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The Occupy Movement

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Even if you avoid the media at all costs and spend your days locked in your room, you have heard of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) by now. However, you may not have all the facts.

To most, OWS started on September 17th 2011 at Zuccotti Park, but it really began in July in Canada of all places. Bloggers for Canadian magazine, Adbusters, said, “[W]e want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months.” Occupiers wanted to fight for “one simple demand” and follow the example of the protesters in Egypt and other places around in the world participating in the nonviolent revolutionary movement, which is being called the Arab Spring.

Their one demand called for “a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington.” Only about 1,000 protesters arrived on the first day, labeling the movement a bust, and forcing those involved to question whether OWS would die out before it ever got started.

Instead of pushing harder for their one issue, they expanded the cause to make room for other issues. Occupiers issued a list of 23 grievances against major corporations in place of their original demand. Since then, OWS has grown not only in numbers, but the number of related movements has increased as well.

Occupy Wall Street has now become Occupy Together. Occupy groups meet in over 1,500 cites internationally. Protests are held in Nigeria, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom, and other countries. In some cases (the UK), it is American Occupiers leading the charge. The movement has shown no signs of slowing down, despite losing its media attention in the U.S.

Occupiers compare themselves to the protesters of Egypt. If you make this comparison, it is clear that, despite the growth, Occupy has not met its primary goal: political change. It took less than three weeks to go from Egyptian protests beginning in Tahrir Square to President Hosni Mubarak’s resignation. Occupy in the U.S. has gone on for months and has not been met with the same results. In fact, it has been the opposite.

The Occupiers have been met with force and have mostly been chased out of their “occupied zones” and out of the media. While the members are still around drumming up as much support as they can and attempting to alert the media to their demands, the media has not followed them. Instead the media circus has chosen to follow the movers and shakers of the Republican caucus and other more pressing political matters. Does this mean the Occupy Movement has failed? After all, it was met with force from every major city; there is even a meme featuring the policeman who pepper-sprayed peaceful protestors at University California Davis on November 18th, 2011. Every major city has repressed its Occupiers in some way shape or form. The November news was full of violent outbursts between Occupiers and the police force; reports of veterans being sent to the hospital, old women being pepper sprayed, and a general refusal of any major government officials to listen to the movement’s demands.

However, Occupy Wall Street and its sister movements have not gone away completely. As of early February 2012, there is a Political Science class at Roosevelt University in Chicago teaching the Occupy Movement. There are still local Occupy Movements in full swing, including some ISU students, such as Danielle Ryun, a sophomore majoring in History. She has participated not only in Occupy Des Moines, (and was arrested for standing up for her first amendment right to peacefully assemble), but also at Occupy the Courts in Washington D.C. Like many other people still dedicated to making change in the states, Ryun says that the Occupy Movement has always been about “returning democracy to the hands of the people, instead of [leaving it with]in the grip of corporations”. Ryun would like fellow students to think of “people power” when they think of the Occupy Movement. “Occupy is still in its infancy. In fact, we are fighting the same essential fight that other social justice movements have been fighting for over a century” she says and continues to fight for her cause.

The Occupy Movement is, at its heart, a developing counterculture, demanding change and slowly but surely working toward it. People who believe in the power of democracy and have the courage to demand an America built on justice and equality help it along.