

1. The recent Occupy Wall Street movement, has now spread globally to 951 cities in 82 countries. How far is there a “community” element to this movement?
2. Does such a movement, as former President Bill Clinton says, “need to be for something rather than just against something”?

On face value, the speed at which the Occupy Wall Street movement has spread throughout 82 countries reflects how the global community has become inter-connected through social networks and the media. Through these, and other mediums, an isolated campaign has been picked up by others who broadly share the grievances highlighted by the movement. Taken as a whole then, anti-capitalist sentiments can be said to have forged a community across borders as more and more people have declared themselves supporters of the movement.

If we consider movements individually however, does this ‘community’ share commonalities in behaviour necessary to make it a successful one? In comparison, the demonstrations in Birmingham and London have received very different press coverage, mostly down to the controversies caused over the impact the London demonstrations have had on St Paul’s Cathedral. This high profile backdrop has taken the focus away from the initial grievances of protestors, to the extent that news headlines call them the ‘St Paul’s protests’ instead of their preferred title of Occupy London Stock Exchange, making them out of sync with protests elsewhere.

Whilst ensuring the protests have not been ignored, this has taken the focus away from the reasons for protest. Press coverage of the St Paul’s demonstrations has certainly focussed on their local environmental and social impact as opposed to wider political and economic aspirations. This seems to have isolated the protest from others globally as local issues are forced onto the agenda. The London movement as part of a global community of protests then becomes a harder badge to attach. Commonalities therefore, become harder to find between London and elsewhere, as the media focus on these alternate issues raised by the movement. Detailed looks at some of the other worldwide movements will also, I am sure throw up similar issues with regards to the creation of a successful community. Indeed, the BBC reported in October that the spread of the movement, physically and through cyberspace is causing a dilution of the campaign as it takes in other issues outside of economic inequality. This itself, places a strain on any community bond the movement has formed through its original message.

This is not to say however, that elements of community have not been retained. The much smaller scale protest in Birmingham has been able to maintain the focus on its anti-capitalist agenda consistent with the initial arching aims of the Wall Street Movement. Comments by participants interviewed in the *Birmingham Mail* allude to a sense of being in this together and grievances noted include the bail out of the banks, and the lop-sided benefits of capitalism, with one interviewee stating he wanted ‘equality for all.’ Reading these statements, in contrast to media coverage of the London protests certainly brings to my mind a sense that these people feel they are part of a wider community, with a common objective and mission statement which is necessarily broad.

In response to the second question, President Bill Clinton’s statement seems to suggest that the protests are only designed to stir negative feeling, encouraging people to be pessimistic about our current economies and governments, when the flip side is that protestors are also campaigning

for positive change. Again, from the Birmingham movement, one interviewee claimed 'the demonstration aimed to make the world a better place for future generations.'

Reading through the nine statements outlined by the Occupy London group, they can also read as being 'for something' rather than 'against' if you take the view that complaints are justified. Point 7 in particular which reads:

*We want structural change towards authentic global equality. The world's resources must go towards caring for people and the planet, not the military, corporate profits or the rich.*

Such a statement, not pretending to be low reaching, certainly does not portray anger, but rather compassion.

Overall then, whether all of the movements actions and comments are appropriate or not, I would say that President Clinton's statement is not relevant here as despite the anti-capitalist rhetoric, behind the demonstrations seems to lie a genuine desire for action, not reaction.