

## Tea Party, 'Occupy' Movements Share Roots

Written by Martin Wiskol | OC Register  
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The Tea Party wasn't crazy about Wall Street's power either. Helping fuel the Tea Party's emergence in 2009 was anger with the hundreds of billions in government-funded corporate bailouts. The now burgeoning Occupy Wall Street movement, which included Irvine demonstrations planned for Friday and Saturday, frames the issue as economic fairness and calls for politicians to climb out of the pocket of big business.

While the Tea Party quickly rallied behind positions identified with the right – like illegal immigration – demonstrators consistently said they were fed up with sell-out politicians on both sides of the aisle. While Occupy Wall Street folks back some issues on the political left – like national health care – they also complain about Republicans and Democrats – including President **Barack Obama**.

However, there seems to be little cross-pollination. Indeed, a congressional proposal to end oil company subsidies was defeated by Republicans and was generalizaed by some in the Tea Party as part of Democrats' effort to raise taxes.

**Jim Hightower** is among those who say both movements are right when they complain about corporate America having inordinate control over the government. But as he sees it, the Tea Party has been co-opted by establishment influences and has lost the potency of its attack of Wall Street's influence.

**'It cracked'**

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I met author Hightower and actress **Mimi Kennedy** ("Dharma and Greg") on Friday afternoon at Pizzeria Ortica, down the block from the Segerstrom Center. They were in town for an Irvine fundraiser for Progressive Democrats of America, a group born out of

### **Dennis Kucinich**

's 2004 presidential campaign. The group has grown in small, steady steps. It counts the 90-member Congressional Progressive Caucus among its allies.

But PDA has operated largely in the political shadows as it advocates for long-shot issues including immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan and single-payer universal health care, as well as for closer regulation of big business.

So PDA members are cheering Occupy Wall Street's sudden, grassroots emergence on the scene and in the headlines, drawing attention to the same issues— particularly concerning corporate power – that PDA has tried to shine a light on.

"Finally, it cracked," said Hightower, a veteran activist and a PDA board member. "People have had too much. Not just here, but around the world."

### **Momentum?**

Like many in the Occupy Wall Street movement, Hightower and fellow PDA members are disappointed that Obama backed off his original positions concerning corporate regulation, health care and taxes. Hightower sees Obama as part of the corporate infrastructure.

"He's raised \$70 million. That's not coming from little people," said Hightower, who served as Texas agricultural commissioner until being defeated in 1990 by an up-and-coming **Rick Perry**. "My party is tied to the same money as the Republicans are."

That's where Occupy Wall Street comes in. Not wanting to co-opt the effort, PDA wants to help the movement if asked. But more importantly, the Occupy Wall Street protests help PDA build

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its case in Congress, with the president, and at the polls.

"We're wedded to Barack Obama and now he's out there a little bit, wanting to tax the super-rich," Hightower said. "I think there is really an opening for the Democrats and progressives to get elected, and pull the party in a more progressive direction."

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