

The idea

The time is ripe to start a worldwide movement for a better world, a world that is not shaped by the greed and narrow interests of a few, but by the care for each other. The widespread sympathy for the Occupy Wall Street movement shows that many people have lost their belief in the current system. In the US and elsewhere people whose hopes had been roused by Obama are disappointed and disenchanted, and open to something else. Communication technology and social media make it possible for such a movement to take off quickly.

Let's call this (for now hypothetical) movement "our movement". Our movement will need something people can rally around, something that expresses our shared aspirations, like the Communist Manifesto did more than 150 years ago. I've tentatively put some paragraphs on paper.

Very likely there are other people elsewhere trying right now to do something similar. If any of such efforts take off, contact will be established naturally.

The defining characteristic of our movement is the shared belief that human society is the product of human activity, that we can take our destiny in our own hands and build a just and peaceful society together, and that it is our human duty to do so. Our movement must have a broad appeal, by being friendly and inviting. We should not rely on revolutionary rhetoric and romanticism.

A major task of our movement is to work out, realistically and in sufficient detail, the organization of the world we want to bring into being, such as how to realize a fair redistribution of wealth. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." is a slogan we can all agree on. But how do we determine an individual's needs? How do we avoid that the system is abused without resorting to Big Brother methods? Democracy should not stop at the gate of the factory. But how will we regulate the governance of companies? Will there still be private companies and stockholders? And so on. We need to have realistic and workable solutions to these problems.

An immediate and urgent problem is: how to organize direct democracy, and how to shape a consensus in discussions in which many people participate on an equal footing.

What needs to be done to start this up?

Get people interested who agree that this can work and who are willing and able to sign up to put considerable effort into it. Expand this by networking to an international scale. Organize an international meetup. Find some money.

Start up the wiki. Establish the first chapters.

Get opinion leaders and media to pay attention to our movement.

OUR MOVEMENT

... hence, with the *categoric imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despised being ...

Karl Marx
A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right
– Introduction

This is not a manifesto

These writings contain some thoughts on the philosophy and organization of our movement, but without the pretension of bringing a finished framework. They offer a starting point, rather than an end point. Hopefully, it will inspire its readers.

An attempt to overthrow the existing political and economic order must start with an analysis of the political situation. The reader hoping to find a coherent analysis in these writings will be disappointed. Some thoughts are given that may be relevant, but they are not part of some encompassing larger system.

What is our movement?

Our movement is formed by the activities, worldwide, of people who work to bring about a just and peaceful society. Everyone who shares that goal and wants to work together to reach it, is part of the movement. Obviously, there are many different ideas on how to achieve that goal. We cannot expect that everyone will agree with everything the majority agrees with. But that must not stop us from working together.

OCCUPY THE WORLD

By its nature, our movement has no institutionalized membership. It is not a political party. But organizations, including parties, can also be part of the movement if they share this goal.

The nature of human beings

Some political philosophies are based on the premise that humans are essentially and naturally good and altruistic. Others start from the idea that humans are essentially bad and selfish. But it is more realistic to assume that most people are naturally altruistic to *some degree*, but that that degree varies among people, and also according to the circumstances and experiences of individuals.

Any society is a cooperative work. A society can only maintain itself if its members work together. Creating something worthwhile together gives those sharing in the effort a purpose and a sense of accomplishment. But when a few usurp a totally disproportionate share of the results, the effect is demoralizing. In the society we envisage, individuals cannot reap huge profits from other people's labour.

This is more than an issue of fairness. It is also needed for social coherence. And, for people who are dirt poor it is hard to be happy, but it is also hard to be happy when you are excessively rich. In the end, everyone will be better off if the fruits of our collective labour are shared equitably.

Human beings have a natural and deep need to be part of a larger group to which they feel loyalty – a tribe, a football club, a party, a nation. This is cynically exploited by power-hungry politicians to create false “us against them” sentiments. We must always make clear that our first allegiance is to humankind.

Inclusiveness

A central concept in our political philosophy is that of inclusiveness. We aim for a world in which everyone, young and old, men and women, majority and minority, can contribute to and enjoy the fruits of a just and peaceful society, a society that respects human rights and that values education, science and culture. The journey that will bring us there is long and not easy. We must realize that we are all in this together. Many problems facing humanity are urgent and must be addressed, requiring concerted action at all scales, from local to global.

As we strive to turn our political ideals into reality, our ways and our mode of working must reflect our philosophy. Therefore, also our movement itself is inclusive. Everyone who shares our ideals is welcome to join in the struggle. For too long, the Left has allowed itself to be paralyzed and stunted by notions of ideological purity. We try to operate by consensus, which can only be reached by an open debate. Participants in the debate must be free to say what they think, without fear of being purged by self-appointed ideological inquisitors.

In spite of our best attempts at achieving consensus, differences concerning the course of our movement may prove unbridgeable. If a group cannot live with a majority decision, they should be free to go their own way. What we will do then, is not wage a bitter battle, but instead part as friends. There will still be many things we agree on, and in the larger struggle we remain allies.

For, not against

We fight for our ideas, not against people. When we disagree with the ideas or actions of other people, we fight against those ideas or actions, but we do not demonize the people responsible for them. Instead, we aim at creating openings

for a debate. Even while we recognize that people may be oppressors, we still see them as fellow human beings. Although they maintain an unjust system, they are at the same time themselves victims of that system, caught in an ideology from which they cannot escape by their own power. They may be our adversaries today, but we hope they will be our allies tomorrow.

Amongst ourselves we also treat each other with respect and dignity. We do not use *ad hominem* arguments against each other. We assume that all of us act in good faith and work to contribute to our common aims, as long as the contrary is not evident.

As always, there will be agents of the reaction who pretend to be part of the movement but actually work to sabotage it. Nevertheless, the tendency to see agents everywhere must be actively countered: it does more harm than good. Comrades who are sloppy or overly zealous often do more damage than an agent can hope to achieve. We must judge people by their actions, and hold them accountable for their behaviour, rather than any alleged intentions.

Religion

All religions and beliefs must be equal before the law. We consider it a basic human right that anyone can practice the religion or profess the belief of their choice. The only thing we require of religions, as we require it in general, is respect for human rights and everyone's individual freedom of conscience.

In the course of history, religions have sometimes let themselves be used as an instrument for oppression, but at other times they have been a vanguard in the struggle for social justice. We welcome and applaud the latter.

Honesty and openness

We demand honesty from the men and women who profess to represent us or to lead us. We will praise honest politicians for their honesty, even when we disagree with their political viewpoints. We will expose dishonest politicians, regardless of their political affiliation. We condemn backdoor deals and political secrecy, and support the institution of "sunshine" laws at all levels of government. Whistleblowers who expose illegal practices must be commended and protected.

Among the ills that may inflict a society, institutionalized corruption is one of the worst. Corruption can infect and corrupt a society from top to bottom. Fighting corruption, wherever it occurs, has a high priority. Fighting corruption by top officials has top priority.

Truth is our strongest weapon. We must not give it up for some temporary gain. What we demand of others, we must practise ourselves. Our movement strives to be honest to a fault. We present the facts as they are, to the best of our ability. We

do not twist the facts for effect, nor do we try to hide facts because they are politically inconvenient. If we were wrong, we will not conceal it or put a positive spin on it. Our “damage control” is to frankly admit it. We are clear and open about our aims and our ways, and allow anyone to see and hear our internal debates.*

*This does, obviously, not apply in police states, in which advocating human rights and criticizing the authorities are considered crimes that are harshly punished.

Openmindedness

In a free and just society, conflicts are not resolved by violence or “the right of the strongest”, but by an open dialogue and a willingness to accommodate different interests and viewpoints.

We reject all forms of fundamentalism, which are characterized by a closed mind, an immutable belief, an unwillingness to engage in dialogue and to acknowledge that any other point of view might have some validity. We understand that policy decisions must be taken in a context of uncertainties, that their effects can never be precisely foreseen, and that it is therefore wise to have an open discussion of not only the the pros and cons, but also the potential risks. We are open to the arguments of people who may disagree, and we will consider them seriously. We also understand that policy measures are never purely beneficial, but will adversely effect some. Our aim is never to hurt. We will try to mitigate adverse effects as much as is possible and reasonable.

Our strength

The Left has been weak, especially since the social democracy, worldwide, embraced the neoliberal ideology of the “Free Market” wholesale, including its drive to privatization and hyperglobalization, an ideology that is neither social nor democratic. And to the left of the social democracy, those who aspire to a better world are fractured and operate in isolated, small groups.

It is time to end this isolation. Our strength is in numbers. We can be a large majority.

For a generally peaceful transition to a social organization that does not need to be maintained by force, it is necessary that it is supported by a clear majority. People who are privileged are often raised in the belief that their privileges are a natural right, and usually are not willing to give them up freely and peacefully. People who wield power over others likewise may be convinced this is part of the natural order of things, and in any case are often loathe to give up that power. Any transformative social transition will encounter possibly forceful opposition and attempts at sabotage.

There will be unforeseen problems of all kinds at all levels, and we need the willing cooperation and creativity of as many people as possible to address these problems.

Words, words, words

Words like 'capitalism' and 'socialism' do not define specific economic systems, but stand for broad classes of possibly very different economic systems. The *Communist Manifesto* is still an inspiring document, but it is not clear that Marx would recognize the Bourgeoisie and Proletariat as described there in today's neoliberal society.

It cannot be denied that the capitalist system in its current form has given rise to a higher standard of living for many people in industrialized countries. We should endeavour to maintain a good standard of living for those that have it, while raising that of people who still live in poverty. Yet, at the same time, the current economic systems is inherently undemocratic and powered by greed. As capital moves internationally from bubble to bubble, capitalism moves from crisis to crisis, and creates tremendous environmental problems. When people stand up against powerful companies that trample on their rights, they may be crushed.

People will naturally be reluctant to support a social revolution if they do not trust its proponents. History has given us too many examples of revolutions that promised paradise on Earth but in the end delivered misery. To succeed, we need to win the minds and hearts of the common people. That cannot be done by shouting slogans with words that by themselves mean little. It can only be done by showing through our actions that we are on their side.

What can we do?

We believe that a better world is possible if enough people work together to create it. Not acting because of the idea that "what I can do will not make a difference" is a way of accepting defeat without even trying. We reject and try to counter such defeatism. The human rights and social achievements we enjoy must not be taken for granted. They have not been given to us by the generosity of the powers that be. They have been earned through a long and hard-fought, sometimes heroic, struggle of common people, working together. That fight is not over. The forces of the other side do not rest; they keep trying to regain lost territory. We must not allow that to happen.

So what can we do? We can expose and protest injustice, undemocratic behaviour, shady dealings, and support demands for justice and respect for human rights. But remember: our strength is in numbers, working together. We must discuss these things with others and form groups of like-minded people.

Organization

Our movement will mainly consist of a fluid network of many, mostly small, groups of people who get to know each other well and meet regularly, for study and discussion, but also for cultural and social activities that are rewarding by themselves. These groups are autonomous and self-regulating. Regular exchanges between these groups, such as by overlapping members and exchange visitors, are encouraged.

Next to these small groups there are regional and national chapters. Their function is to support and encourage local groups and to organize various kinds of meetups and further cultural and social activities, such as festivals and summer camps. The chapters do not have some kind of governing board but are run instead by organizatory working groups of volunteers whose responsibilities are purely organizational.

Through information technology it has become possible to create a network that will make our movement hold together without centralized command structure. It can offer a platform to spread and discuss ideas and build consensus. Our movement will have a multinational and multilingual open-access wiki where groups and chapters can put announcements, reports of meetups, essays, alerts, etcetera.

Our movement has no leaders, no governing boards, no representatives, no spokespersons, and no hierarchy. No one can speak or act on behalf of the movement. Everyone remains individually responsible for what they say and do.