More Than A Mere Protest

By NATHAN SCHNEIDER

There was this moment, while I was standing on the steps of the New York County Supreme Court building overlooking Foley Square, when things came together. Literally. It was mid-afternoon on October 5, the day of the first big march when organized labor turned out in support of Occupy Wall Street, then two and a half weeks old. A few thousand union members, students and allies were rallying in the square when a few thousand more marchers who had come from occupied Liberty Plaza—officially, Zuccotti Park—poured in from the north end onto Worth Street. They kept coming, and it seemed like they'd never stop.

In the union crowd, people held mainly matching, printed signs. Among the occupiers, on the other hand, the signs were mainly hand-scratched on cardboard, often on the pizza boxes that are so plentiful in the plaza. Leading the way was a big banner that I'd seen arrive fresh from the printer the night before: "OCCUPY EVERYTHING," it said.

I can't say exactly how long I've been waiting for this moment. I can say that it's been at least years since the time that I first began to hear about the early days of the civil rights movement, when it was full of promise but seemed also destined to fall short. I was young then, too—too young to understand the history that we were a part of, too young to know what was to come.

Afghanistan’s Affliction

By KATHY KELLY

In Kabul, Afghanistan’s beleaguered capital city, a young woman befriended me in December of 2010. She was eager to talk about her views, help us better understand the history of her country, and form some lasting relationships. Now, she is too frightened to return a phone call from visiting westerners. The last time I saw her, during the spring of 2011, she was extremely anxious because, weeks earlier, her brother-in-law had been arrested by US Joint Special Operations commandos (JSOC). The family has no idea how to find him. Once, someone working for the International Commission of the Red Cross called the family to say that he was still alive and in the custody of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). Numerous families in Afghanistan experience similar misery and fear after night raids that effectively "disappear" family members who are held incommunicado and sometimes turned over to Afghan National Police or the dreaded National Directorate of Security.

An October 11, 2011 New York Times article reported the arrest of an American tourist on the same night that the family of this young woman was contacted by the ICRC. The tourist was later released, and now the family is waiting for news of their relative. It is a common story in Afghanistan, where families are left to wonder about the fate of their loved ones after a night raid by US forces.
John Bischof

report about the findings of UN researchers who interviewed 324 Afghans detained by security forces, found that half of those who were in detention sites run by the National Directorate of Security told of torture which included beatings, twisting of genitals, stress positions, suspension and threatened sexual assault. Of the 324 interviewed, eighty-nine had been handed over to the Afghan intelligence service or the police by US/NATO international military forces.

Even though high officials in the ranks of the US JSOC acknowledge that 50% of the time the night raids and drone attacks “get” the wrong person (Washington Post, September 3, 2011), the US war planners have steadily escalated the use of these tactics.

Consider the killing of three brothers in the Nenami family who lived in Sayyidabad village in Afghanistan’s Wardak province. Ismail, age twenty-five, and Buranullah, age twenty-three, had returned from their studies in Kabul to celebrate the start of Ramadan with their family in August of 2010. With their brother Faridullah, age seventeen, they went to the family guest room to study for exams. They were joined by their younger brother, Wahidullah, age thirteen.

An initial US military press release on August 12th indicated that US forces had captured an important Taliban figure nearby and had taken fire from the Nenami home where they believed Taliban fighters were being hosted as guests. Indeed, two Taliban fighters had been shot at the home two days earlier, asking for food. Fearful of repercussions if they didn’t feed them, the family had given them food.

According to a report from McClatchy News (August 20, 2010), the youngest brother, Wahidullah, said that US soldiers burst through the guest room door around 1:30 am and started firing. As Buranullah and Faridullah lay bleeding to death, Ismail tried to speak with the soldiers in English. Wahidullah says Ismail is still alive as the assault force led him out of the room, but he wasn’t sure whether all three brothers had been hit during the initial shooting.

Photographs, which the family provided (continued on page 5)

and costly extravagance all around them. And they could not get to know how to reason together— in long general assemblies, by the ancient method of consensus, it was not possible to arrive at a conclusion. The meetings got smoother, at least until the next batch of new people joined.

I’ve watched this learning curve happen again and again at Occupy Wall Street, as well as at the two occupations going on now in DC. People come in, initially, with ideas about “demands,” and about how the occupation could fit in their existing political frames—how this could help the Democrats, or some such. It might take a few hours, or a few days, or even a few weeks, but their old frames eventually fall away. They rediscover democracy, democracy like they’ve never really known it before, by practicing it in a sea of people, any of whom has the right to speak and be heard like any other. They work out the kinks in the process, those vestiges of corruption and prejudice and indifference from the culture outside that they can’t help smogging in with us. Then they realize that what they do or say in the plaza actually matters less than what they bring back to their own communities and teach others in turn.

Now, my work requires me to spend more time writing and speaking about the occupation than actually being there. When I go back to check on it, I look through the multitude of new occupiers for the few familiar ones from the first days, and I ask them how they’re doing. For the most part, they’re dealing with growing pains, working to adapt the organization to accommodate all the new comrades, reporters, ideas, and problems. But they also tell me they’re learning to step back, to reject the temptations of ego and privilege, to pass their leadership roles over to others. It’s a spiritual task. If this movement is to be better than a mere protest, they know it has to cultivate the hope in people for something better than more of the same, something better suited to living in healthy communities. And, after a few weeks of sleeping on granite under the constant gaze of TV cameras and tourists, they need a rest.

This movement has a long way to go. I was reminded of that a few minutes before the march to Foley Square began, when I ran into ninety-year-old Dan Berrigan and some fellow Jesuits on Liberty Plaza, all in plainclothes. This was a wonderful surprise. The plaza was overflowing with new faces that day, and I was happy to see some familiar ones, and so unexpectedly. I felt, also, like I could stand a little taller among them than I ever had before. Finally, here was some evidence that my generation could take a stand the way theirs had, against injustices we’re victims of and injustices we’re complicit in.

Best of all, as daily life at the plaza showed, we were taking our turn in the form of a carnival—what Dan’s friend William Stringfellow might have called, as he called the circus, “a parable of the eschaton.” It’s a sideways glimpse of the world to come.

After I cajoled those obliging Jesuits into posing for a picture with me, we were approached by a man who introduced himself as a TV reporter from Greece. True to form, he had a cameraman waiting a few paces behind him. (Liberty Plaza has become essentially (continued on page 7)
FRIDAY NIGHT MEETINGS

In keeping with Peter Maurin's recognition of the need for ongoing clarification of thought, we invite you to join us for our weekly Friday Night Meetings. The meetings are held at Maryhouse—55 East Third St., (212) 777-9617. Feel welcome to call and confirm the schedule. Maryhouse is located between First and Second Avenues (2nd Ave. stop on the F train).

Dec. 9 ........................Reading St. Paul’s Romans—(Roundtable).
Dec. 16 ....................Catholic Worker Christmas Party—Please Join Us!
Dec. 23 ....................No Meeting—Merry Christmas!
Dec. 30 ....................No Meeting—Happy New Year!
Jan. 6 ........................Cathy Breen: Iraqi Refugees—Their Struggles Continue.
Jan. 27 ....................Joanne Kennedy Explains Michael Moores’ The Big One (Film & Talk).

MEETINGS BEGIN AT 7:45 PM