

The Missing Issues on the Fall of the Occupy Movements

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Abstract

The recent years have witnessed a wide array of popular movements such as the Yellow Vest movement, Black Lives Matter, Climate emergency protest, Extinction Rebel blockade, and other movements. What is problematic is that these movements cannot achieve their objectives, without a radical reorganisation of society. The factor that led to the decline of these movements shared a semblance with the Occupy Movement. This paper analyses the fall of the Occupy Movement and the missing lessons that were obscured in the literature to highlight the fundamental challenges that undermine contemporary movements and draw useful lessons that can foster the success of contemporary and future popular movements.

Keywords

Capitalism, Occupy Movement, Refomism, Political Power, Isolated Struggles

1. Introduction

The rise of the Occupy Movement (OM) that ensued over a decade ago represents a centrifugal wave of popular discontent that intensified the class struggle and shook the global capitalist establishment to its foundation (Hickel, 2012; Nugent, 2012; Solty, 2013; Allen, 2014). The OM, which began with the occupation of public spaces in the United States in September 2011, quickly spread to more than 80 countries around the world (Erde, 2014; Mizen, 2015; Fernández-Savater et al., 2019). The size and strength of the solidarity the movement generated, represents a seismic shift in the social consciousness of the growing economic inequality, rising poverty and unemployment, mortgage crisis (home foreclosures), massive student loans and debts, lack of health insurance coverage for over 50 million Americans, and decreasing opportunity for social mobility (Neal & McCargo, 2020).

The flood of issues spawned by the OM has developed into a medley of normative questions that expose the failure of the capitalist system to address a wide array of social and economic issues that Americans faced following the global financial crisis of 2009. Despite the potentials of the movement to radically alter the balance of the uneven economic system, the movement eventually collapsed in November 2011 with little or no achievement following the incessant police repression and forceful evictions from the occupied spaces (White, 2016).

The quest to revisit the demise and failure of the Occupy Movement in this paper is saliently urgent following the patterns of problems that recent movements (such as the Black Lives Matter movement, #EndSars movement, Yellow Vest Movement, Extinction Rebellion, #FeeMustFall movement, current in European Farmers' protests) encountered, which were found in the Occupy Movement. These recent movements have assumed similar patterns of spontaneity and have not translated to alteration or changes in the socio-economic and political structure of the society where they ensued. The review of the Occupy Movement is however more germane in the contemporary context to look at the problem with fresh ideas and develop a framework for future popular movements to achieve revolutionary changes in economy and polity.

However, the fundamental question of why the Occupy Movement collapsed and what lessons can be learnt in lieu of popular future movements have been a subject of discourse that several scholars have undertaken. The failure of the Occupy Movement has been attributed to a wide range of interrelated problems, from its apparent lack of inclusion of people of colour and representing white privilege (Campbell, 2011), lack of centralised leadership and effective alliance building (Gitlin, 2013), non-cohesiveness and failure to articulate concrete policy proposals and practical reforms (Gibson, 2013; Breau, 2014) and drawing on anarchist political praxis (Graeber, 2004; Roberts, 2012; Epstein, 2013; Hammond, 2015). Other critics like Disalvo (2015) and Maharawal (2016) attributed other factors to the failure of the movement.

The position of Disalvo (2015) that the demise of the Occupying movement stems from state repression is unfounded. The speed at which the Occupy movement emerged was the speed at which the movement collapsed. The repression from the state only accelerated its demise and brought its idealistic charade to an ignoble end. In contrast to Hedges (2013) argument that state repression was orchestrated to deny people "the infrastructure needed to resist", resistance is at the heart of the people and the encampments are just a reflection of the resistance. The needed infrastructure for resistance is the will of the people and the protesters, not the occupied spaces.

The destruction of encampments should have further radicalised the occupiers and unleashed militancy, and revolutionary actions that can be the basis to build a political party as the needed infrastructure to challenge and contest for political power. But this did not ensue. Another scholar like Maharawal (2016) traced the failure of the movement for excluding the dimension of gender, race and sexuality

that foregrounded the economic inequality of the popular slogans of “we are 99 per cent”. Therefore, the universalist rhetoric of “99 per cent” does not accommodate the diversity of people within “The 99 per cent” bracket on the issues of race, gender, and sexuality. This position is particularly disingenuous as poverty, mortgage foreclosures, job losses, debt crisis and other socio-economic problems do not know race, gender, sexuality and other fault lines that divide humanity.

As an activist scholar, I shared these positions on why OM failed for many years until recently when I observed that subsequent popular movements like the Yellow Vest Movement of 2018, the Armenia Velvet Revolution of 2018, the Black Lives Matter Movement of 2020, #EndSars movement of 2020, and the recent Pro-Palestinian movement also encountered similar problems attributed to the Occupy Movement. It was three years ago that I concluded that even if those criticisms were true, then the solution would be simple: form a centralized hierarchical organisation and structure, develop a clear policy proposal, eschew anarchism, and allow inclusion and diversity. But even if all these measures were implemented, it would not make any significant difference unless the missing issues are addressed. The positions of these scholars cannot fully explain the demise of the movement without addressing other factors such as the reformist nature of the movement, the isolated nature of the struggle, and the failure to challenge for political power, which are important lessons for future popular movements.

This paper begins by articulating the crisis of neoliberalism as the socio-economic circumstances that precluded or gave rise to the emergence of the Occupy Movement in section two, before analysing the rise of the movement in section three. Sections four and five are devoted to unpacking the missing issues that led to the demise of the OM and the implications for the contemporary movements respectively, while the paper concludes in section six.

2. The Crisis of Neoliberalism: A Prelude to the Occupy Movement

The advent of neoliberal capitalism, which has been described as the apogee of “monopoly-finance capitalism, post-Fordism, finance-driven accumulation regime, financial-market capitalism and high-tech capitalism” (Soltz, 2013: p. 85), has been argued here as the socio-economic circumstances that precluded or gave rise to the emergence of the Occupy Movement. Neoliberalism as an economic doctrine emanated first in the US, some parts of Europe, and later globalised between 1989 and 1998. The rise of neoliberalism was facilitated by the decline of the industrial sector that accelerated the push towards a post-industrial economy (financialisation and service-based economy), where deregulation of the financial sector led to the proliferation of hedge funds, asset price bubbles, asset speculations, currency trading, forex trading and other (Harvey, 2007).

The financialisation of the US economy was the consequence of de-industrialisation (loss of manufacturing), which weakened the power of the organised labour union (due to downsizing of workers), rupture of wage structure, increasing num-

ber of labours casualisation and the emergence of precariat (those who engage in insecure and precarious forms of employment) (Reinhart & Rogoff, 2009; Wolff, 2010; Kallenberg, 2011). In the United States, the advent of neoliberalism is characterised by the intense pressure on the working class and their organisations, as “outsourcing and the threat of outsourcing kept wages down and reoriented the economy toward low-wage employment sectors, and the relaxation of employment rules and norms made precarious employment more common.” (Macpherson & Smith, 2013: p. 369). By the 1990s, the weakened power of trade unions has led to a fall in wages and income in the US.

The shift to financialisation accelerated public reliance on credit and created an appetite for huge personal debts, credit card debts, mortgage loans, and student loans to augment job losses, cut in welfare provisions and declining incomes and loss of tuition fee subsidies to ensure a basic level of consumption and subsistence (Maharawal, 2013). The use of credit, as Karl Marx noted in his three volumes of *Das Kapital* (Marx 1990; 1992; 2011), is central to the functioning and survival of the capitalist system. Without credit, the culture of consumerism cannot ensue, and businesses and companies cannot obtain capital to create new products, manufacture new technologies and develop innovations. Therefore, consumer spending is the key driver of the capitalist economy in the epoch of neoliberalism, and the pivot towards financialisation guaranteed the provision and accessibility to credit to foster consumerism.

The diversification of the US economy towards financialisation as the consequence of the post-industrial economy achieved a certain degree of profitability. Following McNally (2011) and Duménil and Lévy (2011), Cox and Nilsen (2014) observed that the recovery of profitability was achieved during the neoliberal phase from 1982 to 2007. Since neoliberal capitalism was not based on production but on consumption, financial speculation and financialisation, the quest for profitability became the cog in the wheel that constituted the internal crisis of neoliberal capitalism.

The crises of neoliberalism were manifested in different contexts: the first is the growing economic inequality between the rich and the poor. The disparity in income and wealth increased astronomically in the US. Weisbrot (2011: p. 1) observed that the economic inequality widened between 1979 and 2007, as “the richest 1 per cent received three-fifths of all income gains in the country and most of this went to the richest tenth of that 1 percent and people with an average income of \$5.6 million (including capital gain)”. Further studies undertaken by McNally (2011) and Duménil and Lévy (2011) observed that the national income of the upper 1 per cent has increased from 9 percent in the 1970s to an unprecedented 28 percent in the late 2000s. This growing wealth inequality deepened extreme poverty for the precariat, unemployed and low-paid workers. The second is the increase in extreme poverty especially in the regions where manufacturing has declined. Most of the industrial workers who were downsized relied on welfare benefits from the American state (Baumol et al., 2003; Magdoff & Magdoff, 2004;

Kalleberg, 2011). The cut in welfare and social spending means low unemployment benefits, which can sustain the livelihood of the unemployed.

The third is the massive debt crisis. The shift towards financialisation of the US economy revealed the centrality of credit to the functioning of the neoliberal phase of capitalism. As the body requires blood for survival, so is credit required for capitalist development and survival. The use of credit in offering loans to investors, and the individuals in form of personal loans, student loans, mortgage loans, and credit cards was undertaken to generate profitability (through interest rates) and sustain credit-fuelled consumption. The declining income, cut in welfare benefits, and loss in purchasing power are partly offset by access to credit to sustain a basic level of consumption. As Mahmud (2012: p. 476) observed that “gross debt of households rose from 50 per cent of GDP in 1980 to 98 per cent of GDP in 2007, while the outstanding consumer debt as a percentage of disposable income grew from 62 per cent in 1975 to 127.2 per cent in 2005”.

The excessive use of credit was the catalyst that triggered the global financial crisis of 2008 due to the failure to offset household debt obligations and mortgage repayment, which eventually led to the collapse of the US housing market. The subprime mortgage crisis was the catalyst that accelerated the brewing crisis of neoliberal capitalism and brought it to the fore. The subprime mortgage crisis, which triggered the bankruptcy of several financial institutions, and the collapse of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac was the contagion that threatened the collapse of the global financial system and undermined the global economy, as it spread to the rest of the world. The consequences of the global financial crisis had profound effects on workers and families who lost their jobs, homes, businesses, and savings, and those who suddenly fell into poverty and struggled to recover many years after the crisis occurred (Foster & Magdoff, 2009; Chowdhury et al., 2013).

However, this crisis of the neoliberal phase of capitalism did not lead to its collapse as many expected or transformed into post-neoliberalisation despite being fraught with structural accumulation crisis and ecological contradiction (Soltz, 2013). Rather, neoliberalism became more resilient following the unprecedented bailouts of the financial markets with trillions of dollars (Ritholtz, 2009; Alirzayev & Suleymanov, 2013; Tooze, 2018). This confirms Karl Marx’s assertion in the *Communist Manifestoes* that any socio-economic system (including capitalism) that has outlived its historical usefulness if it has not been uprooted despite its inability to move society forward, will continue to perpetuate itself.

In general, the crisis of neoliberalism was the catalyst that triggered the rise of the Occupy Movement. Since these crises did not lead to the demise of neoliberalism but became the springboard upon which the Occupy movement festers.

3. The Rise and Fall of the Occupy Movement

The catalyst that sprang the emergence of the Occupy Movement was the failure of the capitalist system that ceased to play any progressive role in the development of humanity in its neoliberal phase. As the crises of the neoliberal phase of capi-

talism intensified and spread across the world, the resistance to the system emanated outside the organised labour (labour unions) that were central to capitalist social relations. One of the myths around neoliberalism is that organised labour became one of its casualties. This argument was exemplified by Roberts (2012), who posited that the power of unions to bargain and organise was crippled and limited following neoliberal assaults on labour laws that made unionisation difficult except in the public sector. As a result of draconian labour laws, Roberts further observed that “only 12 per cent of the workforce was unionized, predominantly in the public sector” (Roberts, 2012: p. 756) by the end of 2007. The position of Roberts and other scholars who articulated this claim is problematic because the neoliberal assaults on labour laws in the United States do not prevent organised labour unions from engaging in class struggle. There is a dichotomy between trade unionisation and class struggle. As trade unionisation is only limited to union members, class struggle encompasses a broad layer of the American working class, as many non-unionised workers who are facing the acute crisis of neoliberal capitalism are part of the working class that is looking to the trade union leadership to provide direction for class struggle so that they can join en-mass. Due to the strategic role of labour in the capitalist production process, organised labour and trade unions have the power to undermine capitalism. But the organised labour is not interested in challenging capitalism and forfeiting the privileges they enjoy under neoliberal capitalism.

Organised labour tends to constrain class struggle within the workplace, and their agitations are limited to struggles that benefit their membership only and ignore the agitations of non-members who are also victims of the neoliberal capitalist system. Another factor that accounted for the failure of the US labour Unions to mount resistance against the forces of neoliberalism is the lack of independent political direction of the trade Unions. In this sense, the labour unions were not oriented towards mobilising workers as a class to challenge for political power (Ogunrotifa, forthcoming) but limited to welfare issues between capital and labour. Over the years, the agenda of the capitalist ruling class is to weaken the class consciousness of the working class so that they will not be able to challenge capitalism as a class, but rather engage in isolated struggles (ibid). The capitalist establishment has, so far succeeded, partly due to the reformist leadership of the trade unions, whose collaborationism with the capital has weakened the collective strength of the workers as a class. This assertion was further articulated by Nugent (2012), who argued that corporate and financial interests have “succeeded in compromising the very institutions that were developed to protect vulnerable groups—and to provide the general population with at least some voice in its own affairs” (Nugent, 2012: p. 281). Nugent’s position was further supported by Macpherson and Smith (2013) who posited that large unions/labour federations (the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in the United States) dominating the institutionalised labour movement often played the “good cop” to the right’s “bad” one. Far from effectively fighting for

workers, they often provided a deceptively human face for neo-liberal rollbacks' (Macpherson & Smith, 2013: p. 370) during the decades of neoliberalism.

The missing question of political power in the agenda and direction of American labour unions weakened the power of the American Working Class as a class, capable of changing society and polity. At worst, organised labour would prefer to queue or align with a section of the capitalist ruling class in the Democratic Party than engage in class struggle and form an independent workers' party and challenge for political power. These factors put public respect for the labour movement at its all-time low by the end of 2009 (Jones, 2012). These experiences and attitudes of reformist labour leadership over the years are what led to the weakened nature of the working-class militancy and solidarity with other movements. The failure to challenge for political power has led many movements to distance themselves from the workers' movement and trade union leadership, especially in the contemporary context.

As nature abhors a vacuum, the vacuum left by the American Labour Union and its leadership was filled by activists and participants who organised the Occupy movement in 2011. The decline and failure of organised labour to foster class struggle against neoliberal capitalism created space for the rise of the Occupy Movement. The Occupy Movement developed independently outside the confines of organised labour leadership that has suppressed class struggle over decades.

The rise of the Occupy Movement was triggered by a clarion call and tweet from a Canadian magazine—Adbuster, which called for protests, barricades, and occupations of Wall Street against corporate greed in July 2011 (Mitchell, 2011; Lubin, 2012). The tweet of Adbuster was widely adopted by a group of activists but did not trigger the Occupy Movement until September 2011 when thousands of people marched on Wall Street in New York to protest corporate greed, wealth disparities and political corruption in the United States (Mitchell, 2011; Gibson, 2013; Rowe & Carroll, 2015; Maharawal, 2016). Inspired by the anti-globalisation movement of 1999, the Spanish Indignados movement, the Arab Spring, the Tahrir Square occupation, the student movement in Britain, public sector workers' protests in Wisconsin, and the anti-austerity movement in Greece, Portugal, Italy, and other parts of the Eurozone (Van Stekelenburg, 2012; Epstein, 2013), the protest quickly developed into physical occupation of public spaces like Zuccotti Park in New York (Uitermark & Nicholls, 2012; Manilov, 2013).

The Occupy Movement subsequently spread to hundreds of cities and towns in the US and other countries around the world (Lubin, 2012). The movement initially attracted little attention, but as the agitations of the activists intensified, media coverage of the movement proliferated. The rise of the Occupy Movement, as Razsa and Kurnik (2012) argued, stemmed from the failure of liberal democracy, which made demand for basic needs—employment, food and shelter impossible in the face of severe economic crisis and savage austerity programme. This was further compounded by the incompetent political elites that represent the interests of the capitalist ruling class, financial institutions and big corporations against

peoples' interests and aspirations (Nugent, 2012).

The Occupy Movement was a watershed event that rattled the capitalist establishment. As the campaign of the movement shifted from austerity, corporate greed and money politics to economic inequality and wealth disparity between “1 per cent and the 99 per cent”, it sent jitters down the spines of the capitalist ruling class and state institutions, and they became nervous. In contrast to several protests that were based on identity politics in the United States, the slogan of “We are 99 per cent” was an inclusive unifier that facilitated a shift in class and social consciousness of the American public and found an important echo among the rank and file of the American working class that has been divided by race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexuality. What underpins the message of the slogan is the attention that was directed to the disparity between a few wealthy individuals and the struggling majority. The accompanying shift in class and social consciousness that underpinned the slogan of “We are 99 per cent” enabled Americans to question the capitalist status quo, and this poses a threat to the American state and the capitalist ruling class that was determined to thwart the movement and its appeal at all costs (Epstein, 2013). The barrage of negative portrayals of the Occupy activists and the movement in the mainstream media did not stop the sudden awakening of class and social consciousness, and hence the need to engage in repressive clampdown against the movement.

The deployment of police crackdown, arrest, threat of imprisonment and prosecution, physical assaults of Occupied campers, and the forceful eviction of protesters from the occupied spaces (Roberts, 2012; Gillham et al., 2013; White, 2016) reflect the desperation of the state and the capitalist ruling class to thwart the appeal of the movement that directly question the basis and relevance of capitalism to the everyday life of Americans. By the 14th of November 2011, the police crackdown on the activists and protesters led to the eviction from Zuccotti Park and several camps in Oakland, Oregon, Denver, and others (Gillham et al., 2013; King, 2017). Following the eviction, the Occupy Movement became fragmented, and the movement gradually declined and fizzled out of public imagination. I contend that the real cause of the decline and fall of the Occupy Movement in the United States is not police repression and other factors espoused in the previous section. The real problem that led to the collapse of the Occupy movement was the fundamental issues within the movement, which undermined the direction of the movement in terms of tactics, strategies, and organisation. These fundamental issues are the missing issues that this paper discusses in the section below.

4. The Missing Issues on the Fall of the Occupy Movement

Most studies, as previously stated, have attributed the fall and collapse of the Occupy Movements to several factors including an apparent lack of inclusion of people of colour, lack of centralised leadership and effective alliance building, drawing on anarchist political praxis, non-cohesiveness and failure to articulate concrete policy proposals and practical reforms. These factors are fundamentally ger-

mane, but there are truly missing issues that ought to have been addressed and without which much of the accounts of Occupy Movements being discursively espoused will continue to suffer gaps that empower enormous misinterpretations and will have important consequences for the contemporary popular movements. These missing issues, which deserved to be, but were not addressed in the existing literature on the Occupy Movements are three. The first is the reformist nature of the movement, and others are engagement in isolated struggles and the lack of class-based alliance, and the failure to challenge for political power that is discussed as follows.

The reformist nature of the movement

When the OM emerged, it was purely a reformist movement against the symptoms and consequences of the capitalist crises, which manifested in the context of economic inequality, wealth disparity and other socio-economic problems. The OM is a reformist movement because the orientation and ideology of the activists, leadership and participants of the movement are not oriented towards finding an alternative to capitalism. The reformist character of the movement stemmed from its preoccupation with the consequences of capitalist crises, while taking the critique of the capitalist system out of scrutiny (Higgins & Apple, 1983; Panitch, 1989). What this implies is that capitalism is allowed to escape questioning and scrutiny, as the scope to address the perennial consequences and crises of capitalism was narrowed to the confines of the capitalist system that created the problems.

With reformism, the opportunity to discuss the alternative to capitalism or address the problems outside the framework of capitalism was never allowed by the OM. This is what Higgins and Apple (1983), Brenner (1993), Patnaik (2010) and Guttman (2023) regarded as “reformism”—a belief that capitalism can be reformed to resolve the crises of its creation. As Gorz (1968) and Luxemburg (1970) argued reformism is an opposition to a decisive break with capitalism. Reformism implies that socioeconomic problems caused by capitalist crises can be resolved by initiating a myriad of reforms to the capitalist system and that capitalism can be better reformed to solve the extant socioeconomic problems. As far as reformism is concerned, revolution is disregarded as unnecessary.

The reformist nature of the OM prevents a decisive break with capitalism, as the movement inhibited attempts to discuss the alternative to capitalism, even when the solutions to the growing spate of poverty, global problems, climate change, debt crises economic inequality and wealth disparity, home foreclosures etc cannot be found under the same capitalist system. The perennial crises of capitalism especially in the neoliberal epoch mean that the capitalist system can no longer afford to provide welfare programmes, free education, free health, free housing, etc unlike in the past. The austerity policies and programmes undertaken by most European countries following the global financial crises (McKee et al., 2012; Karanikolos et al., 2013; Macpherson & Smith, 2013; Kohler & Stockhammer, 2022) lend credence to this assertion. There is a limit to what the capitalist

system can afford in terms of concessions because the interest of the capitalist ruling class is opposed to welfare programmes for the people. The cut in social spending and other austerity policies in the post-2008 financial crisis was initiated for the survival of capitalism. The orientations of OM activists and participants towards reformism revealed their failure to challenge the capitalist system and agitate for its overthrow. The reformist nature of OM ensures that the economic and political lever of power of the capitalist ruling class as a dominant class is not challenged.

The OM activists and participants may be anti-capitalists, but they are not interested in discussing the alternative to capitalism. The consequence of reformism is that OM was unconsciously defending the same capitalist system that was responsible for the crisis they were protesting. This reformist character of the movement is predicated on the class character of its leadership and the participants. The OM is dominated by middle-class ideology and orientation, which generally reflects a mixed bag of individuals and groups, whose class position is found outside the nexus of capitalist social relations (between the capitalist class and the working class).

As the intermediary between the forces of capital and labour in capitalist social relations, the middle class comprises a group that possesses a higher-class status than the working class with a higher standard of living (Hebson, 2009; Manstead, 2018). The constitution of the middle class is not limited to groups with good education and high income such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, and other professionals, but also encompasses a group of small business owners, and self-employed (small capitalists) (Bechhofer & Elliott, 1985; Archer & Blau, 1993). The class character of the middle class is usually reflected in its consciousness, orientation and ideological outlook which makes it distinct from the working class.

The consciousness and ideological orientations of the middle class are oriented towards protecting the privileges they hitherto enjoyed under capitalism (for professional groups) and their aspiration to be part of the bourgeoisie (small business owners). Therefore, the middle class is a class of petit-bourgeoisie or aspiring bourgeoisie (even though, they do not possess the requisite capital), whose class interest is to defend the capitalist system to protect the dividends and privileges of capitalism they are enjoying (Streeck, 2011; 2017). The global financial crisis and the attendant consequences brought by neoliberal capitalism together with a wave of austerity policies and programmes undermined those privileges. The attempts to ignore the discussion on the alternative to capitalism means that activists and participants are agitating for reformist policies that can be acceptable to the capitalist establishment. Even when the OM activists and participants are agitating against capitalist crises, they find themselves in complete opposition to revolution because their privileges cannot be guaranteed if capitalism is overthrown. With this reformist orientation, the OM was unconsciously oriented towards wanting to save capitalism from itself and thus prevented socialism. This acted as a factor that led to the collapse of the movement.

An isolated struggle

The collapse of the OM stemmed from the isolated nature of its struggles. An isolated struggle can be described as the lack of connection between one movement and other movements, in which solidarity of different movements is required for the agitation of the movement to be successful in their demands. Being an isolated struggle means that there was a lack of connection between different movements, as each protest movement agitates and campaigns on its own without the active support of other movements. The failure of the Occupy movement stemmed from its method of isolated struggles that had no connections with other struggles in different domains. This was primarily due to two factors: the anarchist method of organising the movement and the middle-class interests of the OM leaders, organisers, and activists. The OM movement is a middle-class movement, whose reformist character is fundamentally opposed to the interests of the working class. In fleshing out the middle-class character of the OM, [Van Stekelenburg \(2012\)](#) and [Nugent \(2012\)](#) observed that the movement is populated with individuals who lost their jobs, income, mortgages, and fortunes during the global financial crises. This position was further supported by [Hammond \(2015: p. 292\)](#), who observed that OM is dominated by “occupiers who came from or aspired to careers in writing, the arts, the media, and information technology” they utilised to disseminate their messages with creativity. The middle-class interests of the OM leadership and organisers were at variance with the revolutionary quest of the working class to overthrow capitalism, rescue economic and political power from the capitalist ruling classes and provide an alternative to the capitalist status quo.

The class interest of the middle class, who are leading the OM cannot steer the movement towards a revolutionary pathway because they are not interested in breaking with capitalism. The isolated nature of the OM ensued because the middle-class ideology and orientations that underpinned it, are not fundamentally opposed to the logic of capitalist accumulation and dispossession, and challenging the capitalist system requires the alliance and collaboration of OM with organised labour and the working class, whose method of political action is the class struggle. Since class struggle is incompatible with middle-class ideological orientations, then the turn towards isolated struggles became the norm.

The isolated struggles that were engaged by the OM became more entrenched when anarchism was adopted as a method of political action to challenge and confront the forces of capitalism ([Smucker, 2013](#); [Gibson, 2013](#)). Anarchists believe that the state is coercive and therefore have disdain for formal state structures and institutions, and are discontented with established political parties ([Smucker, 2013](#); [Gibson, 2013](#)). The anarchistic character of movement was predicated on the insistence on “egalitarianism, its suspicion of the state and aversion to mainstream institutions and culture, and its emphasis on the creation of alternative communities, intended to be, as far as possible, beyond the reach of the state and mainstream society” ([Epstein, 2013: p. 66](#)), and the quest to create “a prefigurative movement” ([Hammond, 2015: p. 292](#)), where social relations are devoid of exploi-

tation, coercion, and alienation.

The anarchist method of OM was opposed to democratic ideals and rather adopted horizontalism as the organisational structure, where decision-making is based on consensus (Razsa & Kurnik, 2012). In contrast to Marxists who believe in the abolition of the state by the working class as the means of overthrowing capitalism, anarchists imagined a future outside the established parties and the state, where horizontal collaboration, participatory assemblies, community building, egalitarianism serve as the basis of remaking the society and social life (Nugent, 2012).

The method of anarchism cannot challenge capitalism and its forces effectively and strategically because it is alien to the method of class struggle. The most potent force that is capable of challenging capitalism and the capitalist ruling class is the working class if politically organised. This is because the working class is central to capitalist social relations and can undermine capitalist production, and distribution, as well as its accumulative and dispossession regime. The popular movement like the OM, is outside the capitalist social relations, and cannot effectively challenge the capitalist forces without an alliance with the working class. The problem of anarchism is that its method of political action, not only deepens isolated methods of struggles but also strengthens the powers of neoliberalism and the capitalist ruling class they are challenging. With the Occupy movement, there was no class alliance with a clear mandate and programme of action between the occupied activists and the organised labour. This lack of class-based alliance has enabled the American capitalist ruling class to continue its regime of exploitation, accumulation, and dispossession at the expense of the overwhelming majority of Americans who bear the brunt of the capitalist crises. As the leadership and organisers of the OM found solutions in anarchism rather than class struggle that would involve aligning with the working class and organised labour, this made the potential class-based alliance unrealistic and isolated struggles as a viable shortcut to struggle. The adoption of anarchism as a method of political action enabled the OM activists and organisers to sever their ties with the working class and the organised labour that deployed different methods of struggle.

However, Rehmann (2013) argued that OM activists and organisers refused to collaborate or forge an alliance with organised labour because of the fear that the latter might hijack the movement and re-oriented it towards providing political support to the Democratic Party. Even if this allegation is false, forging an alliance between the OM activists and organisers and the organised labour with a clear programme of action would have been problematic because of different class interests and different methods of struggle. Nevertheless, Piven (2013) noted that organised labour rallied to defend occupied activists in the Zuccotti Park when they were initially threatened with eviction, by asking workers or members to join the movement and give it tactical support. This tactical support was not enough to challenge capitalism and foster radical social change when a formal alliance and clear programmes of action were lacking. Therefore, when the activists, protesters

and organisers were forcefully removed from the occupied spaces, the movement collapsed because there was no class collaboration and alliance with the working class and organised labour to sustain the movement outside the occupied spaces.

Challenge for Political Power

The final factor that led to the collapse of the OM is the failure to challenge for political power. The anarchistic and isolated method of struggle that activists, leadership, and participants of the movement adopted undermined any serious effort at organising the movement to politically challenge the existing capitalist status quo for power. The Occupy Movement had no political direction and never included the question of political power on the agenda due to the failure of the movement to transform itself into a serious political movement and organisation of the toiling masses and youth.

Most of the issues or problems that OM activists and participants resented and agitated for, cannot be achieved without taking over the political power. Challenging political power means contesting the realm of state power with those who control the lever of state power and political institutions through the formation of independent movements of activists and participants in the OM. The formation of an independent movement requires building a political party for the “99 per-centers” and aligning with the working class, youths and organised labour to challenge and contest for political power in elections. At the peak of the movement, forming an independent alternative political party to galvanise the demands and struggles of the “99 per cent”, dispossessed, aggrieved and other oppressed layers of the society would have helped to provide a political base that can outlive the movement after the evictions from the occupied spaces.

Apart from Lenin and other Russian revolutionaries who founded the Bolshevik Party to take over political power from the Tsarist regime, recent political parties like Podemos and Syriza derived their power and membership base from the anti-austerity movement in Spain and Greece respectively (Morlino et al., 2017; Bortun, 2023). These political parties challenged for political power and won elections to be in the seat of power. In contrast, the activists and organisers of the OM did not take such an opportunity afforded by the momentum and potential of the movement to build an independent political party, whose membership will be derived from the movement. Establishing such a political party would have helped to educate and mobilise the disgruntled and frustrated Americans, who are genuinely tired of the system and looking for alternatives and solutions to their problems. The failure of the OM to organise the frustrated and aggrieved Americans into concrete political struggle means that the opportunity for progressive and revolutionary social change is missed and lost. This is due to the ideological limitations of the movement, which led to its failure to channel the energy, potential and anger of the people on the street into a concrete political programme of action.

The possibility of giving the movement a political expression was lost due to the anarchistic and isolated methods of struggle that undermined the quest for an al-

ternative political direction. The anarchistic method of struggle, as Epstein (2013) argued, had no realistic path towards revolutionary or social change. The continued occupation of public spaces was part of the anarchistic method that was alien to the class struggle. When the occupied activists and organisers were forcefully evicted from the occupied spaces, the movement did not have an alternative path to organising and had no political base to sustain the struggle, and as a result, the movement gradually fizzled out of public imagination and collapsed. In this regard, the opportunity to radically transform and re-ordered the polity and undermine the capitalist status quo was missed due to the lack of political direction and the quest to challenge for political power.

5. Missing Issues: The Implications for the Contemporary Social Movements

In recent years, there has been an upsurge in social movements around the world. From the Americas to Asia, from Africa to Europe, people have taken to the streets to agitate and campaign against corruption, state repression, austerity, social justice, civil rights, economic injustices, environmental issues, and other demands. According to the 2020 Global Peace Index, there has been a 102 per cent increase in the number of general strikes, riots, and anti-government demonstrations from 2010 to 2018. The report further observed that the number of riots and protests has roughly doubled while the number of general strikes has quadrupled in the eight years leading to 2018. A further study conducted by Ortiz et al. (2022) observed that there have been 2809 protests between 2006 and 2020 in 101 countries, which covers over 93% of the world population. The most recent movements among these social movements include the Sudanese revolution of 2018 and 2019, the Extinction Rebellion of 2019, the Black Lives Matter Movement of 2020, the 2022 Sri Lanka protests, and the European farmers' protests of 2024.

Like the Occupy Movements, the undermining factors of these movements are their reformist nature and the engagement in isolated struggles that had no connection with other struggles and movements in different contexts. The problem of isolated struggle, however, leads to the fall and collapse of these movements without achieving important concessions from states and the capitalist ruling classes (Ogunrotifa, 2024). It can be argued that these movements achieved some successes in their objectives, but such successes are infinitesimal or sometimes, ended as a wake-up call to the issue without any concessions.

For instance, the Black Lives Matter Movement achieved some concessions such as defunding of police and other policing reforms, dismantling of the Minneapolis police department where Floyd was killed, a ban on ketamine use, no-knock warrants, a national database to track officer misconduct and limits on campaign contributions from police unions, and removing Confederate statues and symbols (Clingham-David, 2020). Other concessions include corporate acknowledgment of the racist culture and removal of the executive from Refinery

29, Bon Appetit, CrossFit, and others over previous racist remarks and dog-whistling comments (Clingham-David, 2020) but leaving the structure of institutional and systemic racism intact, while the problems of police killings and police brutality against African Americans persist (Ogunrotifa, 2023). While the Extinction Rebels' protests of blocking the major highways in London became unsustainable and eventually fizzled out of public imagination. Rather than achieving some concessions from the British state, the UK government defied the protests of Extinction Rebel and other Environmental groups, and awarded 24 new licences to major oil companies to drill fossil fuel across the North Sea in July 2023. The reformist and isolated nature of these movements especially the Extinction Rebellion is the demonstration of a lack of connection with other movements.

The success of these movements cannot be facilitated without a formal and class-based alliance with the working class and its organisation, and a clear programme of action. Without an alliance, most movements are reluctant to reach out to other movements (as observed in the Occupy movements), and therefore, decide to embark on the protest alone. What often leads to isolated struggles or what makes alliance difficult is the ideology. Different movements have different ideologies that underpin their emergence. Due to different ideological positions, forging a class-based or ideologically oriented alliance and challenge for political power is not realistic and sometimes impossible, and hence the resort to isolated struggles.

The consequence of isolated struggle is the loss of a network of movements that can challenge capitalism on a class and ideological basis. Therefore, allowed capitalism to escape scrutiny and enabled the capitalist ruling class and its agent to continue to rule and govern the state without subaltern challenge and resistance. Contesting for political power (elective positions), which is challenging the capitalist ruling classes and its agent for political power, requires a class-based alliance, a clear programme of action (manifesto) and joint tactics and strategies that are devoid of isolated struggles. Without a change of orientation towards engaging in isolated struggles, forging a class-based alliance and challenging for political power, social movements will continue to emerge and fall on the same trajectory as previous movements experienced.

6. Conclusion

This paper has critically reviewed the rise and fall of the Occupy Movement, highlighting the socio-economic context that gave rise to its emergence and the eventual collapse in November 2011, and the missing issues that had escaped scrutiny in the existing literature on the Occupy Movement. What triggered the emergence of the Occupy Movement and most of the contemporary movements was the failure of the capitalist system that ceased to play any progressive role in the development of humanity in its neoliberal phase. The capitalist system can no longer afford to provide welfare programmes, free education, free health, free housing, etc unlike in the past. These perennial crises of capitalism, which found its expres-

sion in the global financial crisis of 2008/2009 had profound effects on workers and families who lost their jobs, homes, businesses, and savings, and those who suddenly fell into poverty and struggled to recover many years after the crisis occurred.

From the review, it was observed that three factors led to the collapse of the Occupy movements: the reformist nature of the movement, isolated methods of struggle, and the failure to challenge for political power are the missing issues that have profound implications for the contemporary social movements. These missing issues are the important ingredients that have continued to limit the potential of contemporary movements to achieve their objectives. Most of the contemporary movements fail immediately after they emerge because they are reformist in orientation and ideology, engage in isolated struggles and fail to contest for political power. Unless the system of capitalism is challenged by a class-based alliance with a radical and anti-capitalist set of policy and political programmes for power, the rise of the contemporary movements that emanated from the terminal crisis of capitalism would continue unabated.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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