

**We occupy
everything
because everything
is ours. We
demand
nothing because
they have nothing to
give us.**

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**Inspired by comrades in California, NYC,
and Everywhere.**

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For further reading:

Occupation: A Do-It-Yourself Guide

**The Bricks We Throw Today Will Build the
Liberation Schools of Tomorrow**

**OCCUPY EVERYTHING
DEMAND NOTHING**

**An Explanation
and Defense**



I wish to start by clarifying my intentions and explaining my anonymity. My intention in writing this is not to create, recommend, or further any needless political infighting. I write this in good faith, as an active organizer who wants nothing more than for this movement to succeed and grow. I desire to remain anonymous so as to allow the ideas that follow to be evaluated on their merits, rather than on any notions, correct or incorrect, regarding my friendships, personal politics, or personal motivations. While the title of this makes my argument obvious, I would rather my ideas and arguments, instead of myself, be considered.

An Explanation

The phrase Occupy Everything, Demand Nothing exists simultaneously as an ideological declaration and as a tactical suggestion. I will first offer an explanation of my understanding of the ideology behind the phrase, to attempt to counter any dismissal of the phrase as empty rhetoric, political immaturity, or utter nonsense.

In the context of the student movement a call at the college to occupy everything must be accompanied by an understanding of the fact that higher education does not exist in a vacuum, but instead that it is part of capitalist society, and that it indeed plays an important role in the functioning of capitalist society. Additionally, public institutions are directly linked to and controlled by the government. The support from both capital and government shows that higher education serves an important function in the maintenance and reproduction of the current social order. While the precise nature of this role is debatable, that debate does not concern my present argument.

What I am concerned with is how I, as an anti-capitalist, wish to challenge capitalism and state power through the current struggles around the budget and higher education.

Higher education, as an institution, provides a strategic location around which to build struggle and build resistance. The college, being constructed and operated under a capitalist economy, was built by and is operated by the working class. While the administration of the modern university is generally tied to the state or to corporate power, they are not the ones who allow the university to function. It is the

the occasional victory. These victories generally appear as reforms, but the real victory is in building to keep on resisting.

To the criticism that the principle of occupy everything, demand nothing is alienating, I would submit that I recognize that such tactics cannot take place divorced from a social context. Indeed, the main reason I wrote this is to introduce what I hope is a coherent explanation of the phrase occupy everything, demand nothing into the discourse around the upcoming actions. I hope that this gets people thinking about the ideas, even if they may not agree with everything I write. There is more to an occupation than simply building barricades, and introducing people to these ideas is a part of building a movement.

Conclusion

I am very well aware that this text is not going to convert everyone to my ideas. It would never be my intention to do that. However, I am free to advocate ideas and tactics, and I do so in the hope of generating discussion and in order to clarify what may seem to be a confusing phrase.

I also write from my own experiences and observations, and I acknowledge the inherent limit of my perspective. Again, I present this text to generate discussion, and hopefully to foster understanding and solidarity.

Regardless of your agreement or disagreement, I hope that this text has proven useful.

advantage to the occupiers. Instead of setting demands that can be negotiated down, the administration is forced to concede an offer that can then be renegotiated up to the gain of the occupiers. This, of course, assumes an eventual end to the occupation. Again, this is a purely pragmatic analysis.

More ideological, or perhaps idealistic, is the potential that exists in an occupation with no demands. For example, an occupation with no demands has no obligation to accept concessions from the administration. Inasmuch as a practical advantage is gained in negotiations, there also exists the possibility of refusal. Rather than us hoping for them to meet our limited demands, they must produce an acceptable offer. This approach would thus maximize flexibility, adaptability, and autonomy. The burden is on the administration to figure out what an acceptable offer is, if there even is one.

On a final tactical note, I anticipate criticism of these ideas from three positions: that the proposed tactics are inappropriate for the specific situation (too much too soon), that the proposed tactics are essentially reformist (not radical enough) and that the principle itself is too radical (alienating). I will briefly share my thoughts on each of these responses.

To the claim that the tactics are too much, too soon I would reply that I am not committed to action at any cost. If an occupation would clearly result in disaster, I would not do it. Circumstances must always be considered. However, circumstances are shaped not only by things beyond our control but also by us. The organizing and actions of the past have led to the capacity for action that we currently enjoy. I firmly believe that this capacity, in conjunction with the national rise in student occupations, makes the tactics I propose feasible.

On the other hand, to the criticism that these tactics are essentially reformist, I would make two points. First, as I mentioned before, I hold little hope for achieving all my goals through a March 4th action. However, if we are waiting to only participate in the one action that will bring about total revolution, we will be waiting a very long time. I have no attachment to fighting for reform as an end. However, I am very much attached to the idea of building power through struggle and

students and staff including faculty that make the university what it is. In other words, it is those without institutional power who allow the university to exist. This is especially important in the case of public institutions, as they are by nature supposed to serve their communities. These points are not lost on everyone. Indeed, a second reason for the importance of the university in social struggle is precisely the fact that students, operating out of universities, have been an important part of many social movements. It is clear that we cannot, and should not, merely seek to replicate the past. However, it is equally clear that we should understand and learn from the ways in which higher education has influenced and been influenced by social movements and social struggles. We must know the history of struggles focusing on higher education in order to both understand our current situation and figure out how to further anti-capitalist struggle.

While higher education in general possesses a unique potential to build resistance and struggle, Evergreen in particular is conducive to social struggle. First, there is the social atmosphere of Evergreen, with its history of organizing and action. Indeed, many of us were drawn to Evergreen specifically for its reputation for radical politics. Second, in contrast to its reputation, Evergreen is currently run by administrators who have shown little but contempt or indifference to the wishes of the Evergreen community. To name but a few scenarios, the administration has ties to the prison-industrial complex through the food on campus and the furniture, they have been resistant to working with the faculty union, they have assisted the police in tracking down members of the Evergreen community, they have ignored complaints of police racism and brutality, have shown extreme hostility towards dissent, and have done nothing to defend public service centers such as the Labor Education and Research Center from attacks by outside reactionaries. Any concessions made to the voice of the community have come only in response to strong campaigns and direct actions. What we've won, we've had to fight for.

The resurgence of student occupations in the United States and the growing national momentum for March 4th affords us a unique opportunity. With budget cuts and fee increases affecting every member of the Evergreen community, an administration that has proven unresponsive at best and openly hostile at worst, and most

importantly a legacy of and direct experience with militant organizing and action, we lack neither a reason for discontent nor experience and passion. These factors, coupled with the examples of the New School occupation and the occupations in California, have created an opportune moment to push our struggle further, and to move from protesting how the college is managed towards building power among students and staff including faculty.

A call to occupy everything, then, is a call to assume control over the community that we create. It is direct action: rather than allowing the administration to make decisions for us, we must take control for ourselves and reshape the college as we, the community, see fit. The college was built by the working class and functions because of the working class, but it is managed by those selected by and beholden to the state and business interests.

To demand nothing is also a call to assume control. By demanding nothing, we demonstrate that we have no use for the powers that be. We occupy everything because everything is ours. We demand nothing because they have nothing to give us. This shifts the goal from achieving some reforms to taking control of the institution and shaping it to fit our needs, rather than allowing it to operate as a component of capitalism and state power.

A Defense

As noted earlier, 'Occupy Everything, Demand Nothing' is also a tactical position. Accordingly, I now wish to offer a pragmatic defense of the tactics implicit in the slogan.

I am not so naïve as to believe that, come March 4th, the Evergreen community with occupy every building, force the administration to resign, and organize resources and space to meet the needs of the community. I'd be thrilled if that happened, but I have no reason to believe it will. However, simply because the end goal cannot be immediately achieved is no reason to discard the tactic. How many of us who were active in Port Militarization Resistance believed that we alone could end the war that way? The value was not only in the attempted accomplishment of our end goal, but also in the shared experience of struggle, which built affinity and solidarity, and in the

escalation it represented, shifting from protest to resistance via direct action.

On a tactical level, to occupy everything and demand nothing creates the potential for the struggle to continually evolve without limits being predetermined. To consider the entire campus a potential site of occupation is to open up the movement to all people attempting to meet their self-determined needs. Occupying, liberating, and holding space creates zones outside the direct control of the socioeconomic system, zones that the community can use as they see fit.

The concept of demanding nothing, however, makes less sense upon first hearing the term. When we consider the traditional student occupation, a series of demands is generally attached. These demands usually fall into one of two categories: concrete or symbolic. For example, a demand to restore jobs that have been cut is concrete. A demand to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, on the other hand, is generally regarded as symbolic. By no means do I intend to validate or invalidate either category. I merely mean to draw a distinction between the two for the purpose of analysis. Symbolic demands, and the occupations that support them, are generally not expected to be won. Instead, they seek to gain publicity or draw attention to an issue. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. It's a specific type of action for a specific purpose, appropriate for some situations but not for others. Concrete demands, however, are generally made with an intention to win them. Another specific action for specific circumstances. However, to demand nothing allows for some advantages over concrete demands.

On a purely pragmatic level, demanding nothing puts the administration in a difficult position. They are given three options: to forcibly dismantle the occupation, to wait out the occupation, or to tip their hand by making an initial offer for negotiations. The first is undesirable for many colleges, as it has the potential to generate very bad publicity, and it is certain to hurt relations with at least the students involved. The second carries two potential disadvantages: uncertainty and inconvenience. If the occupation is in an essential location, the inconvenience could even be senior administrators unable to perform their duties. The third option, initiating negotiations, confers a certain