

TIME

Could Occupy Wall St. and the Tea Party Unite?

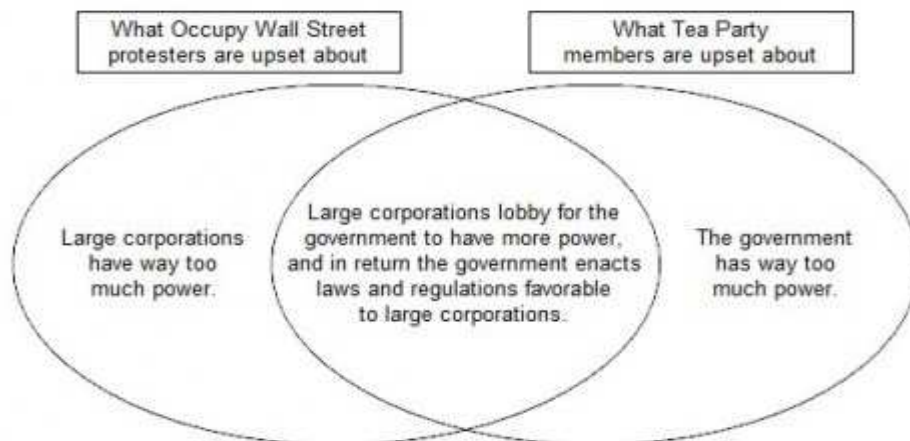
Posted by Roya Wolverson Thursday, October 13,

The lines being drawn between the ultra-right Tea Party and its nearest complement in the realm of public furor, Occupy Wall Street, are curious. My colleague Michael Scherer over at Swampland describes the parallels as follows:

In its broadest outlines, this new outpouring of protest is driven by the same fuel that gave fire to the Tea Party: Anger at elites, a feeling of injustice, a concern about jobs, fear about the direction of the economy and a clear desire to take action. Whereas the Tea Party focused these furies on government, Occupy Wall Street focuses the fury on corporate America. It seems, quite simply, to be the left's answer to the right's size-of-government critique that has dominated national politics for the last two years.

But what if these two seemingly polarized groups are more than just a disgusted reaction to one another? What if they have the makings of a singular cause? It's not that far-fetched. In some ways, the Tea Party and OWS are like doppelgangers (you know, those ghostly human doubles in folklore that, in some cases, end up chasing the same demons, one just a heartbeat ahead of the other.) Both groups are repulsed by their taxpayer dollars funding Wall Street's bailout. Both are disenchanted by the death of the American dream. And both feel left out of a system that seems less like a democracy than a cavalier plutocracy.

I started rummaging around the blogosphere for a sympathetic view and came across this nice visual, a Venn diagram of the Tea Party and OWS's overlapping interests, drawn up by the self-described "liberal-leaning libertarian" blogger James Sinclair:



The idea here is that our livelihoods are threatened by more than just the outsized power of corporations (in the view of Occupy Wall St.) or government (in the Tea Party's view). It's both these forces working together to their exclusive benefit that has the whole of America (minus the 1%, or the .01%, or name your miniscule number) mouthing off at one big boss or another.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Sinclair's hybrid politics aren't exactly widespread. The country is too divided to be joining hands and mixing positions. But there's a chance the vilification of the Tea Party by OWS and vice versa is, at the ground level, more of a mirage. Pundits and politicians thrive in a polarized world. So, threatened and fueled by the very existence of the other side, many of them have claimed these movements as yet another tool to gripe at one another, for instance, here, here, and here. And yet, there are a few voices noting these movements' common cause. Jim Harper at the right-leaning Cato Institute is an example:

There are plenty of reasons to reject the possibility of alliance between Tea Partyism and OWS, but not necessarily good ones. The easiest out is to pour this new wine into old bottles and characterize OWS as dirty hippies using retrograde protest tactics. Many are kinda like that. But that stuff was a couple of decades ago. No, wait—four decades ago. These kids have no direct knowledge or experience of, say, Kent State, and older observers might be too prone to fitting them into a pattern that doesn't exist for them. To the extent the substance of their grievance is, or can be turned to, corporations' use of government power to win unjust power and profits for themselves, that's a grievance I can sit in a drum circle for.

Addison Wiggins at the Daily Reckoning speculates that, "for all we know, the OWS protesters are the college grads with no jobs stuck living in their Tea Party parents' basement." And even some Tea Party organizers have said things like, "it's funny that the Occupy Wall Street guys are also against phoney capitalism and we agree about that." There are also signs that Tea Partiers might support some of OWS's calls, like taxing the rich. The latest WaPo-Bloomberg poll finds 54% of Republican and Republican-leaning voters favor raising taxes on incomes above \$250,000 as a way to reduce the deficit.

No doubt, melding together a motley crew of guitar-strumming hippies and tight-pursed Tea Partiers certainly seems far-fetched. But nothing creates change like the power of imagination. Few imagined Occupy Wall Street, with its ramshackle construction and squishy demands, would even come about and then grow this strong.