

Occupying the Picket Line: Labor and Occupy in South Central Indiana

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between a striking labor union and a local Occupy group in South Central Indiana in fall, 2011. It looks at areas of cooperation, tension, and coordination between the two groups within the context of Occupy/organized labor relations during the same period in other locations in the United States. The article examines attitudes of union members and Occupy participants regarding each other, unions, working people, class, labor law, strikes, and direct action. This work examines areas of agreement and mutual benefit between the striking union and the Occupy group, while also discussing the major areas of tension in the specific case in Southern Indiana and in other instances where Occupy groups and labor organizations came into contact. The article concludes with a discussion of major difficulties in the Occupy/labor relationship, and avenues of potential cooperation.

Keywords:

Strike, labor union, Occupy Wall Street, tensions

Introduction

‘We thought they were coming down here to do, well, we didn’t know what. We didn’t know what to expect.’ - Local 8093 member, on news that Occupy Bloomington activists were joining their strike.

‘I didn’t care about the union or the politics. This was working people with hungry kids. Let’s just be people helping other working people.’ - Occupy Bloomington activist.

On November 15, 2011, 50 members of Carpenters International Union, Millworkers Local 8093¹ in Oolitic, Indiana, unanimously voted to reject a contract offer from their employer, Indiana Limestone, beginning a strike that would last nearly two months.² When the millwrights and cutters of Local 8093 began their strike, they sought and received community and union support in the area. The union would also receive support from an unlikely source, one that had not existed when the local began this round of contract negotiations in August 2011. As the strike lengthened, Local 8093 would enter into an uneasy but relatively successful alliance with activists from Occupy Bloomington, a local manifestation of the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon taking place in the United States and Canada that fall (Berret 2011). Mirroring events in other cities such as Portland, Oakland, and New York, Occupy Bloomington (OB) and Local 8093

¹ In the US, ‘Local’ refers to a regional branch of a trade union.

² ‘Strike Update: David Versus Goliath in Lawrence County, Indiana’, Millworkers Local 8093 Press Release (Bedford, Indiana. November 20, 2011).

found common ground and a common foe in the struggle with Indiana Limestone. The two groups also found some of the same difficulties and tensions that became apparent in other attempts at Occupy/labor coordination (Wollen & Greenhouse 2011).

Tensions between labor unions and Occupy groups both mirrored long-standing areas of disagreement between organized labor and activist organizations and presented new versions of these older issues (Fletcher and Gaspasin 2008). These tensions, in Bloomington and elsewhere, took three major forms: First, unions had traditionally worked within capitalist structures, while many Occupy participants tended to reject such structures in whole or in part. Second, Occupy groups made early and lasting commitments to bottom-up, non-hierarchical forms of organization that sought to be as inclusive as possible (in theory if not in actual practice), while labor organizations were viewed by many Occupiers as top-down, bureaucratic organizations with long histories of purging militants and radicals. Finally, labor unions were proscribed from certain activities by labor law, while many Occupy activists felt that legal limitations needed to be transcended, if not ignored entirely. Tensions also arose around questions of jurisdiction, militancy, and respect for autonomous actions (Wollen & Greenhouse 2011).

For U.S. labor unions in general, and the Carpenters Local, the breakout of Occupy Wall Street as a social movement came at a time of crisis and creativity. Having achieved densities of over 30% membership in private sector employment in the 1960s, unions had entered a long period of decline with the economic crisis of the early 1970s. By the Great Recession of 2008, union density in the private sector had been reduced to under ten percent. Technology, anti-unionism, and the opening of U.S. labor markets to global competition, combined to create a crisis for organized labor (Rosenfield 2014). As reaction to the Great Recession and its aftermath highlighted the growing gap in income inequality, many labor union members, particularly those working in well-established industries, were viewed by some members of the general public as a coddled elite (Blumgart 2010). Due to sustained attacks from the anti-union industry, many Americans viewed organized labor as, at best, just another ‘special interest’, or at worst, a major reason for the decline of the U.S. economy (Rosenfield 2014, p. 27-29). For their part, unions had responded to their own decline, and the 2008 crisis, in creative and diverse ways, by initiating diversity hiring, organizing among low-wage workers in sectors heavy with recent immigrants, and doing outreach to community groups (Luce 2014). While some of these efforts were attempts to revitalize the union movement through bringing in new members and new leadership, efforts were also made to restore American manufacturing, and return to the days of high-paying industrial labor that characterized the post-War (1945-1973) period (Herod 2018; Moody 2018).

Indeed, the long period of labor union expansion had redefined what it meant to be working class in America. The post-War period was a time of unprecedented prosperity for unions, and the United States in general. High union density helped not only union members, but workers in related industries and employment to achieve a higher economic and social status, and what appeared to be an ever-rising standard of living. While no accord ever existed between the capitalist firm and wage and hourly workers, private sector unionism became close to the norm, and the period saw narrowing levels of inequality. Union leaders and their rank-and-file increasingly achieved greater benefits, in pensions, health care, workplace safety, and skill training. Labor historians debate the specifics, but generally agree that large unions, such as the United Auto Workers and United Steel Workers, traded ideological battles over the control of the

production system for security and rising wages (Lichtenstein 2002). As Cold War tensions decreased in the 1980s and 1990s, business and political critiques of unions and their leadership shifted from accusations of ‘socialism’ to attacks on ‘union bosses’. By the eve of the 2008 recession, many people saw unions as sclerotic, bureaucratic, and only interested in the well-being of their narrow membership (Blumgart 2010). As well, unions had a long history of racial and gender-based tensions and exclusions. By the 2000s, union members were perceived as solidly middle class, able to afford vacations, second cars and homes, good health care, and comfortable retirements. As union membership decreased, a larger portion of the working public did not have access to these benefits, leading to increasing class tensions in the working class itself (Storch 2013).

Class tensions, and the meaning of ‘working class’, played out in the relationship between Occupy and unions, and within Occupy groups. Debates over what constituted working class membership, what it meant to be working class, and what role workers played in historical development, have a long history in the U.S., as in other capitalist systems (Katznelson & Zolberg 1986; Aronowitz 2003; Olin-Wright 2015). Many of these tensions were played out within social movements, and during labor actions, from the Homestead Strike³ to the war in Vietnam. Occupy participation in labor union actions highlighted long-standing tensions between labor unions and many labor movement activists. While most labor unions accepted the role of investment capital in the economic system and conceded the control of the means of production to ownership, and were organized hierarchically, Occupy groups, including Bloomington, were heavily influenced by the autonomist political theories of horizontalism promoted by David Graeber, Marina Sitrin, Dario Azzellini, and others (Graeber 2009; Sitrin and Azzellini 2014). While unions rightly trumpeted their lead role in establishing workplace rights, and achieving increasing living standards for their members, horizontal autonomists questioned unions’ acceptance of capitalist norms and imperatives, and often held that labor unions held back or restricted the more radical desires of their rank-and-file.

As these issues played out on larger stages in New York, Portland, Oakland, and elsewhere, South Central Indiana experienced the same challenges when Occupy and labor attempted to forge common ground. While the strike in Oolitic would prove an instance of successful cooperation, the overall alliance between Occupy and labor suffered from problems of distrust, differing goals and philosophies, and tensions over tactics and strategies. This article looks at the Indiana Limestone worker’s strike and other local instances of interaction between labor and Occupy in South Central Indiana within the context of regional and national debates over the goals of both groups, and tensions over tactics. It charts the high level of cooperation that occurred around the strike and the subsequent lessening of energy as Occupiers became involved in the struggle over anti-union laws and other worker issues in Indiana. This study shows how local, small-scale interaction organized around the 99% slogan failed to translate into sustained, effective action at a wider level.

In fleshing out the tale of Occupy Bloomington and Millworkers Local 8093, this research addresses several questions:

1. Why did Occupy group activists focus on labor and workers?

³ The Homestead Strike of 1892 was a dispute between steel workers and the company they worked for in Pennsylvania. More information can be found here: <https://aflcio.org/about/history/labor-history-events/1892-homestead-strike>

2. Why did labor see Occupy groups as potential allies?
3. What factions of Occupy activists distrusted unions and union leadership?
4. How did working people, both in unions and without, symbolize the 99% of OWS rhetoric?
5. How did the goals, strategies and tactics of the two groups mesh at times, and come into conflict at others?

While answering these questions, three general points emerge: First, Occupy groups served as a disruptive force to business as usual in some labor struggles. Second, Occupy groups encouraged and built upon calls for a revival of direct action strategies within organized labor. And finally, the lack of any sustained, general alliance and agreement, and the lessening impact of Occupy groups since winter, 2012, appears to leave organized labor at a crossroads in the search for new alliances and directions (Gupta 2012). In carrying out this examination of an isolated instance of labor/Occupy cooperation, I highlight some basic tensions that led to temporary success, but long-term failure, on the part of both unions and Occupy groups.

Methodology

The majority of the research on both Occupy Bloomington and Carpenters Local 8093 was carried out by the author as a participant observer embedded with Occupy Bloomington and having access to local unions through academic and activist work with local organizations. As a relative newcomer to the area (2009) I had little connection to the eventual Occupy participants before the establishment of the encampment in September 2011. As a professor of Labor Studies, and as a long-time labor union member and activist, I had established multiple connections in the area with labor unions and the central labor council but had no previous interactions with Carpenters Local 8093. As an embedded participant observer, I spent approximately 300 hours at the Occupy encampment, and interacted with approximately 70 participants, and attended as many as 50 general assemblies. I kept field notes on the assemblies, and on the various working groups and activities, while conducting one-on-one and small group interviews over a three-month period.

While acknowledging the problems of bias in embedded participant observation, my connections with both radical activist groups and well-established labor unions, aided in maintaining a balanced approach to both Occupy and the Local. Being a participant observer in both Occupy and on the picket line provided me with the usual advantages of this method of research, the ability to observe and record behavior that is spontaneous and unscripted. As a key variable in the relationship between Occupiers and strikers was the attitudes of members of each group, participant observation allowed for the recording of organic statements, positions, and embodied actions not readily available in the interview setting. In addition, experience with labor actions such as picketing and leafletting, including actions that press the boundaries of legality, afforded me the opportunity to test the limits of what each group was willing to do in separate and combined activities (Li 2008).

I also conducted a series of interviews. For three interviews, I utilized a small group setting, meeting twice with groups of six to eight strikers, and once with eight occupiers. I also conducted individual interviews with four occupiers, and three union members. The interviews were not recorded. Notes were taken throughout. The group interview sections were structured, with a set of questions presented in advance to participants,

and further questions arising during discussion. The individual interviews were less formal, and more free-flowing, in the form of conversation. Interviews with Occupy members took place in a neutral setting, while interviews with strikers were conducted at the union local's meeting hall in Bedford.

Utilizing these methods allowed for valuable insight into participant's attitudes and outlooks, but it was not without some of the basic problems involved with participant observation. For the Occupy group, several key members expressed early on in the encampment that they were uncomfortable with academic or journalistic use of their activism. Also, it was very difficult to spend the amount of time with a group of people under difficult circumstances, and not be affected by a developing empathy for their cause, which also matched with my own ideological outlook. For the Local, the long-established relationships between individuals made penetration difficult, as many strikers kept their feeling and observations within their closed circle of co-workers. Being identified as a professor at Indiana University also altered the relationship with many strikers, some of whom viewed the institution in less-than favorable light, while at the same time many were deferential, based in class performance. Observation research is also difficult to quantify in statistical tabulation, with results presented in the form of notes and essayistic writing. However, the advantages of participant observation in gathering insights otherwise unavailable, balance out the drawbacks. Ultimately, being embedded in both the Occupy group and in strike activities provided valuable insight (Hammersly 2006).

Labor Troubles

The Oolitic strike and the alliance between Local 8093 and Occupy Bloomington took place at a time of trouble for organized labor in Indiana, both in the immediate and long-term sense, with falling membership rolls over two decades, and widespread industrial job loss. Long-term, organized labor in Indiana had seen a steady decline in both union membership and in overall support (BLS 2011; Saad 2009). Indiana has a long history of union activity in the extractive industries (mainly coal and limestone), in railroads, and furniture manufacturing (Ayer 1963). But union density, and concomitant union culture, really develops in the aftermath of the Second World War, after military demands had re-shaped the state's industrial landscape (Ayer 1963; Cowie 2001). Beginning in the 1950s, Indiana made a relatively fast move from an agrarian to an industrial state, particularly in the southern regions. In the belt from Indianapolis southwest to Evansville, auto manufacturing, engine parts, tool shops and the mass production of consumer durables such as GE refrigerators and Whirlpool washing machines, brought industrial labor, and union organizing, to the region (Cowie 2001, p.58-66). Indiana experienced an anti-union backlash in 1957, when a new Republican majority, inspired by Cold War fears, and emboldened by a period of anti-unionism, passed the first 'right to work' law in an industrial state. The anti-Goldwater Great Society sweep of 1964 led to a new Democratic majority, and repeal of the anti-union legislation (Dixon 1998). But Indiana remained, and remains, a deeply divided state, with strong union culture in the northern industrial regions around Gary, Fort Wayne, and South Bend, and virulent anti-unionism in more suburban and rural areas.

In the current political climate, Indiana's unions have suffered a loss of influence linked primarily to declining numbers. The state followed national trends in the 1990's and 2000's, turning blue or red as the national mood shifted, reflecting the thin margins both major parties maintained. During the Bush administration, Indiana trended Republican at the state level, but attempts by Republican majorities to pass anti-union laws came up

short. However, Republican Governor Mitch Daniels, elected in 2005, did rescind collective bargaining rights for state workers upon entering office, and embarked on a program of privatization and tax cutting. However, national trends brought Indiana into the Democratic column at the national level in 2008, by the slimmest of margins. Backlash against the Obama Administration over health care and other issues swept the state back strongly Republican in 2010, and the fight at the state level over collective bargaining was on again, with the new majority introducing legislation aimed at restricting collective bargaining in both the public and private sectors (Varga 2013).

Indiana would eventually become the second industrial state to adopt anti-union 'right to work' legislation in the private sector.⁴ While Indiana labor engaged in a spirited fight, the outcome was not surprising, given the political climate. By 2012, Indiana unions had lost 45% of their members since 1980 (BLS 2011), and public opinion, while not monolithic, did not favor strong unions. The economic recession that severely slowed the United States economy was still being felt in Southern Indiana in late 2011. As well, long-term de-industrialization and the lack of union jobs meant stagnant wages and few benefits for workers (BLS 2011a). As unemployment remained stubbornly high, Indiana workers, like workers in other areas, were less likely to demand higher wages and better working conditions (NELP 2012). It was in this climate of anti-unionism and economic insecurity that two events coincided: the emergence of the Occupy movement, and the strike by Indiana Limestone workers.

Occupy

The climate of economic crisis, along with increasing income inequality, spawned forms of resistance in the United States, culminating in the emergence of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement in September 2011. This article will not attempt to explain or examine the causes and consequences of OWS but will focus on the local manifestation of OWS in Bloomington, Indiana, and discuss other instances of Occupy/Labor cooperative action. Yet it is important to note the timing of the emergence of OWS and the climate of activism that spawned the new movement. As income inequality rose to levels not seen since the 1930s, and corporate malfeasance was revealed as a major culprit in the economic crisis resulting in the collapse of the United States housing market (Taibbi 2010), no major successful, sustained movement of protest emerged from labor/progressive coalitions (Mintz 2009). This was not due to lack of effort, but is connected to the demise of union density, and the slow unraveling of the always-tenuous New Deal Coalition (Greider 2011). Indeed, to the contrary, the most visible responses to the Great Recession came in the form of the pro-corporate Tea Party movement, and the destruction of one of the most successful anti-poverty groups in the nation, ACORN.⁵ It was in this climate, after a summer of planning sessions, that activist chose Wall Street as the locus of a resistance/refusal that would quickly coalesce around the taking and holding of public space, highlighting the gross inequities through the 99%/1% slogan (Berrett 2011; Weinstein 2011).⁶

In Bloomington, publicity concerning the actions of police during the OWS march over the Brooklyn Bridge (Sanchez 2011), combined with a strong local activist tradition, led

⁴ Indiana was also the first industrial state to pass right to work, in 1957. The law was repealed in 1964. See Marc Dixon, 'Movements, Counter-movements and Policy Adoption: The Case of right to Work Activism.' *Social Forces*. 87:473-500.

⁵ Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now.

⁶ On Occupy Wall Street, there has been an industry of commentary and writing, but no comprehensive reviews, to date. For origins, see David Graber 'Occupy Wall Street Rediscovered the Radical Imagination' in *the Guardian*, September 25, 2011, a first-hand account.

to the calling a of a general meeting in People's Park, in the downtown business district, on the western edge of Indiana University's sprawling, limestone-building campus. On October 9, 2011, approximately 200 activists met in the park, which had been deeded to the city by a local family, with the proviso that the space remained available to the people for acts of symbolic political speech (Sherman 2011). As with other Occupy sites, Occupy Bloomington early on committed to the open meeting General Assembly form, with an assembly format based on consensus process, operating without acknowledged or official leadership, in an open forum for sharing information, ideas and potential actions. Within a week, approximately twenty-five small tents were erected, as were a library, and eventually, a functioning kitchen and commons that were open to the public without restrictions.⁷

While participants in Occupy Bloomington emphasized diversity, in practice, the Occupy encampment was predominantly racially homogenous. However, participants did come from a wide range of class backgrounds and had divergent levels of activist experience. The lack of racial diversity reflected both the demographics of Bloomington and the surrounding area, and the make-up of the student body at Indiana University. In accordance with the consensus of the group, no demographic information was collected during the period of encampment (September to January), but it is possible to sketch a rough picture of the make-up of the occupy group. At the peak of participation, Occupy Bloomington's General Assemblies, held nightly at 7PM, drew from 30 to 50 people. Four separate working groups (Action, Camp, Food, Planning) had member lists of twelve to twenty individuals. The eventual Labor working group would have over twenty names on its official list. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 70, with most falling within the 20 to 30-year-old group. They were majority white, with few people of color participating, and split evenly between male-identified and female-identified, with several non-binary members. In terms of social and economic class, the group was very mixed, with college students from upper middle-class families, and local residents whose families had worked in factories located in or near Bloomington. My own rough estimate would put the percentage of participants who would self- identify as working class at around 30 percent.

As the tactic of Occupation spread from New York, other Occupy groups began to develop what would be an uneasy, if sometimes fruitful, alliance with organized labor in various cities and regions (Bacon 2011). Occupiers in New York, Oakland, Portland, and other locations formed alliances with local labor organizations, but only after some hesitation. As New York labor journalist Ari Paul reports, 'When Occupy was conceived there was no outreach to labor. They were hesitant to even let unions be a part of it because they were seen as bureaucratic and short-sighted.' (Gupta 2012) Conversely, unions were wary of what Arun Gupta terms Occupier's 'congenital aversion to establishment politics.' (Gupta 2012) For many, the galvanizing moment came when union members, responding to calls from officials, rushed to defend the Zuccotti Park occupation from police eviction on October 14, 2011 (Turse 2011). However, two weeks previous, officials with the Transit Workers, SEIU, and Retail Workers had officially endorsed and embraced OWS and the Occupy general assembly (Tarleton 2011).

Between early October 2011 and January 2012, coordinated actions involving labor unions, community groups, and Occupy activists took place in various locations and

⁷ Decisions and debates of the Occupy Bloomington General Assembly can be viewed at <http://occupybloomington.org/> which contains an extensive archive of working groups, meetings, and activities.

with varying degrees of success. In the West, Occupy groups from Oakland to Seattle joined in the fight for union rights on the West Coast Ports. The fight between Export Grain Terminal, LLC (EGT) and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) had been long-standing, with the main issue being EGT's use of non-union truckers to move freight out of the ports. While the ILWU campaign had included direct action civil disobedience, the union was troubled when Occupy allies called for more militant actions and engaged in an attempted port shutdown unsanctioned by ILWU leadership.⁸ While this article will not go into the many details of these actions and the tensions that arose, it will suffice to point out that accusations and harsh words were exchanged (Rohar 2011). In spite of the tensions, ILWU Local 8 officer Jack Mulcahy would state 'The mobilization of the occupy movement, particularly in Oakland, Portland, and Seattle, and Longview were a critical element in bringing EGT to the bargaining table' (EGT 2011).

Longview was but one example of tension, disagreement, and different visions and methods mixed with instances of effective local action. In another, in Maryland, the State AFL-CIO passed resolutions supporting Occupy encampments and declaring Occupy picket lines viable and legitimate. At the same time, as Brian Tierney reported, National Association of Letter Carriers President Fredric Rolando walked through an Occupy picket at the National Press Club without even acknowledging its presence (Tierney 2011). The basic tensions can be summed up in the statement of ILWU President Robert McEllrath, on the militant Occupy Oakland groups' disruptions of port activity, 'Support is one thing. Organizing from the outside groups attempting to co-opt our struggle in order to advance a broader agenda is quite another.' (Wollan 2011) On the Occupy side, the '89%' statements of the Black Orchid Collective, in which the 10% of workers represented by unions are excluded, exemplifies the more radical position (BOC 2011). But what really seemed to separate the two groups, at least at the level of union leadership, was the basic outlook on systemic change. While most unions continue to operate as part of the capitalist system, many Occupy groups struck an early and consistent anti-capitalist position, one at odds with most of organized labor. Locally, in discussions in the OB General Assembly and working groups, some participants expressed a deep distrust of union bureaucracies that worked in compliment with their equal distrust of political parties and most established advocacy groups.

In relations with local labor groups and other community activists, OB faced many of the same difficulties as other Occupy groups. Representatives of local unions and their allies, while for the most part sympathetic with the Occupy call to fight for the 99%, were also suspicious of the lack of leadership, refusal to issue statements, and strident anti-capitalist tone and positions.⁹ In Bloomington, the Central Labor Council supported Occupy Bloomington with small financial contributions and supplied a portable toilet set-up for the park occupation.

Members of local unions attended rallies, marches and teach-ins, and expressed strong support for the attacks on the financial industry and corporate power. But union members and activists from more traditional organizations like Jobs with Justice and Transition Bloomington expressed confusion over the sometimes-hostile attitude toward what many Occupiers came to see as 'liberal reform' ideas. Still other local activists were dismayed by the general commitment of OB members to avoid electoral politics and focus instead

⁸ For the original solidarity statements regarding the EGT port actions: <http://occupytheegt.org/>

⁹ Interviews and discussions by author with Liz Feitl of Monroe County United Way; Jackie Yenna, White River Central Labor Council; John Clower, South Central Indiana Jobs with Justice. November 12, 2011 in Bloomington.

on direct action.¹⁰

For some Occupy Bloomington participants, worker issues exemplified the struggle of the 99%, and issues such as low wages, poor safety conditions, lack of collective bargaining rights, and the long history of struggle in the labor movement, were the subjects of discussions and informal and formal teach-ins. The Occupy Bloomington Worker Solidarity working group would eventually emerge from these meetings and several teach-ins on labor issues. The group formed a separate web presence and communication network from OB and coalesced around ideas to empower low waged workers, work with immigrant worker groups, and support labor unions when appropriate.¹¹ The group was loosely organized and leaderless and was searching for a rallying cause and point of action when news of the strike by a small group of limestone workers was reported in the local press. Four days after the strike commenced, Carpenters Industrial Council Mobilization Director Dan O'Donnell, working with Local 8093 in Oolitic, contacted labor activists in Bloomington, seeking support. Word quickly spread through the local network, and on November 21, five days into the strike, a contingent of activists, including nine members of Occupy Bloomington, joined members of Local 8093 in Oolitic for an early morning picket.

Strike

Local 8093 began their strike against Indiana Limestone Company on November 16, 2011. The Carpenters Local represented 50 workers whose main duties in the factory were moving and cutting the large slabs of limestone down to workable size for fabrication. It is dangerous work that requires skill, knowledge and experience. The towns of the Southern Indiana stone belt, Oolitic, Bedford, Stinesville, Ellettsville, and Bloomington, all contain quarries, and stories of men who died in them. Of the 50 men working at the Indiana Limestone Company's plant in Oolitic, over 70% had a relative who had also worked in the industry, and the vast majority had family who had lived in Oolitic or Bedford for several generations.¹² The collective bargaining unit was comprised entirely of males, and contained very few racial minorities, a fact that mirrored the demographics of the immediate surrounding towns (Ferrucci 2002).

The company had been locally owned, the property of the Johnson family, until its purchase by a private equity firm Resilience Capital Partners (RCP) in 2010. RCP, based in Cleveland, Ohio, is considered an industry leader in corporate acquisitions and mergers, specializing in buying 'distressed' local companies and preparing them for re-sale by lowering operating costs and selling assets. The firm had recently launched an industrial minerals 'platform', North Coast Minerals, and had been on a purchasing spree of stone, coal, and other extractive industries throughout the lower Midwest.¹³ RCP had purchased a lead competitor of Indiana Limestone, Victor Oolitic, in 2006, after that company had been placed in bankruptcy by the Audex Group, another private equity firm. While there is no evidence of a consistent pattern of union busting in RCP's acquisition pattern, the company's stated goals are to bring profitability to distressed

¹⁰ Based on participant discussions with activists in South Central Indiana Jobs with Justice, White River Central Labor Council, Transition Bloomington, and Bloomington Move to Amend, between October 15 and December 20, 2011, Bloomington.

¹¹ <http://www.facebook.com/joseph.n.varga#!/groups/153296401439857/>

¹² Background and historical information on Indiana quarries is drawn from: <http://quarriesandbeyond.org/index.html>. No comprehensive history of labor struggles in the Indiana Limestone Industry exists as of this writing.

¹³ Basic information on Resilience Capital Partners can be found at their website: <http://www.resiliencecapital.com/>

companies, often by reducing labor costs. Local 8093 workers reported noticing a difference in shop floor management attitudes as RCP took over operations and brought new middle management to Indiana Limestone.¹⁴

The workforce at Indiana Limestone reflected the demographics of Bedford, Oolitic, and Lawrence County. The members of Carpenters Local 8093 were all white, at least based on appearance. The workforce at the plant in Oolitic, which included members of two other unions, was all-male. From observation, the majority of strikers were over 40, with more than a decade of experience in limestone work standard. There were younger workers, and many came from families with limestone workers in past and current generations. The majority of strikers lived in Bedford.

Historically, Local 8093 members report that they considered the relationship between the company and workers to be typical, with some tension, but with an ability to reach compromise on most issues. Negotiators and union officials reported that contract talks were always hard, but amicable, and while strikes and lock-outs had been threatened, the only work stoppage occurred in the late 1970s.¹⁵ The existing contract between Indiana Limestone and Local 8093 was set to expire on October 31, 2011. As the date approached, Local 8093 representatives claimed company officials ignored the unions repeated requests to negotiate, and it became apparent that management was determined to force a confrontation. The major issues for 8093 were not strictly economic but concerned the company's demand for concessions in work rules and conditions. Many strikers would subsequently frame the strike action as a question of respect.¹⁶ On substantive contractual issues, Local 8093 received a contract offer calling for changes in seniority rules, attendance policy, alterations of 'just cause' dismissal and discipline, in addition to a wage freeze and increases in health and pension costs. After unanimously turning down the offer, Local 8093 agreed to continue working and meet again in two weeks. On November 15, company negotiators presented their last, best and final proposal, identical to the rejected offer.¹⁷

Feeling pressed, Local 8093 took a strike vote on November 15, which passed with over 90% approval. The strike commenced on November 16, with two picket lines set up, one at the main entrance, and another at a little-used rear gate. Millworkers Local 8093 were joined on the picket by members of the Machinist Local and the Stonecutters Local, meaning that the only function still in operation was the quarrying of large stone, carried out by members of the Laborers Local 741, who crossed the 8093 picket line, claiming 'Carpenters locals always cross ours'.¹⁸ Local 8093 officials claimed 90% attendance on picket duty, and the picket line at the front gate received support from portions of the local community, in the form of hot coffee and honks from passing cars¹⁹.

Picket duty for Local 8093 began just as winter settled in over the region. Strikers set up two lines at entrances to the plant, erected shelters, brought home-made signs, and settled in for the grueling work of picketing. During the workday, a presence of roughly

¹⁴ Jerry B., Tim S., Ronnie W., Mike F. Interview by author. Bedford, Indiana, June 30, 2012.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Based on interviews with officers and negotiators of Local 8093, November 22, 2011, June 30, 2012, by author in Bedford, Indiana. Indiana Limestone Company refused to participate in interviews for this article. Three separate attempts were made to solicit information from ILC, on July 23, August 17, and September 5, 2012.

¹⁸ President, Laborers International Local 741. Phone interview by author, November 22, 2011.

¹⁹ Dan O'Donnell. Interview by author, Oolitic, In. November 24, 2012.

20-30 workers was maintained at the two gates. Five days into the strike, Local 8093 picketers received their first strike support visit from a contingent from Bloomington, which included some members of CWA Local 2730, labor activists, and eight members of Occupy Bloomington. Carpenters Union officer Dan O'Donnell related an early reaction of the 8093 strikers to the arrival of the Occupiers at the site of the picket, Indiana Limestone's main facility located off of State Highway 37, 20 miles south of Bloomington. O'Donnell received a call from one of the picketers, reporting, 'Dan, you gotta' get down here. There's a girl with a ring in her lip'.²⁰ 8093 picketers were happy for the support, and the distraction of having new people on the line, yet tensions quickly developed over tactics. Shortly after arriving, OB activists directly confronted a flatbed truck leaving the plant with a load of limestone slab. As the truck attempted to make its way to the highway, OB members blocked its path and engaged in heated conversation with both the driver and the private security force ILC had hired for the strike. Several OB activists had become more accustomed to the confrontational style of public theater, while some of the OB activists with union experience had not taken into account the geographic context of southern Indiana, where local authorities and communities tend to side with management over unions.²¹ After a consultation with union members who feared injunctions, Occupy activists agreed to abide by picket rules established by Local 8093, at least temporarily.

As the strike went on, other activists and community groups joined the fight. The local United Way chapter provided food from donations collected from local union groups and food banks. United Auto Workers Local 440 from nearby Bedford provided picket support, as did United Steel Workers members engaged in their own struggle in nearby Mitchell, Indiana, with C & M Conveyor. The main organizing event was a labor summit convened in Bedford on November 22, organized in part by CWA 4730 local president Bryce Smedley, attended by officers from six local unions and by a dozen local activists. While all participants in the summit agreed to continue to support picketing, ideas about how to bring negative publicity and other forms of public and private pressure were also discussed. It was from this and other meetings among non-Local 8093 activists that activities around Resilience Capital Partners, and local trucking companies and stone factories supplying replacement labor were coordinated.

The galvanizing issue that appeared to bring all factions in the alliance for 8093 together was Resilience Capital Partners. RCP provided a unifying theme for strike support for several reasons: First, RCP was the perfect corporate villain for union supporters in an area long struggling with industrial job loss and low wages. RCP's reputation for stripping and selling distressed companies galvanized the resolve of both 8093 members and Occupiers. Second, research about RCP's activities was coordinated between Occupiers, South Central Indiana Jobs with Justice and Local 8093, providing a common project off the picket line. Finally, for Occupiers and for the community of activists in Bloomington, Resilience fit neatly into the 99% rallying cry of Occupy Wall Street. As more Occupy activists and members of the Bloomington progressive community understood the nature of the dispute with RCP, the more they joined in to support 8093. Within the larger context of the assault on worker's rights, the faltering economy, and the attention OWS and offshoots had brought to the issue of the 99% vs. 1%, Resilience Capital Partners presented pro-labor activists with an almost-perfect rallying point.

²⁰ Dan O'Donnell. Interview by author. Bloomington, June 8, 2011.

²¹ Based on discussions between Local 8093 members, and Occupy Bloomington participants, Oolitic, November 21, 2011.

As the strike wore on, tensions between company representatives, strikers and a small contingent of workers crossing the picket line rose considerably. Two weeks into the strike, Indiana Limestone presented Local 8093 with a public relations gift when one of the strikers, Danny Stephens, was struck by a vehicle driven by a replacement worker as it passed the picket line at high speed. The popular and jovial Stephens suffered injuries to his shoulder and back, and police and the local sheriff refused to make an immediate arrest. Though local police and a sheriff investigated at the scene of accident and took testimony regarding the speed of the vehicle and the apparent malicious intent, the local prosecutor for Lawrence County refused to proceed with the case. The incident increased militancy on the picket line, and provided 8093 strikers with another rallying point, while providing union supporters with a tool by which to attack RCP. In response to the lack of official charges, 8093 called for a community support rally on the courthouse lawn in Bedford to demand justice for the injured Millworker (Lewis 2011).

The Bedford rally marked a high point of community solidarity for the strikers. Bedford has a mixed history of union activism and anti-union sentiment, and the turnout and enthusiasm of the crowd impressed many of the striking union members and stiffened their resolve.²² The rally also attracted union members from around the area, non-labor activists, local press, and academics from Indiana University. Several speakers used the occasion to highlight how the demand for justice for Danny Stephens and the strike by 8093 were linked to larger struggles then underway over union rights in the State, and over inequality nation-wide. The incident also galvanized the picket line for 8093 members, and convinced some members, and their new Occupy allies, that redress through the legal system was not forthcoming. It was during this period that private, informal conversations and planning took place for activities meant to intensify the struggle with ILC. In the informal talks, union members and Occupy activists conferred regarding the possibilities for actions that were not sanctioned by the union leadership (Lewis 2011b).

In the face of legal restrictions of union activities on picket lines, Occupy supporters undertook several actions that were intended to raise the level of engagement and militancy on the line and elsewhere. In addition to photographing security guards, provoking the guards, photographing and interfering with trucks and replacement workers, a contingent of occupiers, approximately 15, arrived early one morning and set up tents, the symbol of Occupy, along the main entrance. With tents in place, black-garbed occupiers strategically interfered with the entering vehicles of company management. As Dan O'Donnell reports, strikers noted the fear this provoked, as management 'freaked out'. O'Donnell felt it was this particular action that introduced a measure of uncertainty into management's view of the strike,²³ bringing in an unknown element whose reputation was no doubt heightened by images of Occupy confrontations then occurring in New York, Oakland, and other locations.

In addition to the Bedford rally, several other events were organized to promote solidarity, bring community support, and apply pressure to the company. On a very cold December morning, Bloomington's 'Raging Grannies', a group that performs anti-capitalist song parodies, entertained the strikers to their obvious delight. Local supporters wrote opinion pieces and letters to the local paper highlighting the 'David and Goliath' nature of the fight. And in one of the most important actions of the coordinated struggle, South Central Indiana Jobs with Justice (JWJ) worked with

²² Interviews with participants

²³ O'Donnell interview, June 8.

Cleveland JWJ and Debra Kline to carry out a boisterous demonstration at the corporate headquarters of RCP in Cleveland. Kline and her contingent, which included participants from Occupy Cleveland, attempted to deliver a letter demanding negotiation, and held a noisy demonstration with placards and a bullhorn that attracted press, RCP management, and police.²⁴

The main solidarity event was the fundraiser organized by Occupiers on December 17. The event raised more than \$2,000 for Local 8093, and increased solidarity between OB members and Millworkers, who mingled, drank, and danced late into the evening (Lewis 2011c). Held at a pizza bar in Bloomington, the event attracted members of the IU faculty, local political figures, activists from a variety of local organizations, and local musicians who supplied free entertainment. Organizer Jason S. summed up the feeling of many fellow activists and Occupiers, 'I didn't really care about the union politics, and the Occupy stuff. I just wanted to help people. These are my people, I'm a working-class guy, and my folks are all workers. I just wanted to bring everyone together and help out. I want my kid to grow up in a better world.'

With the holidays nearing, activists and strikers needed to maintain enthusiasm, and escalate the fight. Occupy activists and some strikers continued direct actions and picket line resistance. Occupiers made public their plans to picket the trucking company that was crossing the 8093 picket line, and the small limestone companies supplying replacement workers.²⁵ Several activists also made plans for actions at a local church attended by ILC managers. As these attempts at escalation proceeded, in late December, Indiana Limestone came back to the table. Within days of the resumption of negotiations, it became apparent that the company was looking to settle, and strike action de-escalated. While the official settlement occurred in early January, the intense phase of the strike was over before New Year.

Looking back on the strike and settlement, Dan O'Donnell feels that the alliance with Occupy Bloomington had made a difference, 'Occupy Bloomington did help, definitely.' He also cited growing community support, particularly as they capitalized on the 99% rhetoric dominating the news, and the heightened profile of struggling unions in Indiana in the face of anti-union legislation at the Statehouse. But O'Donnell is quick to point out that the striking Millworkers and their union supporters won the strike. While the Laborers 741 members and some non-union stone workers had crossed the picket line, O'Donnell knew that many non-union stone workers in the area had refused to work at ILC for the duration of the strike:

'We heard through the grapevine that some workers at a non-union mill were commanded to cross our picket lines or they'd be fired. Still they refused to cross. They'd worked with some of these guys. You don't have to be in a union to understand that crossing a picket line is about the dirtiest, lowest thing a man can do. You don't have to be in a union to know right from wrong. Most working class people, once they understood what the millworkers were fighting for, supported them'.²⁶

For many of the Occupiers, the strike experience functioned as a school of labor relations

²⁴ Debra Kline. Phone interview by author, June 25, 2011.

²⁵ Most of the activities that Occupy members engaged in regarding strike support were organized publicly through the OB and OB Worker Solidarity Working Group.

²⁶ O'Donnell interview, June 8.

and union practices. With some exceptions, Occupiers had never been on a union picket line, and while many OB participants came from Indiana's working class, few had any connection to the southern Indiana region below Bloomington. Car rides to and from the picket location included discussions of the National Labor Relations Act, Taft-Hartley, the legal environment in which unions operated, and the heroic past and challenged present of labor unions in the United States. Two areas received particular attention and served as effective pedagogic devices: first, Occupy participants were originally perplexed by the actions of the Laborers Union. Why would they cross 8093 picket line? The other main area of interest was in the legal system that defines and frames union activities. As mentioned, the first morning that Occupiers joined the picket line became a lesson in what an injunction was, and what strikers could and could not do on a picket line. As the strike continued and potential actions were discussed both between Occupiers and union leaders and between them and some of the more ambitious rank and file, Occupy activists received valuable lessons in how the legal system constrains union activities once workers receive official recognition as a collective bargaining unit. This had two effects for most Occupy participants: it brought them to a somewhat more sympathetic view of union leadership, yet also led many to question the ultimate value of the NLRA legal regime.²⁷

Aftermath: Indiana Workers

Energy generated by strike support, and education around workers' issues, was substantial, and activists in the OB Workers Solidarity working group hoped to sustain and expand both. Group members expressed interests in the plight of undocumented workers because of their lack of legal protection, temporary workers struggling to get by without benefits, service workers toiling for low wages for employers like Wal-Mart, and Indiana's efforts to roll back union rights with a 'right to work' law. Members also expressed considerable interest in non-union forms of action and organizing, in more radical forms of unionism such as the IWW,²⁸ and in worker cooperatives and alternate forms of work and collective production. The Oolitic experience solidified them in their determination to aid working people distressed by the current economic system and increased their knowledge regarding the function of unions. At the same time, the experience also reinforced for some their pre-existing beliefs that working people would never get their fair share under the existing labor relations system, and that labor unions often served as a brake on the potential militancy of workers²⁹.

In an effort to maintain the momentum of the Oolitic actions, OB Worker Solidarity members sought out other issues through which to lend support to working people's struggles. Several took part in the pro-union rallies that commenced with the convening of the new legislative session in Indianapolis in early January 2012. Events at the Statehouse quickly highlighted again Occupy/organized labor tensions. As the new legislative session prepared to open, Indiana State police officials announced new rules meant to severely restrict public access to the legislative hall, just as anti-union legislation was set for procedural votes (Bradner 2012). As Occupy and other activists made hurried plans for direct action civil disobedience, labor officials at the statehouse made it clear that they had no intention of using such tactics and were determined to keep their members' behavior orderly and strictly within the law.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Industrial Workers of the World.

²⁹ Notes and interviews from meetings of the Occupy Bloomington Worker Solidarity Working Group between December 20, 2011 and January 15, 2012.

³⁰ Based on notes, interviews and participant observation, Indianapolis State House, January 6, 2012.

Occupy Bloomington participants who attended the initial rally, and subsequent events at the Statehouse, remarked on their disappointment at the lack of more radical action, and the seeming lack of creative energy, 'It all seemed very top down,' said OB activist Cooper C. 'They lined up, walked around, a few people yelled, and there were bland speeches. All of it tame, no call for real change. The working people we saw seemed angry, but nobody was doing anything with the anger.' OB activists initiated banner drops, anti-capitalist chants, and encouraged militant action, to little avail. 'There just seemed to be no energy' said Jason W., 'Everyone seemed kind of ready to go home when they got there. If the system is screwing you, you're not going to win fighting by its rules'.³¹ After the free-flowing exchanges and sharing of ideas on the Oolitic picket line, the statehouse rallies, and other union-sponsored actions such as an SEIU rally against WellPoint in Indianapolis, seemed to OB activists as top-down, lacking in creative autonomy, and largely ineffective. Subsequent events involving the right to work law struggle further increased OB cynicism and decreased enthusiasm for union support. The decision by Indiana labor leaders not to hold a major demonstration at the Super Bowl in Indianapolis, five days after the passage of the anti-union law, convinced many OB activists that cooperation with unions was a dead end if the goal was systemic change. Ed V., a union member and OB activist, claimed, 'The unions were scared, they didn't want to offend people. Offend people? They were worried about that while we're losing our rights!'.³² The experience of OB activists at the Statehouse and in several subsequent union-sponsored events, including a health care demonstration in Indianapolis in April, convinced some of the most active members that unions were moribund, tame, and unlikely to spark the wide-spread systemic change many of them sought.

Occupy Bloomington organized a day of action for May Day, 2012, including a call for a general strike, as did many other Occupy groups around the country. While the call for a general strike, both in Bloomington and other locations, did produce valuable dialogue about what general strikes entailed, most experienced labor organizers recognized its prematurity, and the call served to highlight the stark differences in approach developing between some occupy groups and labor activists. Occupy May Day activities in several cities included hopeful measures of cooperation and coordination, and the re-establishment of the relevance of May Day as a day of militant action were seen by many as a positive sign (Smith 2012). But tensions remained and even escalated in some locations. In Chicago, May Day and anti-NATO actions included tense confrontations between Occupy activist determined to radicalize what they saw as ineffective actions, and other march organizers, while the numbers in some cities for May Day marches were lower than expected (Harkin 2012). In Bloomington, there was no tension during the OB May Day activities between unions and OB activists, mainly because no coordinated activity was planned or attempted. Five months after participating in support of a successful strike, it appeared Occupy/labor solidarity in Bloomington had been put on hold, at least for the time being.

Lessons Learned

When asked if his experience with the Local 8093 strike had changed his opinions of labor unions, Charlie P., an Occupy participant, responded with an emphatic answer: 'Yes, I think less of them. I think they hold workers back and don't represent them. They

³¹ Interview by Author, January 7, 2012.

³² Ed V. Interview by author, January 10, 2012.

tamp down the righteous anger workers feel when they are screwed by the system'.³³ A long time self-described progressive activist, Charlie feels that union leadership does not do a good job educating their members on how the system is set up to keep them from achieving their goals. 'They don't teach their folks about Wall Street, and the 1%, about Citizens United, and how rich lobbyists right the rules and game the system. A lot of the guys on the Oolitic picket line supported Ron Paul. Ron Paul!' For Charlie and other OB activists, participation in the Oolitic strike was both exciting and educational. For some activists in OB, the strike action confirmed their pre-existing beliefs that unions were bureaucratic, passive, and unable to lead the fight for a new system. For some, like Charlie, they represented the existing system. 'If we're going to take back our system, our country, we're not going to do it playing by the 1%'s rules. Unions play by the rules, for the most part.'

For Charlie and other OB participants, the Oolitic experience was mixed. Many felt the solidarity of participating in the struggle, but also experienced some misgivings and frustrations. Charis H., a very active OB strike supporter, remembers when OB first got involved in the strike. 'I just went. We were involved in so many things in November, foreclosure, homelessness, keeping the park encampment going, I was just like, 'hell, I'll go'.' But she also thought, upon learning more, that the strike was perfect, a 99% issue. 'It was all there, the local industry, used to be a family operation, limestone tradition in the area. These guys all had, like, five kids, and the moms stayed home. Then there was Resilience, pure evil'. Charis, like other OB participants, grew very fond of the strikers, and forged several relationships that outlasted the strike. 'They were cool folks, just like us. Man, when we were all hanging out at Max's (the 12/17 fund raising event), everyone was dancing, drinking, there was no difference'³⁴. Like others, Charis and Corrine C. felt the tensions from what Dan O'Donnell called OB's 'punk rock aesthetic'. Corrine: 'I think when you spend time with people, they start to see that even if they still think your kinda' strange, or at least they have to pretend they do, they start to see that you are all struggling the same way. You have to talk with people, hang out with them, listen'.³⁵ As the strike wore on, Charis recalls a change in the all-male, all white Millworkers: It was strange being there with an all-white, all-male, all-straight crew, but I remember after a while, some guy made a remark about 'some faggot' or called something 'gay' and turned to us right away and apologized'. Some OB activists were troubled by the situation in other ways. Jackie W., a single mom struggling to get by, saw it odd that she was traveling to Oolitic to support the strikers. 'I mean, I'm making nothing, waiting tables, and these guys are making at least \$15 an hour. I mean, they are not rich, but I got nothing. Not that I didn't think it was the right thing to do.' Asked if she thought the millworkers would support her on a labor dispute, she said 'Oh, I think they would. I think we all understood, it's the same fight'.³⁶ Others were not so sure. Several OB activists mentioned the Laborers, and how local unions often fought each other. They also remarked that most union officers saw their role as working as partners in the capitalist system. Still more had concerns about the sexism and racism that would spring up in the picket line banter.

For Occupy Bloomington as an ongoing movement, the main tension was ultimately internal, and reflected the problems that occurred in other Occupy encampments. Aside from the obvious problems of maintaining a physical presence in public space, and remaining open to all participants, the group failed to increase participation over time,

³³ Charlie P. Interview by author, Bloomington, June 23, 2012.

³⁴ Charis H. Interview by author. Bloomington, June 27, 2012.

³⁵ Corrine C. Interview by author. Bloomington, June 23, 2012.

³⁶ Jackie W. Interview by author. Bloomington, June 23, 2012.

and suffered from a loss of resources. Occupy Bloomington, as a movement, and as a group of activists, did not articulate a clear set of goals, in keeping with the horizontal structure of most Occupy groups. This led to disillusionment among some participants who were more attuned to traditional repertoires of social movement activism. OB never applied for a permit to occupy the public park they claimed and maintained a rigid separation from local political groups. As an example, when a local Democratic Party group attempted to set up an information table at the fundraising event for the strikers, they were aggressively asked to desist, and complied. Finally, the critique of many in OB, that unions were bureaucratic organization designed to restrain worker activism, ignored much of the radical history of unions, and the constraints placed on them as legal entities.

And what of Local 8093 members and their feelings about their Occupy allies? What did the Millworkers think of the 99% campaign and Occupy Wall Street? 'I knew it was going on,' said Jerry B. of Local 8093 of OWS, 'And I supported it in general. Yeah, the bankers are screwing us. But then, it started to seem like it was just some kids doing the latest thing, you know, like, 'I'll camp out''. But Jerry also told how the involvement of OB in the strike, and the emphasis that OB members made on the 99% issue, caused him to do more research on the larger system and on Resilience. 'I saw it more after I started looking in to it. JP Morgan, Resilience, they all do the same thing. They rig the system. Rush Limbaugh ain't telling me that, Michael Moore is'.³⁷ Tim S. an officer in 8093 and a millwright, said he was aware of OWS, and 'counter culture in general', from his own children, in their late teens and early twenties. 'I know all about dressing in black and that, it doesn't bother me. I also know how rotten this system is for working people, so I agreed with OWS, sure.'

What about the questions of solidarity in action and cooperation in fighting the company? Jerry B. tells a story of the day Danny Stevens was hit by the vehicle on the picket line. It was early in the morning, still before sunrise when the local police and sheriff arrived:

'And the cops started in with, 'well, maybe this picket line is dangerous', and we were telling them 'no, we got it all under control, everything is fine', when I see on cop looking over our shoulders, and he says 'oh, yeah, then what the hell is that'. And it's about ten OB people, and they got their arms locked, marching toward us. I knew they saw cops and lights, and their ready to throw down. I was like, 'oh, no, we don't need this'. But they just joined us peacefully. I calmed the cop down. I think it was all in the way people saw the Occupy folks, as some sort of radical bunch. I guess they are, though'.³⁸

After the initial appearance of OB activists, and the agreement about picket line behavior, there was little dispute on the line itself. Local 8093 officers and members had no stated issues with the strident anti-capitalist rhetoric utilized during the strike by OB members, provided it served the purpose of furthering picket solidarity. For their part, OB activists were willing to accept views that did not match their own, regarding the capitalist system, free enterprise, and even unions, provided that Local 8093 members remained overall respectful and cognizant of differences.

³⁷ Tim S. Interview by author. Oolitic, IN. December 6, 2011.

³⁸ Jerry B. Interview by author. Oolitic, IN, December 6, 2011.

The major problem lay not in strategy or tactics, but in overall goals and long-term cooperation. For most Local 8093 members who expressed a view, the battle between RCP/ILC and their union was not just local but linked to the larger system. The same was clearly true for OB activists, who quickly saw the plight of the Millworkers as part of the struggle for the 99%. But as the strike wore on, conversations on the picket line and elsewhere revealed the limits of the solidarity over long-term cooperation. As with many local unions, 8093 begins each meeting of their local with the Pledge of Allegiance, anathema to most OB activists. Issues around nationalism, capitalism and consumerism became apparent during the course of the strike. One particular incident was during a discussion with 8093 members about fund raising for Christmas presents for the striker's children. OB members were debating over whether to use the money to purchase gifts or simply hand it over to the strikers. One 8093 member suggested buying gift certificates to Wal-Mart. When this suggestion was conveyed in an OB General Assembly, it set off a heated discussion that included vows by some not to participate if Wal-Mart was to be involved, and counter-claims of elitism. For many of the strikers interviewed, it was not that they did not understand the role Wal-Mart and similar companies played in the low-wage economy, but rather that choices were limited, both geographically, and financially.

Conclusions

The coordinated actions between Local 8093 and Occupy Bloomington participants were a short-term success. In spite of tensions and some areas of concern, OB provided valuable and useful support to the local in the form of picket activity, public pressure, innovative tactics, and funds. The profile of the local strike was raised considerably by public actions and organizing provided by OB and activists from the Bloomington community. Members of Local 8093 considered the strike a 'win' for the union and attributed the support of OB and other groups crucial to the outcome.³⁹ OB and 8093 consider the cooperation between the groups to have been a positive experience, and members of both groups expressed willingness to act together in future struggles should the opportunity arise.

However, enthusiasm both nationally and locally for Occupy as a movement had receded by the time of this writing. While May Day did see a swell of coordinated activity and Occupy groups and labor unions were still in various stages of alliance, organized labor and Occupy groups were facing severe tests of their strength and durability as fall 2012 elections approach. As efforts to weaken unions intensify, and Occupy groups continue to search for ways to re-energize, the immediate prospects for what many viewed as a sustainable if uneasy alliance appears doubtful. Even if a revived OWS movement were to emerge, it is hard to see a successful long-term alliance between a committed anti-capitalist group and a union structure that functions within the constraints of the status quo (Gould-Wartofsky 2015).

The Local 8093 strike was a unique set of events in a particular context that led to a successful alliance between seemingly unlikely partners. OB brought awareness of the struggle between the 1% and 99%, and its connection to Local 8093's strike as representative of a wider struggle of workers in a system of increasing economic inequities. The Local's battle with Resilience Capital Partners, a private equity firm, brought to the fore what OWS had claimed regarding American capitalism, temporarily

³⁹ Jerry B. Interview by author. Oolitic, IN, December 6, 2011.

capturing the imagination of local activists and bridging the cultural and social gaps between union leadership, the rank and file, and Occupy activists.

What is clear from the reaction of Local 8093 members, and from the subsequent rejection of direct action tactics by Indiana labor unions in the ‘right to work’ fight at the state level, is that Occupy activists’ methods and tactics, as well as their overall goals, disrupted the normal functioning of organized labor, and increased conversation about the relative merits of direct action tactics. In the case of the local strike in Oolitic, unconventional tactics such as tent set-ups, remote pickets, and confrontational picket line tactics, pushed some rank and filers to support more radical action while promoting serious discussion of how to conduct a strike. The reaction and subsequent narration of the events of the strike by Local 8093 members clearly show that OB activists introduced an unknown element into the struggle and disrupted business as usual. The same can reasonably be said for the EGT/ILWU action, where Occupy efforts to shut down ports on the west coast and reach out to union militants provided a disruptive, if not always positive, force. Introducing confrontational direct action tactics seems in line with calls to revive the strike and re-energize organized labor. As well, in informal conversations in and around the picket line, OB activists’ insistence on a strident anti-capitalist stance introduced a different element to many union members accustomed to viewing their roles as part of a successful, if somewhat unjust, capitalist system.

Revisiting the five research questions posed earlier, the experience of Occupy Bloomington and Local 8093 suggests that the two groups viewed each other as united against a common enemy, if only temporarily, and in limited ways. OB core activists saw the struggle of working people as intrinsic to the battle against corporate domination, while union members recognized the common enemy in a corporate system that had replaced local ownership with private equity, demanded give-backs, and showed an increasing lack of respect for their roles in the workplace. The most common measure of agreement and mutual recognition for the duration of the strike was the slogan, ‘We are the 99%’. Both groups felt that their struggles, collective and separate, represented the longer battle over resources between wealthy elites and working people. In the end, it was this common ground that caused each group to accept, temporarily, the differences and limitations of the other. Ultimately, the differences over long-term goals and strategies brought the groups into, if not conflict, then a mutual dissolution of their period of cooperation. For the Millworkers, the end of the strike returned the struggle to the shop floor, and their local community. For Occupiers, the struggle against capitalism, and systemic injustice was not contained by such temporal or geographic limitations.

Cooperation and coordinated action between labor unions and activist groups concerned with labor-related issues has a long and complicated history in the United States. As well, labor unions are not monolithic, and have changed over time to meet changing conditions. As Eric Foner (1984), in his seminal article ‘Why is There No Socialism in the United States’ points out, American workers have taken forceful, often radical action, in defense of their class and rights, just often not in the ways that activists and theorists would have predicted or desired. While no independent labor party has existed for any appreciable length of time, labor unions and their leadership have worked both within the political party system, and outside of it, to advance the cause of the working classes. This process has often taken the form of radical direct action, such as the sit-down strikes of the 1930’s, while also involving actions, such as support for overseas military engagements, that have alienated more left-leaning groups. While labor unions have been hurt by radical actions of supporters, such as the anarchist Berkman’s disastrous intervention in the Homestead Strike, unions have also taken actions, such as

the Teamster involvement in the farm worker's campaigns, that have alienated supporters. There have been instances of successful and sustained solidarity between labor and social movements, such as union support for the civil rights March on Washington, while at the same time, individual unions have discriminated against people of color, women, and LGBT members. Occupy actions involving support for organized labor encompassed both the positive and negative aspects of this history of solidarity and fragmentation.

Ultimately, the types of solidarity actions between labor unions and more decidedly radical groups such as OWS and its off-shoots that may be successful might be actions similar to the 8093 strike: limited in duration, focused on an easily identifiable foe, with coordinated actions that allow for autonomy while respecting each groups positions and restrictions. Organized labor will continue to struggle with declining membership and legal and political challenges into the foreseeable future. Unions will continue to search for ways to invigorate their memberships and expand their influence. While most large unions and umbrella organizations remain attached to a mainstream political party, it seems doubtful that long-term alliances with stridently anti-capitalist groups such as Occupy Wall Street would be sustainable in the long run.

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