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# What Occupy Wall Street Has Taught Me

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Have you seen *Hard Times: Lost on Long Island*? The film won the Audience Award/Best Documentary at the Hamptons International Film Festival in October. The documentary follows a group of unemployed men and women, ranging in age from their late thirties into their sixties, who are looking for work while living in certain middle class suburbs on Long Island. I had not seen the film during the festival itself, but when I screened it the other day, I realized the true meaning, for me, of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

*Hard Times* is a disturbing film that puts a face to the unemployment crisis in America in a rather effective way. At times, talk radio broadcasts play over footage of the principals as they trundle off to another day of staring down their own obsolescence. Over the airwaves, voices of people like Rush Limbaugh can be heard exhorting his listeners about the evil of unemployment benefits and how such programs only encourage procrastination and sloth.

In America today, we are told that unemployment now hovers at around nine percent, while other sources insist that those statistics are underreported and are closer to 12.5 percent. At nine percent, we are confronted with a situation where one in eleven working Americans is

We have learned many lessons in the past three years. One important lesson, I believe, is that bailouts of major corporations in any and all industries is counterproductive to long term economic health. And not simply direct infusions of cash as loans, tossed like gargantuan life preservers, in moments of greatest perceived dread. I'm talking about the bailouts the US government gives major corporations every day. The excessive fees forced on customers by certain banks, not to mention the predatory lending practices of the mortgage industry (coupled with the remarkably stupid borrowing of certain homeowners).

Another example is that we have no high speed rail in this country. Typically, you fly or you drive. So airlines are free to tack on fees to remain profitable the way that oil companies are free to manipulate oil production, and thus the price of gasoline. You bailed out the airlines every time you did not demand more effective, intermediate range travel, i.e. high speed rail. You bailed out the oil companies every time you watched (were you watching?) as American troops went to Iraq to fight a war for oil. You bail out American business, and help them maintain an often false veneer of profitability, every time you send nearly every member of the current Congress back to Washington. Maintaining US corporate profitability is the single goal of this Congress. Because that is what the corporations who own the Congress paid for when they bought the Congress.

Every thing I have put forth here, I have heard articulated from the Occupy Wall Street movement. Some of it was not news to me. I have grown up in the latter half of the 20th Century. When the Greatest Generation was replaced by the greediest generation and what was known as the Protestant Work Ethic became a quaint chestnut. The definition of success became getting the most for doing the least. It became about getting away with what you can and the only issue was getting caught. Which pretty much defines the Wall Street culture of today. Never have the world's greatest financial markets been controlled by such dangerously short-sighted people as they are today. And never has this country been cursed by a more incompetent and derelict Securities and Exchange Commission as we are today. In the wake of 9/11, America attacked a perceived terrorist community with all it had. In the wake of some of the worst financial scandals in US history, the SEC took a dive, throwing the fight in the first round.

Occupy Wall Street people understand that not only are more difficult times possibly around the corner, they know that the current government will likely do as they have historically done, which is to protect the rich and powerful at the expense of the long term interests of the middle class. Some of the most financially successful people in America continually remind us all that capitalism is a contest. There are winners and losers. And the winners want to enjoy their success and they want the losers to keep it down. The noise of the vanquished is spoiling the victors' fun.

OWS talks a lot, too much in fact, about One Percent versus Ninety Nine Percent. As if success itself were a crime. That's a mistake. But what OWS has helped to remind me is that One in Five is a far more unsettling ratio. Twenty percent unemployment. In the 21st Century United States.

There won't be enough cops any where in this country to rip down all the tents that are going to pop up in places you never imagined if we hit that figure. That's what OWS has taught me.

In my next post, let's talk about how Ray Kelly is running for Mayor of New York and how he'll never get there without paddy wagons full of Wall Street money, which is why he had the boys hose down Zuccotti Park.

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