OCCUPY ALBANY
Why Should You Care?
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Education Loans are predicted to reach 1 trillion in debt on April 25th.
The interest rate on subsidized Stafford loans will double to 6.8 % this year.
The 5% interest rated Perkins loan program (Federal) will expire in 2014.
Banks gambled with housing loans which threatened our economy.
Banks were then bailed out. The Banks continue to report profits.
In NY State today, there are 2,103 Homes listed as Foreclosures.
Who is bailing out your neighbors who lost those homes? Not the Banks!
Corporations are funding elections which influence political decisions.
There are corporations who pay no taxes.
These corporations also get government subsidies (our money).
There are corporations that run offshore to defer taxes indefinitely.
The 99% cannot keep absorbing these costs; It’s time for greedy corporations to pay their fair share.

Join a group, get informed
STAND UP.... FIGHT BACK.
This country was founded on Democracy;
Let your voice be heard.

Recently I attended a Non-Violent Direct Action Training session at Albany’s Occupy location. Non-Violent Direct Action Training aims to bring together people in numbers with a common interest to make change. The Non-Violent part is emphasized and takes precedent over the direct action portion of the phrase. Direct Action is the “sending of the message” segment. This message is amplified by taking part in the unexpected, or by refusing to do what is expected. One famous example: Jim Lawson was asked by Martin Luther King to train others in non-violent actions in the south. One organized event aimed at restaurants not allowing blacks to eat at lunch counters. On queue groups of blacks sat at lunch counters across the city. When they were arrested, the next group would be seated. This continued on and by the end of day 82 were in jail. After ten weeks, the mayor conceded and the lunch counters were de-segregated in Nashville.
Journal Entry 1: On April 10, 2012 I entered the Occupy Albany headquarters on Madison Ave. I was cheerfully greeted at the door by Siobhan Burke and Mark Shaeffer. This welcome lowered the apprehension and anxiety I felt. The meeting room was decorated with handmade posters and paintings reflecting issues the organization is addressing. One decoration caught my attention. The caption “You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it’s right” -- Rosa Parks. I recall the story of Rosa refusing to give up her seat on the bus and that triggered the year long bus boycott. It melded in with the theme of Occupy. Due to my early arrival I had time to talk to some of the attendees. It was easy to delineate the seasoned volunteers from the new comers. I met the leaders of the training Susan and Elric who were from the Move-On organization.

The training was well organized, beginning with multiple handouts and some fliers to advertise upcoming “events.” The agenda was posted, as well as the norms the members were to adhere to. Susan announced if we could not agree to either the Agenda or the Norms, kindly step outside until the training session was over. This set the tone that they were serious about the training and assured adherence to the topic at hand. The norms were: Work toward goals and Agenda, Respect the Speaker, Step up, Step Back(Quiet people speak up, Verbose people throttle it back), Work for solutions (don’t just complain), and Focus on the topic at hand. These seemed reasonable terms.

We were shown a movie The 99% Spring, which stated with monologues of volunteers and their stories that depict the impact of the 1% on the 99% of the populous. The movie was paused and we broke into groups to tell our own stories. Our stories enabled us to empathize with others, and began building a sense of belonging to the group. Siobhan explained her dad was a second generation Irish immigrant who bought some property and livestock. She explained how large industry dairy farms made it increasingly difficult for small farms to be profitable. They lost just about everything except for the plot of land.
Mark described his advanced education and that he opted to work for the State. This was a lesser paying job, but the Medical and Retirement benefits were very good. He loved being an activist and was very knowledgeable of politics and history. I too had a story. Over 25 years ago my coworkers in the Mid-Hudson valley were 10,000 strong. In the 90’s the company started trimming cost, including Layoffs, shifting health care costs to employees, and forcing employee’s to a “new cash balance” retirement program. These layoffs continue even as profits continue to rise.

Each group then compiled their issues into “the Story of US.” The list was comprised of the Highly educated but underemployed, Retirement Savings plummeting, Education debt, Unemployment, Close to homeless, Struggling to pay bills, Rising health care costs, Home values dropping below what owed, Grants dropping, Not funding jobs, Youth having no future, and Elections costing too much for common persons to participate. It was an eye opening experience to hear all the issues facing such a small diverse group of people in one room. I felt a bit of regret that I let little things bother me knowing the larger issues in the room.

The next activity was to take the group list above and put it in the statement “We want a different future Where”: For example, struggling to pay bills became We want a guaranteed minimum income and tax equity. This ensured our group list was not a complaint as agreed to in the norms, but an actual goal that actions could be assigned to.

The system is rigged to favor the few at the expense of many. Now that we have identified the issues, we have to take a stand. We repeated “we are the 99%” a few times and returned to the video. We watched a history of non-violent direct actions in the U.S. This included Martin Luther King and other passive resistance movements. They described Rosa Parks as a younger woman and being a well-trained activist which is contrary to what some movies depict. They touched on the dichotomy of the constitution and slavery, and the taking of Indian land. They acknowledged Harriet Tubman with
assisting slaves in the Underground Railroad to freedom. The Industrial factories in Lawrence Mass had poor working conditions. The workers united and went on strike just to be recognized as humans.

We did a hassle line exercise where one person was the banker and the other wanting to close h/er bank account because the bank threatened to foreclose on the person’s home. With no training, both sides got very loud, violated personal space, and hand gestures were plentiful. We then watched the video on control. Pointers were to meet volume and lower voice in a metered fashion hopefully deescalating the situation. The second hassle line exercise was still engaging, but the tension and overall volume was much lower.

The last exercise was in planning an event. This was a very strong module, since we were planning a real action that was to take place the following Tuesday. The methodology is to follow a Tactic Star diagram. First we set the goal and the strategy of attaining the goal. The goal was to raise awareness of corporations taking advantage of loopholes so that they pay no taxes. Our strategy is to drive 4 trucks with corporate emblems of the offending companies through a giant loop hole. Our target: the general public with media coverage. The planning went over time; putting a person in charge of large tasks such as recruitment, media, permits, visuals, contingencies, Scouting, Safety, and the dry run. This gives accountability to one person and is easier to attain status of project.

The most memorable module was the last one where Attorney Mark Mishler explained what may happen legally. He started out with what policemen will do in a non-violent situation; they will verbally give a warning notice that if you continue you will be arrested for (put charge here). It’s up to the discretion of the police to give further warnings, follow through and arrest, or do nothing. Mishler went on to describe the tie wrap restraints or hand cuffing, the booking process, and the issuance of an appearance ticket, if a judge is not available. He noted that normally the Albany police are very tolerant and really don’t want to go this far for a peaceful protest. He went on to detail the arraignment, plea negotiations usually ending in an ACOD. If negotiations fail, a Prep for trial occurs, kind of a mini trial
where defense states viewpoint, the Prosecution responds, the Defense makes motion to dismiss based upon the 1st amendment, etc. The prosecution responds and the judge decides if charges are dismissed or not. If not, a non-jury trial of guilty or not guilty follows. If found guilty, sentencing commences. Non-criminal violations commonly draw 15 days in jail, and/or a $250 fine, or both. A misdemeanor like trespassing in the 3rd degree nets 3 months in jail, and resisting arrest 1 year in jail. A flowchart and definitions of legal terms were passed out as well. Lastly, Mark listed personal circumstances that could complicate your arrest. He mentioned not to carry any form of weapon, have any outstanding warrants, fake Id’s (as in the SUNY Student), drugs, in the country illegally, on parole, or if you have a serious medical issue. At the conclusion, Sue and Elric thanked the instructors and attendees.

It was now close to 11pm; I was getting tired and still had an hour drive back home. The trip down the thruway had me pondering what my next step if any would be.

Over the next few days I reflected on the training. The session on telling our story parallels the introduction in Leob’s Soul Of A Citizen. We are too consumed in our own personal world where we struggle to pay bills; we worry about layoffs, and rising health care and education costs. Unconsciously we detach from being aware of the external world and fixing issues, just to survive. But therein lies the conundrum. A November 2011 Marist poll found that 45% of those earning less than $50,000 have a good or great understanding of OCCUPY. Compare that to the 77% who earn over $100,000. The numbers indicate awareness of OCCUPY’s message has not reached those who need it most. I can see where training people to go out and start satellite organizations can improve awareness. I don’t want to focus on one issue; the intent of the training is to show how to coordinate an event. Perhaps this training will groom another Virginia Ramirez (Leob). Virginia was a high school dropout who was raising a family of five. She participated in a few functions like baking cookies for the PTA. Her elderly neighbor’s home did not retain heat in the winter. She went to the city’s agencies to get help, but was unable to elicit any action. The neighbor died of pneumonia which made Virginia angry, how nobody
helped. Virginia stopped into a Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) meeting at church to tell the problem to the group. The onus was placed back on Virginia who had no idea what to do, so she left disappointed. A few days later an organizer of COPS visited Virginia and encouraged her to hold a neighborhood meeting and gather concerns. This was very similar to the Non-Violent training session where we shared our story. Virginia held the neighborhood session and came back to COPS telling them the community itself had been overlooked with public funds. Together they gathered facts on the diverting of funds and brought them to the city council. Virginia now had the training, the tools to make a difference, just like the group that went to OCCUPY Albany that night.

Praxis Journal 2) April 17th, tax day - I participated in my first protest. This was the protest we planned for during our training. We met at 5pm at the Karner Road Post office in Colonie, NY. In the parking lot across the street were two police cars within view. I wondered if this was going to go smoothly, or if we would be disbanded before our point was made. I did not have any intention of leaving and felt we were acting within the boundaries of the law. The plan was to join forces with Move-On members to strengthen our presence. The date chosen was “tax day” to highlight those Companies that don’t pay taxes while the 99% do; or who get subsidies that offset what little taxes they do pay.

I was given a poster with bold letters “TAX the 1%” and I joined in the walk back and forth on the sidewalk for about an hour. I could not help but see the dedication, energy, and passion the demonstrators had. The Postmaster approached the group and asked us to stay off the property. A kind conversation ensued reminding him that earlier in the week Occupy went to bat for him by protesting the Saturday Closure proposal of the Post Office. A compromise was reached whereby we would only stand on the front few feet of the property, just off the sidewalk and not block the view of the entrance.

It was time for the main event. A huge loop of rope suspended from poles was strung across the drive way entrance. This loop of rope was touted as a loophole. The loophole that was so big you could drive a truck through it. Two trucks bearing the trademarks of Exxon-Mobile, GE, and Verizon proceeded
to pass through the loophole. To add more drama, the drivers wore masks resembling the CEO’s of the tax dodging companies... Brilliant! Since the post office had a separate entrance and exit, this was repeated five times. My brother came along and took a video of the event and turned it over to Move-On. We concluded the day with a longer march to where the postal vehicles were parked, and returned.

The police never left their vehicles and I noticed they were no longer around. Everything was packed up and returned to Occupy’s headquarters on Madison Ave. On the drive home my brother and I talked about this being our first demonstration and the apprehension we first felt entering the event, and having police presence. Although there was no media coverage, we felt the event was a success. Over 300 vehicles passed by seeing our signs, the video would be posted on the web for others to see, and we walked away with a new experience, and more importantly new acquaintances.

This event brings to mind the question, how else can we influence these companies? We had just advertised their greed which is a positive step. Somehow, I don’t feel shaming them in the public is effective. Would it be possible to boycott Verizon on a large scale for a day? That would mean not to use your Cell, landline, or DSL/Fios for 24 hours. Boycotts have gotten attention in the past. The term originated from a landowner’s last name. His servants protested against evictions and unjust rental prices. Even the Post Office refused to deliver his mail (Crenshaw & Jackson). Referring back to the training, we defined ahead of time how we would measure the success of the event. We did not do a debriefing at the end. Many sources refer to it as a post-mortem. This is where you discuss what was done well, what could be better next time (Kouzes and Posner). Also record any new ideas while it’s fresh in our minds and write it down so it can be planned into the next action.

Praxis Journal 3) April 18, 2012 4:30pm - Occupy Poughkeepsie met in front of the Chase Bank on Market Street. This event focused on the Banks that gambled with home loans and nearly destroyed our economy. At the inception there were 15 people, the majority holding signs directed at foreclosures.
This being my second action I felt a bit more at ease. A chant was started, "The Banks got Bailed out.. We got Sold out."

We stayed for 20 minutes as our numbers grew to 30. The group marched from Rt 44 to the main event. In the banks outer drive-through lane was placed a carpet, table, and a couch with four OCCUPYers seated. They were evicted from their homes and now found a place in the parking lot to reside. The group’s number maxed at around 40. We had just ordered pizza for the evicted, when the police arrived. The two officers were surprisingly sympathetic and hinted they would delay action the best they could.

After 20 minutes the bank manager told the police we were trespassing and the evicted were given a formal verbal warning. This being a peaceful demonstration, we obliged and moved the furniture back into the mini-vans. The group convened on a side street and held a quick session covering the positives of the action. Before departure, everyone put their hands in a circle and shouted “Occupy.”

Once again I was intrigued by the creativity of the group. How they tied in the evicted and put them in a setting such as a bank drive-through right in front of Rt 44/55 which is a three lane highway at rush hour. I estimate there were more than 1000 cars that witnessed the event.
Praxis Journal Entry 4) On April 22, 2012 - I attended the General Assembly of Occupy Poughkeepsie in the Christ Episcopal Church. Attendance was sparse, since they had just finished a video shoot earlier in the afternoon. I was fortunate to meet Jeff who explained that the video shoot comprised of two minute interviews on people’s thoughts on what Occupy meant to them. The meeting started with a recap of events that occurred that week. The six Occupiers residing at Hulme Park continued to clean up and tend the flower beds they planted. The group was also instructed by police they could no longer sleep on the sidewalk (where they were sleeping after being evicted from the park). They could however remain if they slept on the wall. This way they were not in the park after curfew and not blocking the sidewalk. The wall was is only 18” wide and made of stone. I couldn’t imagine how uncomfortable and cold slepping there must be. A video was posted of the signs they made in chalk on the sidewalk advertising Occupy. We reviewed the demonstration on bank foreclosures as noted in Journal entry 3. Although the media did not show, three radio spots were conducted over the phone. General discussion
ensued. Russell shared his challenges in getting students at DCC to become involved in issues like student debt.

The activities over the past month leave me with a sense that there are passionate people willing to sacrifice for what they believe in. I have witnessed volunteers spending hours to make events run smoothly. World Views has opened up a different perspective that I would have missed otherwise. I encourage people to think about the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Do they apply to us today in the U.S?

Article 21.
• Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country directly or through freely chosen representatives.
Can you afford to take a up to 2 years off your job to run for office?
Can you raise funding of 750 million like in Barack Obama's 2008 campaign?

Article 23.
• Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment.
25 Million unemployed or underemployed
Education Loans are driving what employment fields students are pursuing.

Article 25.
• Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being. of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care.
Right now there are nearly 400 Dutchess County homes in foreclosure.
Medical Care... Employers continue to shift benefit costs to employees, which many cannot afford

Article 26.
• Everyone has the right to education. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
Student college debt is set to hit $1,000,000,000,000 Apr 25th!
The interest rate on subsidized Stafford loans is set to double to 6.8 percent this year.
The 5% interest rated Perkins loan program (Federal) will expire in 2014.

If NOT Join a group, get informed
STAND UP.... And FIGHT BACK.

Petition to fight doubling of Student Federal Loans interest rate
http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/student_loans_interest/?rc=fb_share1
Global News Hour with Amy Goodman: Online radio WVKR 8am Monday - Friday
http://player.streamtheworld.com/player.php?callsign=WVKRFM
or other stations found on http://www.democracynow.org/
National Sexual Violence Resource Center
http://www.nsvrc.org/
National Coalition Against Sexual Violence
http://www.ncadv.org/

Works Cited


(Kouzes and Posner)
