

It's important for the Occupy Movement to stay peaceful

OPEN FORUM

By Wim Laven

There is an old adage for journalism: If it bleeds, it leads; we are reminded of this sentiment regularly.

Earlier this year I wrote about our need to see Osama bin Laden's body; the thirst for blood was alive and well after Muammar Gaddafi was killed as well. It is important to avoid such a reaction with the nonviolent Occupy Movement.

On October 25th images of police in gas masks, armed with tear-gas, violently dispersing a crowd in Oakland California, went viral.

Scott Olson, Veterans for Peace, was critically injured by a canister that struck him in the face and a subsequent flash grenade appears (very obviously in my opinion) to have been intentionally thrown into the group of protesters coming to his aid.

The images are disturbing, graphic and upsetting; resist the urge to fixate on the violence, but don't ignore it. On November 2nd, the people showed their solidarity and held a general strike and marched to the port of Oakland.

But, by midnight, the coverage had shifted; the interest was no longer the thousands of people who peacefully walked. It had turned to the bonfires, destruction and vandalism, and the renewed conflict with the police.

Martin Luther King Jr. famously used American bloodlust to garner attention for the African American Civil Rights Movement. The images of peaceful people—attacked by dogs and hoses turned on them—helped awaken people who

didn't believe things were "that bad."

It was important to show the violence of inequality; it was important to shock people into action. The struggle for civil rights showed the struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor; it was graphic and clear.

Many people may not have understood the painful sting of being told, "move to the back of the bus," or "Not Allowed Here," but the ferocious images of violence weren't something people were merely "whining about."

Gandhi didn't have the advantage of ubiquitous cell phone pictures and film, but he took advantage of all the press he could get. He knew: the more real the violence directed against the nonviolent, the stronger the voice of opposition.

The world paid little attention to the challenge to the Salt Tax—it was easy to ignore such a "modest tax"—but, when Webb Miller described "they went down like ten-pins," it was too difficult for the world to ignore.

"From where I stood I heard the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls," wrote Miller. "The waiting crowd of watchers groaned and sucked in their breaths in sympathetic pain at every blow. Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing in pain with fractured skulls or broken shoulders."

The Occupy Movement has many parallels. After all, the challenge many are making is that occupiers are lazy whiners. Others say: if you don't like the banks—don't use them, and if you don't like the corporations—don't buy their products and services (I suppose the Indians didn't need salt either).

But many are changing their minds

and paying attention, because violent responses to nonviolent resistance have always called to the collective human consciousness. At our cores we know: *whatever the problem, violence is never the solution.*

The Occupation is about peace and social justice. In my mind it is all about the question of equality. The Declaration says: all men are created equal, and have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

This is the Declaration of Independence; the United States of America was built on equality—not a healthy economy (read corporate profits).

Occupy Wall Street is only exposing this failure; people want to work, and don't want to have to make tough choices

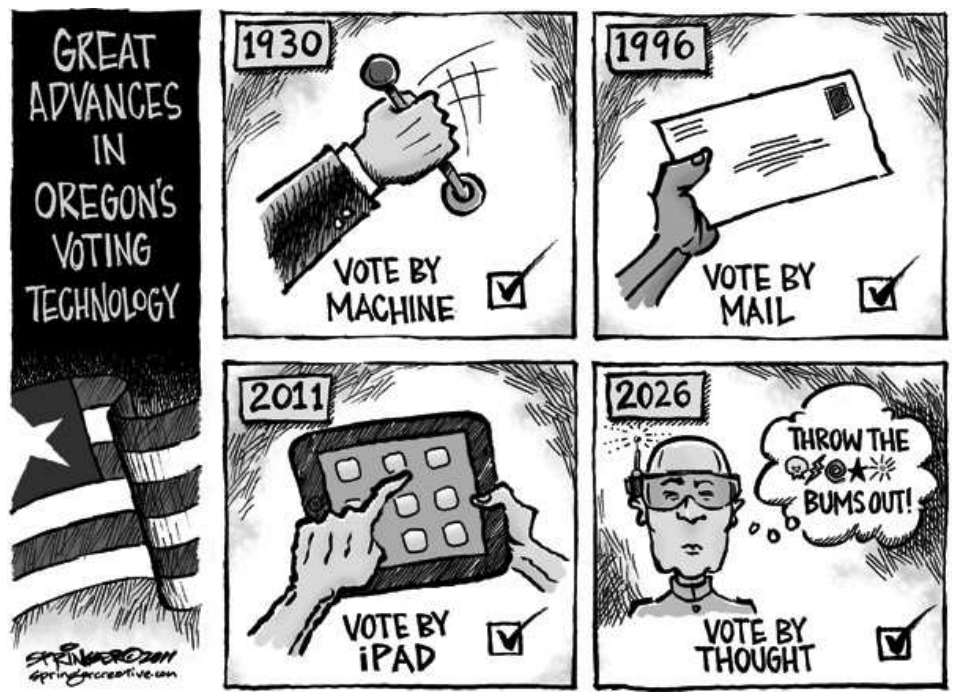
about things like whether to pay for rent or health insurance or groceries...

I really hope that people can stay committed to the nonviolent struggle that is the Occupy Movement. Change does not come easy (the Montgomery Bus Boycott took 381 days!), and it does not come without sacrifice.

At this point, however, it is something the world needs. "America Shows Its Soul" reads the cover of The Hindu Magazine in Delhi.

This is a year of revolution—anything is possible—and with nonviolent struggle the voice is the loudest. I hope the country rediscovers its democratic voice; we only passed the Voting Act in 1965, in response to the long struggle

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