novak (an expert at the neoconservative think-tank American Enterprise Institute).

The Tea Party's assimilation into the broader spectrum of the Republican political arena was marked by the establishment of the Tea

Party Caucus, a coalition of House of Representatives and Senate members that represents perhaps the most powerful political body sitting in the US government - this consortium of leaders are essentially calling the shots when it comes to the right-wing of the American political system. Its members show utter disregard for the original protests of the Tea Party: Louie Gohmert has been a strong and vocal supporter of the war in Iraq, Steve King has openly supported the lobbying industry for their “effective and useful job[s]”<sup>30</sup> and Dennis A. Ross was a member of the United States House Oversight Subcommittee on TARP, Financial Services and Bailouts of Public and Private Programs. Joe Barton eviscerated any ideological tie between himself and the early stages of the movement that he claims to rally behind (not to mention a disregard for any allegiance to the notion of really existing free markets) by arguing that the removal of subsidies to oil companies would act as a ‘disincentive’ and result in the corporations going out of business.<sup>31</sup>

Curiously, the place where this whole process of right-wing co-option began - the corporate-financed milieu of Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks - was intended to be a “powerful answer to the challenge presented by the Left and groups like America Coming Together (ACT), MoveOn.org, and the Media Fund.”<sup>32</sup> All three of these organizations are Soros-financed, revealing the hidden irony that ultimately, these seemingly opposing institutions are simply moving potentially disruptive individuals into an entirely compatible paradigm of power that sits in the dual capitals of Washington D.C. and Wall Street. However, this odd dialectic can be entirely useful. Realizing this process will allow individuals who yearn for legitimate change on either side of the aisle to separate themselves from the system, and hopefully, discover the disparate strands that are ideologically compatible between them and their counterparts. It is a rare opportunity for the discontents of ‘left’ and the ‘right’ to shake off the labels applied to them and create an open dialogue and eventual solidarity with one another.

## Conclusions and Other Thoughts

Though it may certainly seem like it, this essay was not written to belittle the OWS movement, or attack the actions of those who stood in opposition to Milosevic, apartheid, or Mubarak. However, it was my intention to acknowledge the shortcomings in the aftermath of these fights - Serbia and South Africa both jumped into bed with the IMF,

imposing austerity measures in their nations that allowed persistent poverty to fester and even continue to grow. Egypt is certainly following suit now, so even though the brutal fist of the American-backed regime is gone, the slow-burning fires of neoliberalism continue to carry on the torch. For Serbia and Egypt, their revolts, though brilliant displays of the potential of people power, were in no small part shaped by the technicians in State Department, operating through the long arm of the NED. For South Africa, money from George Soros ended up in the coffers of activist groups who quickly changed their tune from the ANC's quasi-socialist demands to jump starting South African neoliberalism.<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly, these same groups showed a willingness to work closely with the NED.<sup>34</sup>

The NED, much like Soros' civil society empowering programs, promotes a little known methodology called low-intensity democracy.

Low-intensity democracies are limited democracies in that they achieve important political changes, such as the formal reduction of the military's former institutional power or greater individual freedoms, but stop short in addressing the extreme social inequalities within... societies. ... they provide a more transparent and secure environment for the investments of transnational capital... these regimes function as legitimizing institutions for capitalist states, effectively co-opting the social opposition that arises from the destructive consequences of neoliberal austerity, or as Cyrus Vance and Henry Kissinger have argued, the promotion of 'pre-emptive' reform in order to co-opt popular movements that may press for more radical, or even revolutionary, change.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, it can be considered to be worrisome that individuals who were trained under institutions that implement this system are turning up at OWS rallies. While the NED's agenda is to establish low-intensity democracies around the world, this is precisely the type of governance that we are dealing with in the United States, the very system that produced the antagonism found in both the Tea Party and OWS. To consent to it would be a rejection of the spirit of the protest and an embrace of what it opposes.

It is the Democrat Party that could possibly represent this system even more so than the Republicans. It is the party of Social Security, government-provided medical care, and other welfare programs. Does this function of the party not dim and obfuscate the fact that it is also

the party of bail-outs and NAFTA? Realizing this simple fact is paramount to creating a movement of legitimate change in the world; we must seek to deconstruct low-intensity democracy and replace it with Really Existing Democracy. We have already seen this functioning in a micro-sense at OWS rallies, where leadership positions are voluntary and voted in by the whole of the people. Decisions are made in a similar matter, putting the course of action and the direction of the movement in its entirety in the hands of the protestors, not in bureaucrats and moneymen with agendas of their own. It is organic and autonomous, and on an international level holds to be what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari referred to as a 'rhizome' - "a nonhierarchical and noncentered network structure".<sup>36</sup>

There are further reasons to be optimistic about the movement's direction. The official OWS website hosts a petition with a "formal demand that MoveOn.org leaves" - "this is OUR movement and it is NOT Obama's personal reelection campaign," it reads.<sup>37</sup> The leftist online newspaper *TruthOut* has called attention to MoveOn.Org and Rebuild the Dream's attempts to cozy up to the protestors, while Michel Chossudovsky, the professor emeritus of the economics department at the University of Ottawa, has published a piece for his Centre for Research on Globalization detailing the arrival of NED associates at OWS rallies.

There is an opportunity here. We live in a time marked by crisis, catastrophe, poverty, and war, but it is in times of disruption like these that rifts open in the landscapes of the global system, providing people with a chance to take the wheel, if they so choose. For America, this time arises from the great disappointments of our so-called democratic process - the hookwinking of the masses by the left-right one-two punch by the back to back presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack H. Obama has led more people to step back, reconsider their presumptions about the world's machinery, and begin to demand that their voices be heard. What happens from here, with the choices marked by the path to liberation or the well-worn roads of hegemony, is entirely contingent on the will of the people.

## Notes

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