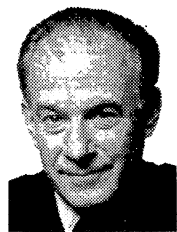


THE OCCUPIERS

Our 'global spring' of discontent

What's intriguing about the eruption of Occupy Wall Street is that it's so similar to other populist movements that are demanding change in nearly every major region of the world. You can't help but wonder if we aren't seeing, as a delayed reaction to the financial crisis of 2008, a kind of "global spring" of discontent.

Obviously, circumstances differ: The anti-corporate activists gathered in Manhattan's Zuccotti Park have a different agenda from that of the demonstrators in Egypt's Tahrir Square, or last summer's rioting street protesters in Britain and Greece, or the anti-corruption marchers in New Delhi. These movements mostly lack leaders or



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VIEWPOINT

clear ideologies, so they're hard to categorize.

But the protesters do share some basics: rejection of traditional political elites; belief that "globalization" benefits the rich more than the masses; anger about intertwined business and political corruption; and the connectedness and empowerment fostered by Facebook and other social media.

This neo-populism is all the more striking because it seems to transcend traditional political boundaries. The tea party movement may wear conservative colors, but it arose as a protest against elites in Washington and Wall Street who were seen to be profiting at the expense of everyday people. Occupy Wall Street comes at these same issues from the left, but the two movements have much in common.

The Arab Spring is the world's most potent populist movement, sweeping away governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. These uprisings began as leaderless explosions of indignation — blurring the usual lines of capitalist and socialist, Muslim and Christian. These cleavages have

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returned, especially in Egypt. But the core of the revolution there remains a rage against traditional elites.

Protests in Europe have the same note of mass indignation. In Greece, Italy and even France, you see the anger of the middle class that their debt-eneebled governments can't deliver on welfare-state promises. In some countries, such as Britain and Germany, there is unrest, too, among growing immigrant populations that are not tethered to national cultural or political norms.

Even in the boom countries, such as China and India, there is the turmoil that comes with rising expectations. According to China's Ministry of Public Security, the country experienced 87,000 incidents of popular unrest in 2005. That's 238 protests a day! The Chinese stopped publishing the number after that, but it surely hasn't gone down. India, too, has seen a rising tide of protest, symbolized by the mass street marches last summer that surrounded Anna Hazare's hunger strike to protest corruption.

It's a stretch, perhaps, to look for shared themes in such dis-

parate countries. But these movements seem to have a common indignation toward leaders who are failing to maintain social justice along with global economic change.

That's certainly true in America, where the tea party and Occupy Wall Street both rage against a financial elite that stumbled into a ruinous recession — and then got bailed out by a Washington elite that's in hock to special interests. The tea party, especially, tapped the bedrock American mistrust of big banks, which dates back to Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. Growth and prosperity would restore public confidence, as in the past. But this time, the anticipated recovery — and deflation of popular anger — still seems a few years away.

Europe's neo-populism will surely increase, as countries struggle with painful economic adjustments. Population is actually declining in most of Europe, which means there will be fewer young workers to pay for the pensions of retirees. To regain competitiveness and solvency, wages and the quality of life will have to decline in many European countries. Meanwhile,

according to a recent study by the National Intelligence Council, Western Europe's Muslim population could increase by 2025 to 25 million to 30 million from the current 15 million to 18 million, adding additional strains. There's no sign yet of a new European political leadership that can accomplish the necessary rewrite of the social contract.

Much of the world's neo-populist anger is justified, given the greed and folly of recent years. What worries me is the echo of the 1930s, a similar period of economic change and dislocation. When the traditional business and political leaders seemed to have failed during the downturn of the '30s, populist indignation veered sharply right and left — toward dangerous movements that expressed national indignation at the point of a gun.

America was lucky then to have had, in President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a charismatic politician who could rehabilitate the center. And now? Not so lucky.

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Drop the labels for the Q-C event at LeClaire Park

Dear Quad-Citizens: I could just as well have addressed you "American Springers," as I do on my fliers, because I feel that only such as these might appreciate my humble commentary here. I am the event organizer for our upcoming political soap box community gathering in LeClaire Park,



Farinha

Davenport, and I wanted to reach out to you per my genuine hopes for this event.

I would like to ask you to drop your political guard for the moment it takes to read these words. I am calling for a transcendent event Oct. 22. Transcendent of liberal verses tea party, Republican verses Democrat. Transcendent of race, ethnicity, and all other such trivialities.

For in the end, I confidently believe that this curious movement which now occupies the title Occupy Wall Street can indeed transcend all of our false dichotomies, false insomuch as such presuppositions effectively pit us against one another. Nothing is truer than that all human beings are sacred, precious, worthy of the love of one another. Any belief system which purports to set persons against persons is therefore deeply profane, worthless, and worthy of our greatest condemnation.

Therefore am I calling upon all political partisans, all ethnicities, all ages capable of reason — all men and women of good will. Come and gather in this wonderful fall season, hopefully on a wonderful day, but nevertheless, surely perfect if indeed we gather in good will.

Let us mount the soap box in our uniquely American tradition which embraces true diversity, and which has managed to stand as special and international example, of the potential of mankind.

Roger Farinha
Davenport