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## THEY SAID IT

My struggles, my worries, my bitter grief, my errors, my insomnia, intestinal troubles, asthma, skin ailments and even phthiriasis, the weak ways of my grandson, the sins of my own son . . . not to mention my daughter's barrenness, the drawn-out struggle with the College of Physicians, the constant intrigues, the slanders, poor health, no true friends . . . so many plots against me, so many tricks to trip me up, the thieving of my maids, drunken coachmen, the whole dishonest, cowardly, traitorous, arrogant crew that it has been my misfortune to deal with . . .

Girolamo Cardano, Italian Renaissance mathematician, *The Story of My Life*, 1576.

## In this Issue

Occupy Sesame Street.

## OCCUPY SESAME STREET.

As we have mentioned before, we are really and truly enjoying a great bit of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Certainly we could do without the grime, the crime, and now the need for officially sanctioned on-site rape shelters. And obviously, we could do without the riots and the violence, both of which are all but certain to increase in number and intensity as the protests continue to degenerate into chaos. But beyond that, we find the occupiers amusing, to say the very least. They are also, much to our surprise, edifying, validating, and, perhaps most importantly, clarifying. Much that we have thought and wondered about the Left, about the "new new Left," in particular, and about the Left's impact on the younger generation has been illuminated and refined by these protests. In short, Occupy Wall Street has been invaluable as a source of both entertainment and ideas.

To both of these ends, one of our favorite stories to emerge from the wall-to-wall media coverage of these protests and their various participants is that of Joe Therrien, an erstwhile teacher in New York City who has, apparently, had a deep and profound impact on his brethren in the "99%." Richard Kim, the executive editor of the left-wing rag *The Nation*, told Joe's story in an article last week:

A few years ago, Joe Therrien, a graduate of the NYC Teaching Fellows program, was working as a full-time drama teacher at a public elementary school in New York City. Frustrated by huge class sizes, sparse resources and a disorganized bureaucracy, he set off to the University of Connecticut to get an MFA in his passion—puppetry. Three years and \$35,000 in student loans later, he emerged with degree in hand, and because puppeteers aren't exactly in high demand, he went looking for work at his old school. The intervening years had been brutal to the city's school budgets—down about 14 percent on average since 2007. A virtual hiring freeze has

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been in place since 2009 in most subject areas, arts included, and spending on art supplies in elementary schools crashed by 73 percent between 2006 and 2009. So even though Joe's old principal was excited to have him back, she just couldn't afford to hire a new full-time teacher. Instead, he's working at his old school as a full-time "substitute"; he writes his own curriculum, holds regular classes and does everything a normal teacher does. "But sub pay is about 50 percent of a full-time salaried position," he says, "so I'm working for half as much as I did four years ago, before grad school, and I don't have health insurance . . . It's the best-paying job I could find."

Poor Joe. He was bored. And unhappy. So he decided to take some time off. He quit his job, ran off to beautiful and scenic Storrs, and spent a couple of years kicking back with his favorite childhood toys – figuring the whole time that he'd be able to plop right back into real life when he was done playing at being Jim Henson. Heck, Joe even thought he'd be rewarded for his "efforts," since as Richard Kim notes, "Like a lot of the young protesters who have flocked to Occupy Wall Street, Joe had thought that hard work and education would bring, if not class mobility, at least a measure of security (indeed, a master's degree can boost a New York City teacher's salary by \$10,000 or more)."

But it didn't work out for Joe. Apparently the no good, rotten, stinking 1-percenters really screwed things up for him! And now Joe is left with nothing, nothing at all. Which, of course, is why he's mad as hell and is not going to take it any more! How's he gonna fix it, you ask? Oh . . . just you wait, 1-percenters! He'll show you! Again, to cite Richard Kim:

Within his first hour at Liberty Park, he was "totally won over by the Occupation's spirit of cooperation and selflessness." He has been going back

just about every day since. It took him a few days to find the Arts and Culture working group, which has its roots in the first planning meetings and has already produced a museum's worth of posters (from the crudely handmade to slicker culture-jamming twists on corporate designs), poetry readings, performance-art happenings, political yoga classes and Situationist spectacles . . .

At one of Arts and Culture's meetings—held adjacent to 60 Wall Street, at a quieter public-private indoor park that's also the atrium of Deutsche Bank—it dawned on Joe: "I have to build as many giant puppets as I can to help this thing out—people love puppets!"

So . . . HA! Take that, you fat cats! Puppets! Are you quaking in your wing-tips yet? PUPPETS, he said!

In all seriousness, though, the story of Joe Therrien is revealing, and not just about Joe and his child-like passions. It is, in a broader sense, a metaphor for the entire "Occupy" movement and exposes at least a couple of critical, if largely overlooked elements of the protests and their fomenters.

For starters, consider the Puppet Master's sense of entitlement and his belief that the consequences of his own stupid choices are someone else's fault and therefore should be someone else's responsibility. He had a job, a good job. According to an analysis by the Manhattan Institute in 2005, thanks to the strength of city's teacher's union, average hourly compensation for teachers in New York was around \$45/hr. And while that might not ever get a guy a penthouse in Tribeca, it was a good job. But it wasn't enough for Joe. He wanted more. And he was absolutely certain that he could get more. So he borrowed \$35,000 to get a masters degree. In puppetry.

Of course, a strange thing happened to Joe on the way to getting "more." It turned out that there wasn't any more to get. And, in fact, while he was off with

his hand up Miss Piggy's backside, what there was, happened to be snatched by someone else. And so now he's mad.

But he's not mad at himself for being a complete dolt and leaving his good job. And he's not mad at himself for being a bigger dolt and leaving his good job to get a degree in marionetting . . . or whatever he "studied." And he's not even mad at himself for being so monumentally stupid as to leave his good job to get an advanced degree in child's play (literally!) and to borrow nearly the national annual median income to do so. None of this crosses his mind, apparently.

Instead, he's mad at the 1%. It's their fault, you see. He has a gift. Or a dream. Or something. And "they" always told him that the better educated he was, then the better he was, period. And he believed "them." So he followed his dream and he made himself a better man . . . errr . . . person by becoming better educated. And now he's screwed. Instead of being the king puppeteer of P.S. Whatever, or hailed by the arts community as "the next Frank Oz," he can't even get his old job back. And how is that fair? He's better now than he was before. Better, stronger, faster! More "elite." But he's reduced to not even having health insurance, like some common manual laborer!

And Joe has to blame somebody for this, doesn't he? It has to be somebody's fault, right? Somebody did this too him. Or lied to him about how the world worked. And who lied to him? Who screwed him over? Why, the 1%, that's who! Don't ask how. That's irrelevant. They did. And that's all you need to know.

The second thing that we learn about Joe from his underemployment ordeal drama is the fact that he is a snob. Joe tells Richard Kim that the full-time substitute gig that he took was "the best-paying job I could find." Pardon us for saying so, but at half the pay he was making before, that's a load of buffalo chips. What Joe really meant to say was, "It was the best-paying job I could find, that I was qualified for or that I didn't have to work with my hands or work really hard to do." Or, more likely, "It was the best-paying job I could find, IN NEW YORK CITY."

One suspects that Joe could have found another job at better money if he had broadened his job search just a little bit. But, of course, that would have meant including places like New Jersey, or upstate New York, or – GASP! – Pennsylvania! And you know who lives in Pennsylvania, don't you? Pennsylvanians. And everyone knows that Pennsylvanians are creepy as all get out. They are scared easily and when they are scared, they cling to their guns, and their religion, and other yucky stuff. And who would want to work among those . . . people . . . if it's fair to call them that? Everyone knows that culture and progress and proper beliefs reside in New York. And Washington. And Seattle. And Chicago. And San Francisco. And a few other places. But nowhere in between. That's "flyover country." And the people who live there read the Bible and don't believe in climate change and don't know that vaccines cause autism and have calluses on their hands. And . . . well . . . yuck.

In so many ways, Joe Therrien is emblematic of the Occupy Wall Street movement. He is a caricature, to be sure. But he is one that embodies the very spirit of the movement in such an obvious way as to make it nearly impossible to miss.

Over the course of the last several weeks, as the Occupy movement has slowly degenerated into the predictable anarcho-totalitarian disaster, many on the right have trotted out quotes from George Orwell predicting and considering such developments. Most of these, understandably, have been drawn from *Animal Farm*, where, in the end, all animals are equal, but some are infamously more equal than others. Some of the Orwell quotes have been taken from *1984*. But perhaps the most insightful and the most interesting was one posted by *The Atlantic's* Megan McCardle and drawn from Orwell's account of the lives and times of North Yorkshire's pre-War coal miners, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. To wit:

I was born into what you might describe as the lower-upper-middle class. The upper-middle class, which had its heyday in the 'eighties and 'nineties, with Kipling as its poet laureate, was a sort of mound of wreckage left behind when the tide

of Victorian prosperity receded. Or perhaps it would be better to change the metaphor and describe it not as a mound but as a layer--the layer of society lying between £2,000 and £200 a year: my own family was not far from the bottom. You notice that I define it in terms of money, because that is always the quickest way of making yourself understood. Nevertheless, the essential point about the English class-system is that it is not entirely explicable in terms of money. Roughly speaking it is a money-stratification, but it is also interspersed by a sort of shadowy caste-system; rather like a jerry-built modern bungalow haunted by medieval ghosts. Hence the fact that the upper-middle class extends or extended to incomes as low as £300 a year--to incomes, that is, much lower than those of merely middle-class people with no social pretensions. Probably there are countries where you can predict a man's opinions from his income, but it is never quite safe to do so in England; you have always got to take his traditions into consideration as well. A naval officer and his grocer very likely have the same income, but they are not equivalent persons and they would only be on the same side in very large issues such as a war or a general strike--possibly not even then.

... Before the war you were either a gentleman or not a gentleman, and if you were a gentleman you struggled to behave as such, whatever your income might be. Between those with £400 a year and those with £2,000 or even £1,000 a year there was a great gulf fixed, but it was a gulf which those with £400 a year did their best to ignore. Probably the distinguishing mark of the upper-middle class was that its traditions were not to any

extent commercial, but mainly military, official, and professional. People in this class owned no land, but they felt that they were landowners in the sight of God and kept up a semi-aristocratic outlook by going into the professions and the fighting services rather than into trade. Small boys used to count the plum stones on their plates and foretell their destiny by chanting "Army, Navy, Church, Medicine, Law"; and even of these "Medicine" was faintly inferior to the others and only put in for the sake of symmetry. To belong to this class when you were at the £400 a year level was a queer business, for it meant that your gentility was almost purely theoretical. You lived, so to speak, at two levels simultaneously. Theoretically you knew all about servants and how to tip them, although in practice you had one, or at most, two resident servants. Theoretically you knew how to wear your clothes and how to order a dinner, although in practice you could never afford to go to a decent tailor or a decent restaurant. Theoretically you knew how to shoot and ride, although in practice you had no horses to ride and not an inch of ground to shoot over . . .

In the kind of shabby-genteel family that I am talking about here is far more consciousness of poverty than in any working class family above the level of the dole. Rent and clothes and school-bills are an unending nightmare, and every luxury, even a glass of beer, is an unwarrantable extravagance. Practically the whole family income goes in keeping up appearances. It is obvious that people of this kind are in an anomalous position, and one might be tempted to write them off as mere exceptions and therefore unimportant. Actually, however, they are or were fairly numerous.

This is, to put it mildly, a brilliant citation on McCardle's part. The general consensus, on the both the right and the left – one side that cites the term as a call to action and the other that mocks it derisively – is that the “class warfare” that exists in this country rages between the elites, or the uber-wealthy, and the rest of us; between the 1% and the 99%. But that's completely and utterly false and, in fact, entirely backward. And here, citing Orwell, McCardle explains precisely why this conception of the class war is wrong. She continues:

Orwell goes on to point out that it is the anxious lower-upper-middle-class who have the most venom towards those below them--precisely because to preserve their status, they have to keep themselves sharply apart from the workers and tradesmen. And I think that that does apply here as well, at least to some extent. One of the interesting things about going back to my business school reunion earlier in the month was simply the absence of the sort of cutting remarks about flyover country that I have grown used to hearing in any large gathering of people. I didn't notice it until after the events were over, because it was a slow accumulation of all the jokes and rants I hadn't heard about NASCAR, McMansions, megachurches, reality television, and all the other cultural signifiers that make up a small but steady undercurrent of my current social milieu, the way Polish jokes did when I was in sixth grade.

Some of my former classmates now live in flyover country, of course, but mostly, I think, they just didn't care. No one seemed very interested in the culture war.

So why does that same culture war seem so important to so many of the people that I know in New York and DC? (“The intellectuals”, as one of my classmates laughingly called us, when I

started dropping statistics in the middle of cocktail chitchat, and then lamely explained that this is kind of what passes for fascinating small talk in DC.)

It's not entirely crazy to suspect, as Orwell did, that this has something to do with money. Specifically, you sneer at the customs of the people you might be mistaken for.

The real class war in this country is indeed being waged more literally by the folks at Occupy Wall Street and their political comrades-in-arms, *but not against the elites*. They actually like the elites, contrary to what they say publicly. And they seek to emulate them in as many ways as possible – from where they live to what they drive; from where they shop to what they eat. They want to think like the elites and dress like the elites. They are, after all, educated like the elites. And they don't understand why that doesn't entitle them simply to live like the elites.

Those whom they hate and against whom they are waging war are those whom they consider “beneath” them in the social pecking order, the “people,” the masses, the uneducated, the blue-collar types whom, as McCardle notes, they “might be mistaken for” based on income alone but whom they know, deep down in their hearts, they are clearly “better” than.

The explicit irony here is that people like George Orwell gravitated to the Left because it promised to level all of Europe's old and longstanding social classes. Today's Left, by contrast, attracts those who seek to distinguish themselves from other, “lesser” Americans specifically by attaching themselves to a political and economic system that confers upon them moral and financial well-being based not on birth-right and heredity but on attitudes, ideology, and the trappings of educational achievement, which is to say “credentials.” Today's Leftists, in other words, seek not only the preservation of a class system, but the recognition of their superiority in that system, at least when compared to those simplistic fools beneath them who don't know and don't understand what really matters in this world.

This, of course, is what underpins Barack Obama's consistent condescension toward and dismissal of "regular" Americans, who, in addition to God and gun clingers, he has consistently derided throughout his presidency as simple, short of attention, and unable to grasp critical concepts: stupid, in short. Obama knows that his supporters, his fans, his fellow travellers will take no offense at his smug characterizations of "the people" because he doesn't mean them, and they know he doesn't mean them. He means those other . . . well . . . people: plumbers, pipe fitters, welders, farmers, home builders, construction workers, painters, and other folks who shower *after* work rather than before it. He means Christians, Evangelicals especially. And people who went to state colleges. He means . . . them. Not us.

This is also the spirit that underpins the political "thought" – if that's what you call it – that animates people like Thomas Frank – who famously wondered "What's the Matter with Kansas?" Seriously? What is wrong with *those* people? Don't they know any better? How can they be fooled so easily into the false consciousness of the capitalist-consumerist society. Don't they know that we latte-sipping, i-Phone tapping, Prius-driving, smarty-pantses know what's best for them? After all, they didn't earn a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago like we did. Simpletons.

In his classic book *Bobos in Paradise, The New Upper Class and How They Got There*, the journalist and now-*New York Times* columnist David Brooks coined the term "Bobos" to describe "Bourgeois Bohemians," the urban-dwelling, smug, leftist heirs to the yuppies, who gravitated to the coasts, who adopted "green" politics, and who, essentially, paved the way for both the Obama revolution and the Occupy Wall Street movement.

The squatters in Zuccotti Park are, in turn, the heirs to the Bobos – a mass of self-absorbed, entitled, lesser-elites who believe that, simply by virtue of a college degree or proper political beliefs, they have earned a social and economic status that distinguishes them from the lesser people. What differentiates today's "99%-ers" from the Bobos of yore, of course, is the economic and financial collapse. Once upon a time,

the Bobos could aspire to getting and being rich and using their money to do good things and to enjoy good things. They could do well by doing good, as the axiom went. But now, they can't. Or at least they can't quite as easily. And they're unhappy about it.

And that, by extension, explains their rage against the "1%." In their minds, these 1%-ers are also the ethereal "they" who told them to go to college, to go to expensive private colleges, to study education instead of engineering, or women's studies instead of math, or, well, puppetry instead of any real academic subject. And these 1%-ers are the same "they" who told them to take out huge loans to pay for it all because the loans wouldn't matter once they were living it up in Soho or Dumbarton Oaks or Adams Morgan or any of the other neighborhoods where young, progressive hipsters hang out and plot to take over the world by spending all their well "earned" money on fair-trade coffee and organic-cotton t-shirts.

It doesn't really ever occur to any them – and nor would it matter to them, even if it did occur to them – that they're flat wrong and that they're targeting the wrong elites. It wasn't the bankers and the traders and the brokers who sold them this bill of goods. It was the politicians. It was Barack Obama. And Hillary Clinton. And Bill Clinton, for that matter. And every other politician over the last half century who mouthed platitudes about the importance of education and the need for America to be able to compete globally, all the while pushing policies and an ideology that could do nothing but hollow out the very educational system charged with providing said competitiveness.

Nevertheless, this "almost elite" as McCardle terms them, rages against "the system" and against the unfairness of it all and especially against the possibility that, despite their superiority, the dastardliness of the mysterious and nefarious global banking syndicate, might render them less privileged than the Bubbas in flyover country. Can you imagine?

The point of all of this we think, could be easily missed, but is critical to any attempt to forecast or understand the medium-to-long-term implications

for American politics. The short term, we're afraid, is rather self-explanatory. The Occupy Wall Street movement is merely one more battle in the war over dwindling resources that we have been promising and following for more than two years.

This "almost elite" is nearly universally part of what we might call the "clerical class." Unlike the working class, they don't actually do or fix or make anything. And unlike the true elites, they don't create or imagine or develop anything. They are clerks and bureaucrats. They are teachers and administrators. They work for governments or government-related agencies or, in their ideal worlds, for non-profit organizations. It is true that many are among the most dedicated, most intelligent, most honorable, and most patriotic people living and working in this country today. And many make a great difference in the lives of a great many others. But many, many more do not. And worse yet, those who presume to speak for them politically or who speak the loudest where matters of politics and policy are concerned are interested more in preserving privilege than in contributing positively to debate over the evolving demographic, economic, and political dynamics in the country and throughout the Western world. All of which is to say that they are digging in their heels and fighting for whatever resources they can manage to preserve for themselves.

This battlefield, of course, is but one of many. And the same forces motivating the occupiers in Zuccotti Park are also motivating union political organizations to ramp up their campaigns against public-employee collective bargaining reform, including the campaign culminating today with a referendum on reform in Ohio. These battles will continue indefinitely, until one side either wins the debate convincingly or until the money simply runs out, ending the debate for good.

And in the medium-to-long term, irrespective of which side wins the debate, that money will indeed eventually run out, which means that the clerical class will diminish both in size and importance, whether its occupants and occupiers like it or not. Over the long haul, there is simply not enough money around to

keep that many people living that comfortably while simultaneously providing for the cushy retirements of their predecessors. The demographics and the economics are simply unsustainable. And the class itself will crash.

In the description above, Orwell notes that his family's circumstances were not all that unique in the inter-bellum period. "It is obvious," he wrote, "that people of this kind are in an anomalous position, and one might be tempted to write them off as mere exceptions and therefore unimportant. Actually, however, they are or were fairly numerous." Of course that group that was "fairly numerous" no longer exists in any meaningful sense. It has disappeared, killed off, essentially by the economic changes that accompanied the end of the Second World War and the rise of America as the global superpower in Britain's stead.

A similar phenomenon will occur in this country, whether it follows in Britain's footsteps in relinquishing the role of global hegemon or not. It is all but inevitable.

This is not, however, to say that the clerical class will go gently into that good night. Indeed, we expect precisely the opposite. The protestors at Zuccotti Park and elsewhere throughout the country will disperse, eventually. But they and others like them will be back. There is too much at stake for them not to be. Indeed, the very identity of the modern political Left is at stake.

In a long essay – which, incidentally served as the motivation for Megan McCardle's piece – Kenneth Anderson, a law professor at American University and a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, noted that the Occupy Wall Street movement is, at its heart, about the downward mobility that has unexpectedly and in some sense "embarrassingly" plagued the "almost elites" of the clerical class since the financial collapse of 2008.

The OWS protestors are a revolt — a shrill, *cri-de-coeur* wail at the betrayal of class solidarity — of the lower tier New Class

against the upper tier New Class. It was, after all, the upper tier New Class, the private-public finance consortium, that created the student loan business and inflated the bubble in which these lower tier would-be professionals borrowed the money. It's a securitization machine, not so very different from the subprime mortgage machine. The asset bubble pops, but the upper tier New Class, having insulated itself and, as with subprime, having taken its cut upfront and passed the risk along, is still doing pretty well. It's not populism versus the bankers so much as internecine warfare between two tiers of elites.

The downward mobility is real, however, in both income and status.

The almost elites find themselves no better off and no better loved than the lower classes they so detest. Or, to put it more crisply: Joe the Puppeteer is no better off than Joe the Plumber. And to them, *that* is an inexplicable tragedy, one that virtually cries out for reform, for rebellion, for action. And they will take to the streets, giving us precisely that, rebellion and action.

Oh. And puppets.

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