



Pre-Occupied with Noam Chomsky

Influential political thinker Noam Chomsky's new book 'Occupy' offers a vivid portrait of the global Occupy movement and a guide to intelligent activism.

BY SETH KERSHNER
STREET NEWS SERVICE

Noam Chomsky's new book, "Occupy," published as part of the Occupied Media Pamphlet Series, lays out many arguments first articulated at student meetings and in front of gatherings of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) activists. Professor Chomsky's interest in Occupy is consistent with his support of previous grassroots movements for change and stems from some of his better-known views on American culture and politics. He has said that "it's only when people get together that they become dangerous" because then "they begin to enter that arena where they don't belong, namely influencing public affairs."

Hence the usefulness of what is known as "the entertainment industry" for those who don't wish to relinquish their hold on power. Television ("You are alone watching the tube. That is very advantageous for the control of people") and sports ("a way of building up irrational attitudes of submission to authority") are both useful as they succeed in keeping people isolated and outside of the political arena. It is because they overcome these strategies of alienation and estrangement that movements like Occupy Wall Street will always be opposed by police wielding pepper spray and tear gas.

Seth Kershner: *You're listed as a New York Times syndicated columnist – ironic, considering your history of leveling criticism at the Times. How long have you held this distinction?*

Noam Chomsky: I was invited by the editor, who seems to operate more or less independently

of the journal. I don't know the details. The op-eds distributed by the syndicate, though distributed here, don't appear in the New York Times, or in the U.S. press generally (except for In These Times, occasionally some other small newspaper, or websites). The book "Interventions" is a collection of them (updated), and another collection is appearing.

S.K.: *We've all seen the video of police pepper-spraying protesters, but few know that City of London police recently listed the OWS activists among "terrorist groups" like al-Qaeda of Pakistan in an advisory notice.*

According to the New York Times, the police operation to clear Zuccotti Park was preceded by weeks of counterterrorism training. And Michael Greenberg writes in the New York Review of Books about how a police satellite truck was for weeks parked in front of the apartment building where one of the "core organizers" for OWS lived; the police were "apparently monitoring people who came in to see her."

N.C.: It was never in doubt that the authorities would act to terminate the occupations. The only question was when and how. It appeared to be a nationally coordinated effort, implemented in different ways throughout the country. As for the effect, it depends how the OWS movements and their supporters respond. Of course, the repression, however predictable, should be

protested, and the victims defended. But we should all realize that the best defense against repression is to carry the struggle forward. That's the task in hand.

S.K.: *But what do you think is the best way to carry the struggle forward? Some Occupy groups have hinted that – come springtime – they'll set up new encampments in city centers and get back to doing the very visible kinds of actions that they began last October. Are traditional community organizing efforts (e.g., coalition-building with labor) not being fully exploited by the OWS movement?*

N.C.: I don't regard my own tactical advice as very significant. For example, if asked I would have opposed the Occupy tactic, assuming that it wouldn't work, and I'd have been spectacularly wrong.

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For what it's worth, my guess is that this particular tactic has probably outlived its usefulness, at least as playing a central role in the movement, and that it is necessary to reach out to engage much broader constituencies, with careful

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See CHOMSKY page 3

Inside



Martin Zarzar's new beat

Pink Martini's drummer talks about his new album

Page 3



Gravity of abuse

Part III in our series on one family's journey through domestic violence

Page 8



Vendor Profile

The positive outlook of Jonathan Bartley

Page 6