

# CFT backs Occupy Wall Street

For several years the CFT has been championing progressive tax policies to address state revenue shortfalls. We have announced our intent to go to the state ballot box with a proposal to boost income tax rates on the rich in November 2012 to fund public education and services. We have been gaining traction with our membership, the public, and a growing list of coalition partners, who recognize that the growing gap between the very rich and the rest of us has been unbalancing our society.

But the attention paid to these issues due to CFT efforts was nothing like what is now happening in the wake of the Occupy Wall Street movement. After thirty years in which the public political narrative has been dominated by anti-tax, anti-government, anti-union messages, the game is changing. For weeks it has been difficult to open a daily newspaper or turn on the ten o'clock news or go to your favorite news website without finding a story or seeing a picture about “the 1%” and “the 99%.” For the first time in decades, income and wealth inequality is a major concern of the news media, of kitchen

table conversations, and even politicians.

## Modest credit

A modest amount of credit can be given to Barack Obama, for coming back around to a 2008 campaign theme he pushed briefly in late 2010 but then let lie dormant until a couple months ago: his call to boost tax rates on millionaires and billionaires in order to fund public services.

But that wasn't the game changer. Of far greater consequence was a message sent out by an obscure Canadian media-critique magazine, *Adbusters*,

calling for people to show up on Wall Street and occupy it near the end of summer. Oddly enough, that's what happened. Not an occupation of the magnitude of Tahrir Square, or in the streets of Madison, Wisconsin, earlier this year, although the lessons of both those events clearly played a role in setting up what quickly spread from New York to cities across the United States.

Occupy Wall Street is thus far a rather limited example of direct action, if compared with historical precedents like the wave of factory occupations in the United States in 1937 following the seizure by automobile workers of the GM Fisher Body Plant in Flint, Michigan—the event that led to unionization of the auto industry. But Occupy Wall Street has endured, with hundreds of people organizing themselves to sleep, eat, debate, demonstrate, and learn together outside in a quasi-public space, Zuccotti Park, in New York for six weeks as of this writing.

The numbers have swelled to thousands for demonstrations and to defend the square against a threatened eviction, much like the flexible size of CFT's March for California's Future last year as it snaked through the central valley from Bakersfield to Sacramento over 48 days. More importantly, Occupy Wall Street sparked similar occupations/demonstrations throughout the United States. Better than one hundred fifty ongoing occupations have sprung up and kept going.

In the process, Occupy Wall Street has changed what we talk about, frightened bankers, stockbrokers and hedge fund managers, and reinvigorated labor and community activists hungry for good news in a recession that should have created a progressive movement but hadn't until now.

## What do they want?

CFT endorsed Occupy Wall Street, as have many labor organizations. That's because the occupiers, of varying opinions on some issues, are nonetheless clear that the economy and the government have not been working for you and me—the 99%—for some time now. They



FRED LONIDER PHOTO

Jim Miller of San Diego City College, AFT Local 1931, participates in Occupy San Diego.

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are clear that teachers and other public employees did not crash the economy with their salaries or work rules or pensions—Wall Street did, with its toxic financial derivatives and predatory loan practices. They are clear that as income and wealth has accumulated in the top 1% over the past few decades, and tax rates have been reduced on that same tiny slice of the population, our schools, transportation and public health systems, and public safety agencies have been pushed into steep decline.

The Occupy movement has projected those ideas into public discussion in a big way. As CFT president Josh Pechthalt observed, “The women and men who are participating in Occupy Wall Street have given voice to the suffering and economic uncertainty felt by millions of Americans. Educators are proud to stand in solidarity with these principles and this important movement.”

Over the past few weeks CFT members have joined in the Occupy events in San Diego,

Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco. During the recent CFT Council of Classified Employees conference, a dozen members accompanied San Diego City College professor Jim Miller to Occupy San Diego. They presented the occupiers with a donation of several hundred dollars collected at the conference, and Miller read the CFT endorsement statement to an enthusiastic reception by the crowd.

Occupiers have reciprocated, coming out, for instance, to support San Francisco educators protesting an education “reform” conference headlined by Jeb Bush and Rupert Murdoch on October 13.

It remains to be seen where the Occupy movement will go. But even if it goes no further than where it is, it will have made an historic contribution to raising consciousness about the real problems facing this country. **ccc**

By Fred Glass

## California Federation of Teachers endorses a movement

“The California Federation of Teachers endorses the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement. Occupy Wall Street, and its local variations, represent the legitimate response of the 99% of us adversely affected by growing wealth and income inequality in America. One percent of the population now owns close to 40% of the country's wealth. Each year, the richest one percent of the population takes in a quarter of the nation's income, representing a doubling of the one percent's share over the past twenty years. During this time the wealthy received massive tax cuts, both in California and at the federal level, a major cause of public budget shortfalls that hurt students, make our streets less safe, and harm the health of children and seniors.

“Instead of investing its newfound wealth in productive enterprises in the United States, the top 1% moved it offshore or into financial speculation, which ultimately crashed the economy. The 1% also took large amounts of this money and poured it into a public relations effort to blame teachers and other public servants for the economic problems the 1% created.

“Occupy Wall Street redirects the attention of the public to the actual causes of the economic crash and recession and to the parties responsible. The California Federation of Teachers embraces the call of Occupy Wall Street to raise taxes on the rich, to reregulate the banks, and to enact a financial speculation tax. We encourage our members to participate in the OWS actions in their cities. These actions will help restore public budgets for schools and other vital services, and set our state and our country back on a road to democracy and prosperity.”

October 14, 2011