

# 'Occupy' Movement Surfaces in Tulsa

The "99 Percent" movement continues to grow, surfacing not only in New York, Washington and other major cities like Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles but in smaller cities, even in conservative bastions like Tulsa, Oklahoma, as Richard L. Fricker reports.

Richard L. Fricker

The first question that the perplexed, the bewildered and the surprised ask about the "Occupy" movement is, "What do they want?"

This is the wrong question. To understand the movement you must first ask, "Who are these people and why are they here?"

One answer was aired last weekend by Rachel Dennis, a 28-year-old book artist working at Whole Foods in Tulsa, Oklahoma: "As I've educated myself on this movement I started to realize our goals are really simple. Many of us hoped for change, and then we voted for change.

"We wanted our voices heard; we participated in the democratic process. Then we realized the government is no longer focusing on us as individuals, it's not about us anymore. Our interests are not being put in mind.

"I don't blame Obama at all, it's not Obama's fault. He didn't realize how manipulated our government had become. He truly believed change could happen but change was prevented. He wanted change, he meant well, but it just couldn't happen. We have to take to the streets to make our country be what it can become."

Dennis is one of about 50 "Occupy Tulsa" volunteers preparing for the national demonstration slated for Oct. 15. Organizers say groups around the United States will hold demonstrations in their respective cities to show support for the Occupiers who have maintained a vigil on Wall Street for nearly a month.

There is not an exact count as to how many cities across the country have Occupy group supporters but the group is estimating at least 1,000. Nor is it for certain that the larger cities have only one group and may, in fact, host two or three Occupy groups.

But the fact that the movement has reached Tulsa is significant. President Barack Obama failed to carry a single Oklahoma county. Then, the off-year elections in 2010 saw Tea Party and ultra-conservative candidates sweep virtually every elected state office and reduce Democrats to the level of

concerned observers in the state Legislature.

“Occupy Wall Street,” now in its third week of demonstration in New York City, remains the movement’s nexus. Yet, also interesting is the number of large and medium cities in which “Occupy” solidarity groups have formed, such as Tulsa.

Dennis was addressing Occupy Tulsa organizers in a public park Saturday. The previous day local unions joined Occupy Tulsa for a downtown rally in front of the new civic events center which was sponsored by the Bank of Oklahoma.

While the turnout was sparse, between 100 and 200 during the Friday lunch hour, compared to the tens of thousands who have demonstrated on Wall Street, the mood was unmistakable, and, for conservative Tulsa, unusual to say the least.

Judging from car horns and passersby the movement’s support was very positive. According to organizers the only opposition to the movement thus far has been a few anonymous phones calls and threats.

The change Occupy is demanding comes in several flavors on several levels.

The overall theme is: Occupiers are generally middle-class workers, housewives, students, seniors and the unemployed. They are, in general terms, responding to what they perceive as the corporate takeover of the political process, inaction by Congress on any number of issues and Supreme Court ruling allowing unlimited donations by “corporate citizens” to political campaigns.

In simple terms, Occupiers feel disenfranchised by the political process. They also feel powerless against the flow of jobs out of the United States to Third World countries; they feel unheard on the subject of social issues such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, education, healthcare and homelessness.

The national president of the Postal Workers Union, Cliff Cuffey, told the group: “We all know that 1 percent of this country has all the wealth; they’re sitting on it. The wealth they don’t sit on they spend overseas, creating jobs overseas.

“We want them to break that money lose and invest in our country. We need people to have jobs in this country, to be able to pay taxes in this country, to support our country. Tell those one-percenters to bring the money back and not spend it overseas.”

Citing his contact with Congress as the head of a large union of government workers, Cuffey said, “A Republican from Tennessee said, ‘Ya’ll are doing so well, what do I go back and tell my people in my county? In one of my counties we have 23 percent unemployment. What do I tell those people?’

"I said, tell them you lied about the 'Right to Work,' it was not a right to work."

Cuffey also sounded the theme that the labor/occupied movement may not be a flash in the pan. He said, "You have people right now in our government who want America to fail. They want the working people to fail. They will not be satisfied until we are back in the 12th Century when working people say 'Yes m'lord, yes m'lady. Will you pay me something?'"

Returning to his contact with Congress, he said, "They want to know why we have homeless veterans. Well, there's not jobs. They want to know why Social Security is failing. There's not enough working people to pay into Social Security.

"They won't get down and have investigations as to the true cause of these problems. The true cause is that the 1 percent take all their wealth and they take it overseas to hire cheaper labor. Then they bring their cheap crap back without tariffs, and we buy it. We've gotta stop buying it. They're selling it to ya we gotta stop buying it."

He concluded, "We need to hold their feet to the fire."

Another union officer told the crowd, "We will not stand by while you [corporate America] take our jobs."

Occupy Tulsa organizer Daniel Lee addressed the crowd, saying, "We are a movement of people, individuals like yourselves, the 99 percent. We are the people that built this country, this state, this city, NOT the corporations."

Lee did not hesitate to take on detractors of the Occupy movement, especially Republican leaders who had previously dismissed the group as malcontents and those wishing to live off the system.

"You want to talk about Producers and Parasites? WE are the producers, and the fat cats at the top are the parasites. Both parties are corrupt, bought up, sold out."

Echoing a common complaint among Occupiers, Lee said, "We try to change things by voting, but the corporations' bribe money outweighs our vote! The government is deaf to the voice of the people so we must take to the streets!

"Enough! We have had enough! We will not be silenced! We will overcome!" He ended his speech with a call for "Solidarity."

Occupy Tulsa has now turned its attention toward the Oct. 15 demonstration supporting Occupy Wall Street. Organizers are reluctant to estimate how many will turn out to support the Occupy movement.

One thing is clear: this movement has a life-force as yet unseen on the American political-social landscape. Whether in New York, New Orleans or Tulsa the mainstream of communication has been social networking.

One of the prime organizers for Oct. 15 is Stephanie Lewis, local businesswoman and member of Industrial Workers of the World, also known as the Wobblies. Wobblies were founded at the turn of the last century as an all-inclusive labor movement at one time boasting a membership of 300,000.

Lewis says the Occupy Tulsa group started on Facebook a week ago. Initially there were 200 interested responses; as of Saturday she said there were 3,900 responses and new sign-ins.

At this point the group is working on plans for the downtown march. Asked if she anticipated arrest, Lewis noted it was the group's intent to be peaceful and law abiding. She added, "We are actually working with the Tulsa Police Department to make sure we don't get into a situation where we have to get arrested.

"But many of us have a point of view that if we have to get arrested, to not make bail. If we load the jail down with people that are being arrested that is also part of what we're going to do as part of this movement."

Lewis said plans are not complete as to whether or not to actually occupy a bank or other facility. She said if such action were taken the group would like to rely on the element of surprise.

One tactic appearing on various websites around the country is "flash" occupations. A group would use Twitter or iPhones to announce a certain location for a group to descend upon for a brief period of time to draw attention to the movement.

Asked about the possibility of arrest, Rachel Dennis said, "We are a peaceful movement so my hope is that arrest won't take place. But I guess we'll find out."  
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Another organizer, Kendra Zoellner, is a mother to two young children and teaches Social Work at Northeastern State University. She found out about Occupy Tulsa via Facebook and other Internet sources. She joined the movement because of what she sees as a need for social justice that has gone wanting in the U.S.

Zoellner cites her professional code of ethics, saying as a social worker it requires her to work for social justice. "People," she said, "don't think they have any power."

"Ultimately I'm here," she says, "because I believe in social and economic

justice for all people. And we don't have that in this country right now."

While she is quick to point out that the Occupy movement is not affiliated with any political party, Zoellner does say, "To me, when I think about being Democrat or Republican the Republicans are saying 'we are the Christian party, we're the religious party,' yet the policies they enact are mostly unethical, immoral and inhuman, there's no sense of justice.

"People are saying I'm a Christian, but I don't want healthcare reform. If you're a Christian and ask what would Jesus do, would Jesus really let hundreds of thousands of children starve to death? People are mad at the injustice, people are mad that they don't count anymore."

Two things have become clear: if there were a tipping point that ignited the Occupy movement it might well be traced back to two events, the Supreme Court ruling allowing unlimited corporate donations and Rep. Eric Cantor's and Sen. Mitch McConnell's intransigence on the debt ceiling.

In virtually every conversation the campaign issue is mentioned as limiting the power of the common voter. Additionally, the discussion touches on the lack of responsiveness by Congress to the social needs of the electorate in deference to corporations and the 1 percent whom they believe control the vast amount of wealth in this country.

Just what, if any, impact the Occupy movement will have on the social fabric of this country, or the political landscape in the coming elections remains to be seen.

This much is known: a movement such as Occupy Wall Street is unparalleled, communications among the groups is instantaneous and any misstep by the authorities will be flashed across the country before the spin doctors can get to a microphone.

There is a naiveté about some of these Occupiers, but there is also a dedication that they want to be heard. It may well be that the politicians sneering at this movement have been so drenched in their own ideology that they have, in fact, lost sight of the electorate.

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# Freedom Plaza Protesters Settle In

**Exclusive:** The Park Police have agreed to let protesters camp out at Freedom Plaza in Washington D.C. for four months as they press their demands for a shift in national priorities from war and greed toward jobs and peace. Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern reports on a anti-war march to the White House.

By Ray McGovern

Exhilarating is the most appropriate word to describe our assembly since Thursday on Freedom Plaza, our "Tahrir Square", in Washington, D.C., called into being by [October2011.org](http://October2011.org). And it appears we will be staying for the duration to exercise our freedom to assemble to petition for grievances, peacefully, unless the National Park Police go back on the stay they granted us Monday evening.

Last Thursday marked a sad anniversary, ten years since the U.S. attacked Afghanistan, even though its rulers offered to hand over Osama bin Laden once they were provided with proof of his complicity in the attacks of 9/11.

Recently acquired official government documents authored by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld provide further proof that White House and Pentagon leaders, after cultivating and playing to a traumatized popular propensity for revenge, launched war on Afghanistan and later Iraq for imperial/strategic reasons that stretched far beyond retaliation for 9/11.

According to [a memo](#) made public by the National Security Archive on the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said, before launching the war in Afghanistan, that the United States needed a broader response than simply attacking al-Qaeda.

"If the war does not significantly change the world's political map, the US will not achieve its aim," said the memo from Rumsfeld to then-President George W. Bush on Sept. 30, 2001.

"There is value in being clear on the order of magnitude of the necessary change. The USG [US Government] should envision a goal along these lines: New regimes in Afghanistan and another key State (or two) that supports terrorism."

After Rumsfeld's memo, the United States deployed air strikes and special operations to support Afghan insurgents in driving the Taliban government from power. Then, even as bin Laden and his top lieutenants were cornered in the mountains of Afghanistan, Bush ordered the U.S. military to shift its focus to Iraq.

Bin Laden managed to escape to Pakistan and the deeply unsettled political situation in Afghanistan was put on the back burner, as Bush and his neoconservative advisers built a case for invading Iraq based on false claims about its possession of WMD and ties to al-Qaeda.

The Iraq War and the resurgent war in Afghanistan have now claimed the lives of more than 6,000 American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans, as well as costing the U.S. taxpayers over \$1 trillion and counting.

### **White House Visit**

So, on Day Four of our “occupation” in DC, hundreds of military personnel, veterans and families against war marched at noon Sunday from Freedom Plaza to the White House to ask President Barack Obama, “Where’s Our Beer Summit?” The Secret Service would not forward our petition, but rather gave us a telephone number to call.

At an impromptu assembly across from the White House in Lafayette Square, a mother of a U.S. Marine gave a very moving talk about her son, who has orders to go back to Afghanistan early next year for his FIFTH deployment to the area.

Her voice, and the voices of other mothers in similar pain, reminded me of what I have come to regard as a universal truth; that mothers grieve in such circumstances in ways that the rest of us cannot even comprehend.

After I added some remarks, videographer Bill Hughes asked for an interview off to the side. The first thing that came to mind was a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian poem by Nikolay Alekseyevich Nekrasov, the first line of which is “Paying attention to the horrors of war.” It is a poignant commentary on the unique, “sacred, sincere tears” of mothers of the fallen. [Click

<http://warisacrime.org/content/video-ray-mcgovern-reflects-horrors-war>]

I tried to provide a translation on the fly, but could not do the poem and the feelings justice. Translations into English also fall short. Here’s one stab at it (not by me).

*Hearing the terrors of the war, sore troubled,*

*By each new victim of the combat torn –*

*Nor friend, nor wife I give my utmost pity,*

*Nor do I for the fallen hero mourn.*

*Alas! the wife will find a consolation.*

*The friend by friend is soon forgot in turn.*

*But somewhere is the one soul that remembers—*

*That will remember unto death's dark shore,*

*Nor can the tears of a heart-stricken mother*

*Forget the sons gone down on fields of gore.*

*One soul there is that like the weeping willow*

*Can never raise its drooping branches more.*

You are all invited to join us on "Tahrir Square" in Washington.

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for a total of 30 years; is now on the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity and a member of Veterans for Peace.**

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## The Never-ending Terror Threat

For a decade now, the American people have been told that only a "long war" against Islamist extremism can keep them safe from terrorism, even at the cost of trillions of dollars and loss of their liberties. Not even the death of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden changed the tune, says Ivan Eland.

By Ivan Eland

Now that the big kahuna, Osama bin Laden, has been killed, the "War on Terror" is much less exciting.

Even before Osama's demise, experts sent chills through the massive post-9/11 U.S. government anti-terrorism bureaucracies by concluding that the threat from al-Qaeda had been much weakened by the group's own bloody excesses against civilians, many of whom were Muslims.

Yet the way government works, every agency needs a threat to hype to keep the cash flowing in from scared taxpayers. So the anti-terrorism agencies need to keep the threat, however declining, fresh in the public mind and publicize their efforts to successfully combat the danger.



Recently, two incidents illustrate the extent of the government's refrain that the "terrorists are (still) coming, the terrorists are (still) coming!"

As the public has tired of drawn-out, muddled and costly (in blood and treasure) counterinsurgency wars in faraway places that seem to have only a tangential relationship to battling insidious terrorists, technology has ridden to the rescue.

Now any U.S. president can kill potential terrorists with pilotless drone aircraft much more cheaply and without casualties from putting troops on the ground. For example, the U.S. is using such technology in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen to take out alleged Islamic terrorists.

Recently, an American drone successfully assassinated Anwar al-Awlaki, a U.S. citizen who spoke fluent English and was inspiring Islamist militants with charismatic speeches. U.S. authorities also made vague allegations that he was operationally involved in the BVD (underwear) bombing and a plot to blow cardboard boxes on cargo planes out of the sky.

Even disregarding the obvious problem of what legal authority the United States used to justify violating the Fifth Amendment's prohibition on taking life, liberty or property without due process, the Justice Department's legal memo justifying Awlaki's killing is classified, and Awlaki doesn't seem to be covered by the post-9/11 authorization for war, which only approved military action against those who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks or harbored the attackers, the U.S. government clearly hyped the threat that Awlaki posed.

Awlaki was little known in the Middle East, and one knowledgeable scholar termed him "a-dime-a-dozen cleric." Thus, his importance to the war on terror was largely a creation of the American government and media.

Seeing the opportunity for some free publicity, what terrorists crave, al-Qaeda then pushed Awlaki further into the manufactured limelight.

And now that the U.S. has made him a martyr by assassinating him on the basis of secret criteria, vague allegations, and no due process, the State Department had to put out a worldwide travel alert to American citizens warning of retaliatory attacks to avenge Awlaki's death.

Also as part of the post-9/11 terrorism hype, the government has created a terrorist watch list containing 420,000 names, with no public disclosure of the criteria used to put that many people on it and no due process for such persons to answer the allegations. If only a fraction of that massive and wildly inflated list is trying to do harm to the United States, we are all in trouble.

In sum, in the war on terror, the U.S. government hypes the threat to justify expanding anti-terrorism efforts and budgets, argues that war is the only means to effectively combat the inflated threat (instead of using low-key intelligence and law enforcement measures, which don't generate more terrorists by poking the hornet's nest), and creates a wider retaliatory threat by using such draconian military action.

This wider danger is used to justify the need for even harsher military action, and the action-reaction cycle escalates. In sum, the government is creating the demand for its own services; private businesses should be in awe of such ability.

And not only is the government hyping the terrorist threat, it is creating it.

Like the hapless BVD bomber, who didn't even have a bomb big enough to bring down the airliner, a graduate student the FBI recently arrested for plotting to blow up the Pentagon and U.S. Capitol with hobbyists' remote-controlled aircraft would have been foiled by the fact that the planes just couldn't carry enough explosives to do the job.

The student, a U.S. citizen, got very different treatment than Awlaki. Instead of being assassinated, he was arrested, but before that, the U.S. government purposefully helped him. The government, in order to entrap him, gave him money and grenades, assault rifles, C-4 plastic explosives, and even the remote-controlled aircraft to carry out the attack.

Without all this money and equipment, the student would have likely been no threat at all. In fact, according to The New York Times, Carmen M. Ortiz, the U.S. attorney in Boston, admitted, "The public was never in danger from the explosive devices."

This is not an isolated case. In similar cases, the FBI has provided the means to carry out terrorist attacks but then arrested the alleged plotter. Such entrapment provides opportunities for people to do what they otherwise would not or could not do.

And Muslims have complained that the FBI is targeting their community with such "gotcha" tactics.

Such governmental hyping of the terrorist threat, or actual creation of it, to justify greater federal coercive action makes one wonder whether to fear more the low probability of a successful terrorist attack or the massive, expensive and intrusive government efforts to combat it.

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Institute. Dr. Eland has spent 15 years working for Congress on national security issues, including stints as an investigator for the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Principal Defense Analyst at the Congressional Budget Office. His books include *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed*, and *Putting "Defense" Back into U.S. Defense Policy*.

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