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## Anti-Wall Street Protests Face Question: Now What? (USAT)

By Rick Hampson, Usa Today

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Michael Kazin was talking all last month about American Dreamers, his new history of the left's influence on U.S. politics. It was a melancholy conversation.

"People always asked the same thing," says Kazin, himself a veteran of the 1960s New Left movement. "'Where's the left in this recession?'"

The author didn't know it, but the left had emerged at a camp-out in a park in Lower Manhattan. A few hundred demonstrators -- many young, "overeducated and underemployed," as they put it -- had decided to "Occupy Wall Street."

Kazin now says the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement has energized the left and given it new hope. "It's like we were waiting for Godot," he says, "and Godot actually showed up."

And then spread across the nation, raising hopes on the left of a movement to counter the Tea Party and to incite what Van Jones, an activist and former White House aide, calls "an American Autumn."

To some, Occupy Wall Street's growing presence also hints at something bigger: a new age of insurrection, in which aggrieved people -- enabled by social media and inspired by young people in North Africa, Western Europe and New York -- protest what they see as what's wrong with the world.

"Over the last few years, with things like Facebook and Twitter, it's just easier to protest," says Matthew Kerbel, author of *Netroots: Online Progressives and the Transformation of American Politics*.

Although the Wall Street protests have spread to scores of other cities, the movement pales next to the conservative Tea Party, which last year helped Republicans regain control of the House of Representatives, and the Arab Spring, which brought down tyrannical governments in Egypt and Tunisia. Many people aren't even sure exactly what Occupy Wall Street is for, and what it's against.

The protest is built around a core grievance: that most Americans are suffering from big financial institutions' practices and from Wall Street's political influence in Washington. "We are the 99%!" the protesters cry -- not the 1% that controls between one-fifth and one-quarter of the nation's wealth.

The protest started with a vague suggestion in AdBusters, a Canadian anti-consumerist online magazine. It was endorsed by a group of computer hackers called Anonymous, and then spread via Twitter and Facebook.

It is inspired, according to its website, by the spirit, strategy and non-violence of the Arab Spring. It professes to

have no leaders or hierarchy; no specific agenda, demands or goals; no ties to political parties or organizations.

Political analysts, operatives, activists and historians generally agree that Occupy Wall Street must mature or wither. But they debate whether it must develop leaders, organization, goals and candidates -- and whether it can.

"This is a moment," says Hugh Hogan of North Star Fund, a foundation that supports grass-roots groups such as Domestic Workers United, an 11-year-old labor organization. "It's not yet a movement."

What makes a movement? Two things -- a problem and a solution, according to Dan Schnur, communications director for Republican John McCain's 2000 presidential campaign.

"The difference between an angry mob and a movement is a goal," Schnur says. "If you march to the White House and the president asks, 'What do you want me to do?', you have to have something to say."

Specifics will emerge -- "We're not here just to march and bang on drums," says Bill Buster, an OWS public relations volunteer at the encampment in Zuccotti Park, where protesters have attracted as much attention for their attire (as "Wall Street zombies") and antics (pillow fights) as their ideology.

There are plenty of cautionary tales about moments that never became movements. The Coffee Party, founded in early 2010 as a liberal (and ostensibly more civil) alternative to the Tea Party, is now crippled by schism.

Kerbel cautions against overstating OWS' potential. At best, he says, "they face some growing pains. ... So far, this is all hypothetical. I could give you a dozen ways this doesn't work out."

Here are five questions OWS faces. How they're answered, political analysts say, will determine the protest's ultimate impact.

#### 1. Led or leaderless?

Navi Johal, an OWS protester who is also a full-time student and 40-hour-a-week clothing store employee, says the protests need better leadership: "A rattlesnake has to have a head."

Kazin says that for a movement to communicate its message, it may need a leader or spokesperson recognizable to the public and identifiable to the news media.

"Flexibility can produce incoherence. At some point, people are going to say, 'I can't listen to everyone,'" he says.

But others believe a single identifiable or charismatic leader is the least of OWS' needs. "You don't need one -- the Tea Party proved that," says Thad Kousser, a University of California-San Diego political scientist.

Sal Russo, the Sacramento political consultant who helped found the Tea Party Express, says working in Ross Perot's third-party presidential campaign in 1992 showed him the problem with a movement based on a leader.

When the irascible Perot "sort of flamed out, that hurt the whole movement. I vowed that was not going to happen with the Tea Party."

#### 2. Organization: Horizontal or vertical?

Whatever its merits, OWS' organization reflects its decentralized, spontaneous soul.

"Its horizontal organization makes it more possible for them to engage in what you're seeing" -- the gatherings, street theater and protests, as well as its spread from city to city, Kerbel says.

Recalling the Perot campaign, Russo says horizontal works better than vertical.

"Perot admired the military, so he developed a command-and-control system for decision-making. That meant that if some guy in Pocatello woke up with a good idea, he had to run it through Dallas (headquarters) before he could do it. But you don't want that guy to have to wait until he loses interest."

No organization doesn't mean disorganized.

The OWS encampment has a reception area, a media zone, a medical clinic, a library and a cafeteria. The protesters publish a newspaper, The Occupied Wall Street Journal. Their website has a link that allows supporters elsewhere to order and pay for pies that a New York pizzeria then delivers to the park.

The protesters are prohibited from using bullhorns. So when the Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz spoke to them, he was told to pause in between lines so the crowd around him could repeat his words more loudly to the rest of the gathering.

But Kazin says eventually the movement will need something more: "If you want to have influence, there is no alternative to creating institutions."

#### 3. What's the agenda? Is there one?

OWS has deliberately kept its scope broad and its goals vague. A Sept. 29 "manifesto" on the group's website lists "grievances" ranging from "large executive bank bonuses" to the death penalty.

But the list was asterisked -- "grievances are not all-inclusive."

Fair enough, says Cornel West, a Princeton professor and left firebrand: "It's impossible to translate Wall Street greed into one or two demands." And it's pragmatic, according to Kerbel: "If you assemble a group that shares a common critique, as soon as you get into details, you begin to fall apart."

But the great political movements -- abolition, civil rights, anti-Vietnam War -- all went a step further. "They developed a program," says Kousser of UC-San Diego.

The problem with coalescing around one goal is the need to coalesce around the right one. A financial transactions tax? Higher taxes on the rich? "A new 'department of banking regulation' won't get people marching in the street," Kousser predicts.

#### 4. What about Election Day?

Any nascent movement faces a choice between purity and impact, which often is a decision about how deeply to get involved in politics. "If you're occupying Wall Street today," Kousser asks, "what do you do in November?"

OWS faces a particular dilemma, because many protesters believe that their most likely big-party allies -- the Democrats -- coddle Wall Street, and that President Obama relies on hedge fund managers' campaign contributions.

Links to unions also have a price in spontaneity and independence.

Terry Madonna, director of the Franklin and Marshall College Poll in Lancaster, Pa., says that although the protesters "want their appeal to transcend partisan politics, there's a risk of being co-opted, or hijacked," especially by unions that support Obama and that last week turned out to support OWS.

Schnur says the degree of political engagement may depend on how much the movement hopes to achieve: "If you want to repeal the \$5 charge on debit card transactions, you don't need to get into elective politics. If you want to double the tax rate in the highest brackets, you do."

Kousser says OWS eventually has to get political, and get partisan.

"This is how a movement grows up. It's not enough just to point out what's wrong. You need to affect the levers of power to change things. Politicians don't fear forces that can't change elections."

#### 5. Managing conflict

For a movement, conflict is both prerequisite and pitfall. Protests must be outrageous enough or contentious enough to get noticed, but not enough to turn people off.

Occupy Wall Street's national attention and support took off only after a police commander was videotaped pepper-spraying two female protesters, and about 700 protesters were arrested at the Brooklyn Bridge.

But conflict has dangers, Madonna says. "If it turns ugly, you know what the reaction of the American people will be -- negative."

From Martin Luther, who used the printing press to spread his ideas about reforming Christianity, to Martin Luther King, who used televised images of police violence to build support for civil rights, the story's always the same,

Kerbel says: "Whoever understands the political power of new media will succeed."

Social media alone cannot make a revolution.

"It's good at informing, organizing and mobilizing those who agree with you," Schnur says, and not so good at converting those who don't.

However, he says, social media frees would-be protesters from reliance on the mass media for information. They allow organizers to move more quickly, and, as Kazin puts it, makes it "easier to be leaderless for awhile."

If the new communication technology has lowered barriers to protest, and if the world faces seemingly intractable economic problems, are we on the verge of a period of upheaval?

"It seems to me we face a crisis of advanced capital society in the U.S., Western Europe and Japan," Kazin says, "and that breeds fear and upheaval."

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