

Guest column: Brookline PAX board endorses Occupy Boston

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Wicked Local Brookline

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Brookline — The board of Brookline PAX has voted to publicly support Occupy Boston, a 24/7 encampment in Dewey Square that is part of the national movement growing out of Occupy Wall Street.

Until recently, few could imagine a mass movement in the U.S. in opposition to the actions and political power of major banks and corporations. But it is now clear that there was a latent readiness among many of our fellow citizens to lean out the window like the hero of the movie, “Network,” and shout to all within earshot, “I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take it anymore!”

Inspired by uprisings around the world, from Cairo to Madison, Wis., the Occupy movement takes clear aim at the financial institutions whose scramble for enormous speculative profits and unchecked political influence crashed our economy and has paralyzed our political system. The movement’s resonant slogan, “We are the 99%,” pinpoints the decades-long trend in which an ever-growing share of the nation’s wealth goes to those at the very top. It protests such injustices as:

- The flight of the manufacturing and information industries to foreign lands, where labor is cheaper and more exploitable, contributing to double-digit unemployment rates here at home.
- Deregulated gambling by “too big to fail” banks and investment houses, which led to enormous losses that were bailed out by ordinary taxpayers. Meanwhile, millions of homeowners facing foreclosure or struggling with unpayable or seriously underwater mortgages have still received negligible assistance; *they* are “too small to succeed.”
- Congress’ obstinate refusal to close tax loopholes for wealthy individuals and corporations and establish an equitable tax structure, threatening instead to balance the budget by cutting Medicare and Social Security.
- The assault on organized labor through the evisceration of collective bargaining rights, and on the social safety net and the environment through cutbacks in public assistance, education, infrastructure repairs and public safety personnel.
- The waste of public monies on foreign wars based on unsubstantiated claims of threats to our security while a shameful percentage of citizens reel under genuine threats such as the lack of decent universal health care and the prospect of a pensionless retirement.
- The continuing inflation of higher education costs, leaving many graduates with unprecedented debt levels at a time when the prospect of employment through a college or graduate degree is at an all-time low.
- The continuing increase in the income gap between the rich and others. Last year, the average U.S. income was less than \$40,000, and the number of Americans living in poverty (\$22,000 for a family of four) rose to the highest total – 46.2 million – since the Census Bureau started releasing the figures 52 years ago. Yet the number of people making at least \$1 million increased by 18 percent. To top it off, last year’s Citizens United decision has given this small elite the green light to dominate our electoral politics even further.

For too long, citizens failed to recognize, let alone speak out on, the above issues. Many lost hope for a decent future and despaired of their ability to create a better one. Cynicism concerning the undemocratic system of U.S. campaign funding; the belief that all one can hope for in our political candidates is to find a “lesser evil”; and retreat into one’s private sources of pleasure all provided little relief.

What we see now, however, is a coming together of many segments of the population who have been betrayed or abused by the circumstances summarized above. The range of people one meets at Occupy Boston is impressive: all ages, many walks of life, many socioeconomic levels, and a range of ideologies. All occupants of Dewey Square agree that unfettered capitalism is collapsing around, and on, them. Some advocate repair, others root for replacement by a different system. But nearly all welcome and support one another in this endeavor, and take pains to act with dignity and with respect for the space they are occupying.

In Boston and many other cities and towns across the nation, we are witnessing the birth of a mass movement run along the lines of participatory democracy and decision-making, and a commitment to nonviolent social revolution in the spirit of Gandhi and MLK. It will have its ups and downs, to be sure, but it is the most inspiring and hopeful event we have seen in this country for several decades.

We encourage everyone to visit Occupy Boston, across Atlantic Avenue from South Station (occupyboston.org). Contribute as much time, participation and advocacy as you can in the coming weeks, months and perhaps, years. Express your indignation when municipal officials threaten peaceful protesters with mounting levels of violence reminiscent of the 1960s. A better America and a better world are possible.

Abram Chipman is a board member, and Frank Farlow a co-chair, of Brookline PAX.