Does the Occupy Movement have a future? Lessons from history

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"Every generation needs a new revolution" – Thomas Jefferson

Abstract:

The dismantling of the Occupy camp in Dublin this week represents a critical moment for the movement. History has shown that when a movement reaches a juncture like this, there are a number of options open to it, and how the movement reacts at this crucial point will determine its future and level of success. What options are available to the Occupy movement in Ireland? With Time *magazine naming 'The Protestor' as their person of the year in 2011, the Occupy movement, which had its origins at Wall Street in New York, has been successful in creating a public presence and has given this current economic crisis a political narrative (one of many that the crisis has). The phrases 'We are the 99%' and issues of inequality and corporate greed and power, have entered (or re-entered) popular and political discourse. This paper draws on social movement theory, and examines protest movements in the twentieth century to see what lessons the Occupy movement in Ireland can learn from history, particularly the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, in developing its future strategy.*

The Occupy encampment on the plaza outside Central Bank on Dame Street was removed in an early morning operation by the Gardai on 8 March 2012. The camp was initially set up as a symbolic representation of discontent and came on the back of a year of uprisings and unrest. 2011 was the year of revolution. Popular uprisings erupted in Tunisia and Egypt, which appeared to spell the end of dictatorships and the triumph of democracy, although time will tell if that is to be the case. Barack Obama addressed the issue of inequality in his State of the Union address in January 2012, and 'in words that could have been written by the Occupy Wall Street Movement', Obama talked of applying 'the same rules from top to bottom'.[1] Former Irish President Mary Robinson also linked the Occupy movement to issues of human rights and democracy in an address to the Seanad in 2011.[2]

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[1] *Guardian,* 25 January 2012.
[2] Address by Dr Mary Robinson, 24 November 2011, Seanad Éireann Debate, Vol. 211, No. 12, p.5.

Occupy and occupation first became part of the language of protest in September 1920, when factory workers in Italy held strikes against working conditions. About 600,000 workers took control of the factories, and the movement was known in Italian as *l'occupazione delle fabbriche,* or 'the occupation of the factories'. Another term for protest-style occupation, the sit-in, has been in use since 1937, though it really took off in the 1960s.[3] As of November 2011, the Occupy movement had spread (physically with Occupy camps and virtually via social media and internet forums) to 951 cities in 82 countries. References are frequently made to 1968[4] but how relevant are they? The *Financial Times* called 2011 'The Year of Global Indignation'. The paper's foreign affairs columnist, Gideon Rachman, wrote 'Many of the revolts of 2011 pit an internationally connected elite against ordinary citizens who feel excluded from the benefits of economic growth, and angered by corruption. The creation of a global mood is a mysterious thing. In 1968, before the word 'globalisation' or the internet were even invented, there were student rebellions around the world. The year 1989 saw not just the fall of the Berlin Wall but the Tiananmen Square revolt in China. Perhaps 2011 will come to rank alongside 1968 and 1989 as a year of global revolt?'[5]

It is true that there are many similarities between what is occurring now and what happened in 1968 and 1989. These similarities should not just be noted for the objectives the movements had in common, but also the strategies that were adopted. While the political and military oppression experienced in the American South and Northern Ireland in 1968, in Tiananmen Square in 1989, or in Latin America in the late 1980s and early 1990s is not present in Ireland now, many of the socio-economic problems are comparable. As the Occupy movement assesses what its future tactics should be, it is an opportune time to examine what strategies have been tried and tested in the twentieth century and which were the most successful.

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[3] Ben Zimmer, 'Occupying Word Street', www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/wordroutes/3001.
[4] Waves of social and protest movements throughout the 1960s began to reshape the values of that generation. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the American and Northern Ireland civil rights movements, student activism, protests against the Vietnam War all permeated each other and flowed into the spirit of '68.
[5] Gideon Rachman, *Financial Times,* 29 August 2011.

Social movements provide weapons for the powerless. They create spaces for people or groups with few formal institutional ties and for ideas that are not part of the institutional consensus.[6] Victor Hugo once stated that an invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come. Jesse Jackson, US civil rights leader, speaking to Occupy London in December 2011, drew on this idea, telling the crowd that 'Occupy is a spirit whose time has come'. Frank and Fuentes argue that one of the patterns that emerge when looking at long cycles of social history is that social movements become more offensive and socially responsible in periods of economic downturn, when people's livelihood and identity are negatively affected.[7] This was true of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) (1967-c.1981). After a period of rapid social and political change after the Second World War, where more public resources were available, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw a period of increased unemployment and socio-economic concerns, which, for the most part, centred around housing. The same is true of Latin America in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Venezuela, the urban masses exploded over the imposition of neoliberal austerity measures by the government, and in Argentina similar looting erupted. The Caracazo in 1989 saw the mass mobilisation of thousands of mostly poor, mostly urban, mostly marginalised Venezuelans forcing their way into the political process.[8] Other manifestations of popular protest against the austerity measures in Latin America include the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico in 1994. So the emergence of some form of public protest now, given the global financial crisis, should not be surprising. What is, perhaps, surprising is that despite the pervasiveness and intensity of the protest, the results are still negligible, at least in Ireland, by overall standards.

The biggest problem facing the Occupy movement is that there is no successful precedent to which they can turn. According to Sidney Tarrow, social movements are 'collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities in sustained

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[6] Naomi Rosenthal et al., 'Social Movements and Network Analysis: A Case Study of Nineteenth-Century Women's Reform in New York State', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 90, No. 5 (Mar., 1985), pp. 1022-1023.

[7] Marta Fuentes and Andre Gunder Frank, 'Ten theses on social movements', *World Development,* Vol. 17, Issue 2, February 1989, pp. 179-191.

[8] Harry E. Vanden, 'Social Movements, Hegemony and New Forms of Resistance', *Latin American Perspectives,* Vol. 34, No. 2, March 2007, pp. 17-18.

interaction with elites, opponents and authorities'.[9] Riots, and other flashes in the pan are not social movements. It is not a social movement unless it is sustained. The broader strategic goal of the Occupy movement should be that of developing a truly long-term movement to transform society. That is a task of sustainability – how can the Occupy movement, specifically in Dublin, develop the organisational, cultural and institutional forms to sustain a long term movement yet also maintain its dynamism, direct democracy, activism and transformative vision? No social or political movement of the twentieth century has been able to do so.

Craig Calhoun argues that Occupy Wall Street and its cousins around the country constitute only a small social movement. It has resonant slogans and appeal beyond the numbers of its activists, but it is at best in the early stages of its development.[10] Likewise, in Ireland, Occupy is only in its infancy and there is a possibility it may have lost its opportunity for any meaningful change. However, it took eighteen months before NICRA began making any inroads in generating support or combating public apathy. These first eighteen months were, according to Fred Heatley, a time of frustration.[11] In 1965, the Derry Unemployed Action Committee (DUAC) was founded. Such was the apathy of anti-unionists at the time that only a handful of people participated in the inaugural meeting. However, gradually the DUAC expanded with each small successful protest. Public meetings were picketed, council meetings disrupted, teach-ins held, and an unemployed workers' club opened. What Occupy in Ireland has to ensure is that it does not move from the first stage (emergence) to the last stage (decline), missing out on the second (coalescence) and third (bureaucratisation) stages.[12]

In Ireland, those involved in Occupy are determined, but so far too few in numbers to claim to be a 'movement' and are very vulnerable. Nonetheless, covering the G20 Summit for *Newsnight* in early November 2011, a number of weeks after Occupy Wall

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[9] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in movement: social movements in contentious politics,* (2nd ed.), (Cambridge, 1998), p. 4.

[10] Craig Calhoun, 'Evicting the Public: Why has occupying public space led to such heavy-handed repression?', from 'Understanding the Occupy Movement: Perspectives from the Social Sciences', *Berkley Journal of Sociology,* November 2011. (http://www.possible-futures.org/2011/11/19/evicting-the-public-why-has-occupying-public-spaces-brought-such-heavy-handed-repression/).

[11] Linen Hall Library, Northern Ireland Political Collection, NICRA, Box III, Material from Ann Hope.

[12] Debra Friedman and Doug McAdam, 'Collective Identity and Activism: Networks, Choices and the Life of a Social Movement', in Morris and McClurg Mueller (eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, (London, 1992), pp. 161-162.

Street began, Paul Mason found it 'was on everyone's lips...OWS [Occupy Wall Street] has, in just a few weeks, become global shorthand among policymakers for "what can happen" if they don't regain control of the situation'.[13] There are two measures when something like Occupy arises to oppose the system: its strength and the system's vulnerability. Therefore, the success of Occupy in Ireland will depend on the vulnerability of the Irish system. Issues like the household charges and tax claims against pensioners may weaken the government's support. A Paddy Power/Red C Poll in January 2012 suggested that 26 per cent of those aware they were liable for the new household charge claim they won't pay it, and those who are more likely to claim they will not pay appear to be in the younger age groups. Yet, despite negative media surrounding both these issues, the two government parties improved their share of the first preference vote slightly,[14] when compared to a similar poll conducted just before the budget in December.[15] At the same time, Davy, the stockbrokers, says its new projections for the Irish economy embody an even weaker recovery than had previously been forecast as uncertainty surrounding the European debt crisis has led to a collapse in confidence.[16] On the issue of the national economy Irish respondents in a Eurobarometer survey, published in October 2011, were among the least satisfied in Europe. Only 4 per cent were satisfied (and 95 per cent unsatisfied) compared to an EU average of 30 per cent.[17] Coupled with the fact that Ireland has the lowest record of 'net happiness' in Western Europe,[18] this could suggest problems for the coalition, particularly as it tries to pass a new European Treaty, thereby creating instability and vulnerability.[19]

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[13] Paul Mason, '#OWS: The brand leaders cannot afford to ignore', http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15562965.

[14] Although the Labour Party's support has dipped one per cent in the latest Behaviour and Attitudes poll in the *Sunday Times,* 26 February 2012.

[15] Paddy Power/Red C Poll, 12 January 2012

[16] Davy Research, 'Irish Economic Forecasts', 16 January 2012, http://www.davy.ie/content/pubarticles/economy20120116.pdf

[17] European Commission, Eurobarometer survey 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/whatsnew2011_en.htm

[18] New Year Poll 'On Happiness', Press Release, Zurich, 30 December 2011.

[19] Although the latest Red C poll indicates that 60 per cent of the electorate will support the Treaty, 5 March 2012.

Repertoires of collective action

Contentious acts can take many forms, and they must be considered as strategic actions in pursuit of rational goals. Contention can be considered as 'public performance' to air disputes with the government and the status quo; the particular forms of contention include violence, disruption and convention.[20] Violence is one of the most visible forms of contentious collective action and should be 'understood as a function of the interaction between protestors' tactics and policing'.[21] Violence has worked in the past. The problems in Northern Ireland were only thrust into the media spotlight, sparking international outrage after the 5 October civil rights march in 1968. Although only a small number of people attended that march, it was the violent reaction of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) that gave Northern Ireland its October Revolution[22] and created a mass movement. Indeed, Eamonn McCann[23] noted that 'By this time our conscious, if unspoken, strategy was to provoke the police into over-reaction and thus spark off mass reaction against the authorities.'[24] The same is true of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. While violence achieves an immediate reaction, that is, violence on the part of institutional forces against non-violent resistance stirs up righteous outrage, and clearly shows discontent, it has shortcomings by scaring off the less committed element within a movement.

Disruption, as a form of contentious action, is merely the threat of violence, but it need not actually threaten public order. This can be done through non-violent direct action, such as sit-ins, marches, rallies, constructing barricades, blocking traffic, etc. Widespread non-violent civil disobedience has perhaps been the most successful of all repertoires of collective action in the twentieth century.[25] The civil rights movement in the US used boycotts, Freedom Rides, sit-ins and marches to highlight injustice. Similarly, NICRA borrowed these actions and were successful in achieving the political

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[20] Tarrow, *Power in movement*, p. 95.
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] Editorial, *Fortnight,* October, 1988
[23] Eamonn McCann was a member of the Derry Labour Party and was involved with the Irish Workers Group, a Trotskyist organisation, for a time in the 1960s. He was a prominent member of the civil rights movement.
[24] Eamonn McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, (3rd ed.), (London, 1993), see:
http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/mccann93.htm.
[25] Tarrow, *Power in Movement,* pp. 98-101

aims the movement set out as well as forcing the issue of discrimination onto the British political agenda and into the national debate.

The Occupy movement has already had precedents for some of its tactics in Ireland. When a group of people pitched tents on the plaza outside Central Bank on Dame Street on 8 October 2011, for many the scene was not a new one. Inspired by Occupy Wall Street, which began its protest on 17 September,[26] the tent was already a meme[27] and the slogan 'We are the 99%' already ingrained in popular discourse. But the '68 and '69 generation in Ireland would connect this to two earlier protests – that of the Caledon Squatting in Tyrone in 1968, and the Battle of Hume Street in Dublin in 1969.

The occupation of public spaces is symbolic, challenging as it does the ownership of that space, or to gain attention for a particular issue. In Caledon 1968, the occupation of a house by Austin Currie (Nationalist MP), Patrick Gildernew and Joe Campbell highlighted the problem of discrimination in housing in Northern Ireland. The squat at Caledon in June 1968 was the point at which NICRA began a mass civil disobedience campaign in earnest.

In 1969, students and lecturers from UCD's Department of Architecture, which was then at Earlsfort Terrace, took up the mantle of protecting Georgian Dublin and occupied a building at Number 45 Stephen's Green, which was earmarked for demolition and the building of new office blocks there. But the occupation was part of a bigger issue, and not just about preservation. There were 10,000 people on the housing list in Dublin alone and the Dublin Housing Action Committee was incensed that sound houses would be demolished in a city where so many people were in over-crowded, inadequate accommodation.[28] The Occupy movement, while, until recently, was symbolically occupying the area in front of Central Bank to highlight financial inequalities, is moving towards the occupation of NAMA properties for social and community use and to hold NAMA to account. The issues of homelessness, inadequate housing, social housing and

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[26] The 'tent village' at Puerta del Sol square, Madrid in May 2011 is arguably, however, the origins of Occupy, even though the protest was short-lived.
[27] A meme is an idea, behaviour or style that spreads throughout a culture either by cultural inheritance (as by parents to children) or by cultural acquisition (as by peers, information media, and entertainment media).
[28] *Irish Times,* 7 June 1990.

lack of community buildings are being used to forward the 'moral superiority' of the Occupy cause.

However, there is a contradiction in disruptive forms of contention. Although they are the strongest weapon of social movements because they give weak actors leverage against powerful opponents, sustaining disruption depends on a high level of commitment and on keeping authorities off balance. In general, disruption loses its power as the movement progresses, as formal organisation moves away from it, police and elite counteract it, and individuals within the movement lose interest in collective action.[29]

More recently the role of social media has been suggested as a new repertoire of protest. Media, the internet, and social media, have been huge influences in past social movements. A paradox has emerged from the revolution in communications. The same technology that has taken world capitalism to a new stage of development and corporate globalisation has also provided a significant boost for anti-corporate and anti-globalisation movements.[30] Both Aldon Morris and Thomas Hennessey argue that the coming of age of modern communication technologies in the 1950s and early 1960s in the US and Northern Ireland respectively advanced the agenda of the civil rights movement.[31] These technologies were capable of providing a window through which millions could watch the civil rights protest and become familiar with the issues it raised. Similarly, when the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) forced the then President of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, to accept a ceasefire nine days after initiating a guerrilla war, despite the military superiority of de Gortari, it was a result of the use of the newly emergent world wide web, which allowed information to flow despite a military cordon preventing the press from entering combat areas.[32] The problem that may occur with the Occupy movement using social media as a repertoire of action is that mobilisations become sporadic rather than deep-rooted and enduring.

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[29] Tarrow, *Power in movement*, p. 98.
[30] Maria Elena Martinez-Torres, 'Civil Society, the Internet and the Zapatistas', *Peace Review*, 13:3, (2001), p. 347.
[31] Aldon Morris, 'A retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and intellectual landmarks', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 1999, 2, pp. 522-523; Thomas Hennessey, *The Origins of the Troubles*, (Dublin, 2005), p. 146.
[32] Maria Elena Martinez-Torres, 'Civil Society, the Internet and the Zapatistas', *Peace Review*, 13:3, (2001), p. 347.

Protests flare up, gather huge numbers to the cause and then fade away. New digitised media has been vital to both the Arab Spring and Occupy. Blog entries, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are used to spread information and coordinate logistics.[33] But in this era of the internet and social media, physical co-presence that forges a collective identity is missing. Then again, perhaps it is no longer needed.[34]

Structure of the movement

Movements are dynamic and hard to control because they are a loose association of individuals. Internally, the movement cannot control its participants. Externally, political opportunities and constraints continue to shift.[35] In Northern Ireland in 1969 and 1970, these problems were certainly felt by NICRA. In 1969, the disunity of the movement was noted: 'It was the week above all where Civil Rights supporters throughout mid-Ulster were saddened to read newspaper reports of discord, disunity and disharmony in the leadership of this once solidly united, broad-based movement'.[36] Some say that the Occupy movement should now evolve into the political arena, supporting policy issues, running candidates for office, and putting pressure on politicians and corporations.[37] However, it was precisely this strategy which caused problems with the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. The formation of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) led to identity conflicts within the civil rights movement and had a profound effect on NICRA's position. Until that point, NICRA had been the spokesperson for minority grievances. NICRA had achieved the political concessions from the Labour government and Stormont in 1968-1969. However, when the SDLP emerged, they appeared to take over this role and NICRA had to question where exactly they stood in relation to it. In a discussion document by Sean Hollywood of NICRA (no date, but approximately 1972), he states that 'The CRA should recognise that it has lost the leadership of the mass of the people'.[38]

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[33] See: Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*, (MIT, 2011).

[34] It is not within the scope of this paper to expand on this idea further, but see: Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*, (MIT, 2011).

[35] Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, p. 89.

[36] *Dungannon Observer,* 21 February 1969.

[37] Jules Lobel, 'The future of the Occupy Movement', http://jurist.org/forum/2011/12/jules-lobel-occupy-movement.php

[38] NIPC, LHL, NICRA Archive, Box 2, Document entitled 'The Way Forward' by Sean Hollywood (no date but c.1972)

The move by members of NICRA into parliamentary politics was, according to Denis Bradley,[39] a mistake. In his opinion, from early 1970 onwards, the debate in nationalist circles, a debate that had been crystallising as a result of the civil rights movement, began to narrow significantly. Eamonn McCann argued along similar lines at the time:

> ... confusion... reigned throughout the movement [civil rights movement] as to where, if anywhere, it was going. This confusion is caused by the fact that there is a total lack of open discussion as to the aims of the campaign and the political implications of its demands. In the interests of the sacred anti-Unionist unity and in order at all times to put forward a united front, there has been a minimum of public debate on the perspective the movement should adopt.[40]

The Occupy movement has an added problem in that it is a leaderless organisation. The movement argue that the lack of leaders or spokespeople has meant that the mainstream media has been unable to reduce the movement to a simplistic and easily dismissible narrative. This makes it similar to the women's and gay rights movements in the past.[41] For them, it shows that it is also a truly democratic, grassroots movement. Ever since social movements became a force for change in the modern world, observers and activists have puzzled over the effects of organisation on their capacity for contention. Some theorists have argued that without leadership exercised through organisations, rebellion remains 'primitive' and soon disintegrates.[42] Others are persuaded that, far from inspiring people to action, organisational leaders can deprive them of their major power – the power to disrupt. The theoretical support for this position comes from Robert Michel's 'Iron Law of Oligarchy', which holds that, over time, organisations displace their original goals, become wedded to routine and ultimately accept the rules of the game of the existing system.[43]

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[39] Denis Bradley is a former vice-chairman of the police board for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in Northern Ireland. He was formerly a member of the NI Drugs Committee and the BBC Broadcasting Council, he also helped set up the Bogside Community Association. In mid 2007 he was appointed co-chairman, along with Robin Eames, of the Consultative Group on the Past in Northern Ireland.

[40] Eamonn McCann, *Derry Journal*, 13 May 1969.

[41] Heather Gautney, 'What is Occupy Wall Street? The history of leaderless movements', *Washington Post*, 10 October 2011. At the same time, while these movements may have been leaderless, key spokespeople emerged.

[42] See: Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: studies in archaic forms of social movement in the 19th and 20th centuries*, (3rd ed.), (Manchester, 1971).

[43] Pamela S. Tolbert, 'Robert Michels and the Iron Law of Oligarchy', *Articles and Chapters,* Paper 397, (2010), http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/articles/397.

Resource mobilisation theory argues that the social movement must have strong and efficient leadership. John R. Bradley, author of *After the Arab Spring*,[44] also states that a leaderless approach is almost certainly a mistake as it seems the revolutionaries have not learned from history, about how revolutionary movements lacking a vanguard are crushed by more entrenched and better-organised forces in the aftermath of massive social and political upheaval. Most self-destructively, they have learned nothing especially of the 1979 Iranian revolution, likewise in its early stages drawing people from all walks of life but then 'hijacked' by Islamist groups.[45] From the start, Occupy in Ireland adopted a 'no banners' approach. There is a concern, given the history of factionalism and splintering of the left in Ireland, and the problems this caused for NICRA, that the Occupy movement would go the same way.

Occupy does not have any official set of demands, other than creating general equality in wealth distribution. In Ireland, Occupy has added that they 'reject the complete control of the European Central Bank (ECB) in dictating our economic policy. Our demand is that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stay[s] out of our affairs' and that 'the private bank debt that has been socialised and burdened upon the population…be lifted'. These goals are idealistic and to a certain extent, unrealistic. Movements with more specific goals often have a better chance at outright success. NICRA managed to achieve most of their political objectives by 1970. The occupation at Hume Street in 1969 led to a change in preservation policy by the government in the decades that followed. At the same time, it is arguable that the creation of this broad new narrative to challenge the right and liberal views, as well as the reframing of the debate, is the success of Occupy. But without the articulation of a set of demands and a programme for change, it is unlikely that the movement will be understood, let alone supported, in Ireland.

Mobilising the masses

Charles Tilly argues that a movement's public displays of worthiness (or moral standing) are critical to a movement's impact, along with its unity, numbers and commitment. Demonstrating that the suffering in question is 'undeserved' is also

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[44] John R Bradley, *After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked the Middle East Revolts*, (New York, 2012).
[45] *Ibid,* p.80.

crucial.[46] For members of the civil rights movement in the North, this involved highlighting the issue of discrimination. Discrimination still remains a highly contentious issue in Northern Ireland, but in the 1960s it was a useful mobiliser for collective action. The civil rights protestors in Northern Ireland immediately identified with the American civil rights movement. One woman on a picket about discrimination in housing allocation in 1963, interviewed by a local newspaper said 'They talk about Alabama, why don't they talk about Dungannon?'[47] The women marched up and down the pavement, American-style, carrying placards with slogans such as 'Racial Discrimination in Alabama Hits Dungannon' and 'If Our Religion is Against Us, Ship Us to Little Rock'.[48] According to Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh, Catholic identification with black people was obvious: 'Many of us looked to the civil rights struggles in America for our inspiration. We compared ourselves to the poor blacks of the US ghettoes...Indeed we viewed ourselves as Ulster's White Negroes'.[49] It was more than that however. This association with the movement in America gave NICRA more legitimacy and credibility and at a time when Martin Luther King's peaceful approach was being flashed around the globe on television sets, it earned NICRA a certain amount of sympathy from an international audience as well as a positive mobilising technique at home.

For the Occupy movement, their challenge is to remain relevant in this area – of possessing the 'moral high ground'. The idea of collective identity in the chant 'We are the 99%' pits the majority 'ordinary' people against the one per cent minority who control the wealth. And there is strength in numbers. History has shown that the success of a movement depends on seizing every available opportunity to highlight injustices. Occupy has made a start with its interaction and coordination with smaller networks and groups such as the Vita Cortex protest in Cork, the La Senza workers' occupation of shop premises to gain correct redundancy rights and more recently, the occupation of NAMA buildings, as well as highlighting issues such as the payment of unsecured bonds by the government. There is an opportunity for Occupy to act as an

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[46] Charles Tilly, quoted in Victoria Carty, 'Labor Struggles, New Social Movements, and America's Favorite Pastime: New York Workers Take on New Era Cap Company', *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 2006), p. 243.
[47] *Dungannon Observer*, 18 May 1963.
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh, *Ulster's White Negroes: From civil rights to insurrection*, (Edinburgh, 1994) p. 14.

umbrella group for these smaller protest groups, who are expressing discontent in much the same language. NICRA assumed a similar role in Northern Ireland and was, therefore, able to coordinate the mass civil disobedience campaign in a more organised and coherent way.

An important aspect that is missing from the Occupy movement in Ireland is the large-scale participation of students in the protest. In the US, students and universities have become one of the most important fronts for the revitalisation of the labour movement.[50] It was students and staff at University College Dublin which initiated the Hume Street occupation in 1969, and sustained it for the six months they were there. The Peoples' Democracy in the North was made up exclusively of students and although radicalised the civil rights movement there, also kept the discrimination issue on the agenda, when more moderate elements wanted to be more restrained on the issue. Paul Mason, BBC *Newsnight* journalist, identifies the importance of the student: 'At the heart of it all are young people, obviously: students; westernised; secularised, ... a new sociological type – the graduate with no future ...'[51] This aspect is totally absent from the movement in Ireland, and it is difficult to explain why. One possible explanation is that according to a New Year Poll on 'Happiness',[52] demographic analysis for Ireland shows that those aged 35-54 years are significantly less happy than other age groups, including the student population, despite increasing tuition fees. An additional explanation can be found in another meme of Occupy – '*slacktivism*'. Evgeny Morozov, visiting scholar at Stanford and Schwartz Fellow at the New America Foundation, used the term *slacktivism* to describe the 'feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact', which is, Morozov argues, 'the ideal type of activism for a lazy generation'. Morozov's point is that *slacktivists* are not personally invested beyond the fleeting clicks of their mouse and that such *slacktivism* efforts have yet to demonstrate any concrete power or effect.[53]

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[50] Victoria Carty, 'Labor Struggles, New Social Movements, and America's Favourite Pastime: New York Workers Take on New Era Cap Company, *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 2006), p. 248.
[51] Paul Mason, 'Twenty reasons why it's kicking off everywhere', 5 February 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/paulmason/2011/02/twenty_reasons_why_its_kicking.html.
[52] New Year Poll 'On Happiness', Press Release, Zurich, 30 December 2011.

[53] Robert R. Sauders, 'Exploring some of the critiques and criticism of activism', *Anthropology News*, 19 January 2012. http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2012/01/19/exploring-some-of-the-critiques-and-criticism-of-activism/

Conclusion

With the dismantling of the Occupy camp in Dublin this week (8 March 2012), the Occupy movement in Ireland has reached its critical juncture. It is difficult for social movements to sustain themselves for a long existence. Unless they enter into politics, movements tend to, when examining the historical precedents, decline and fizzle out. Popular power arises quickly, reaches a peak and soon evaporates or gives way to repression and routine.[54] That is not to say that the Occupy movement will not have a lasting impact. Both the civil rights movement in the US and Northern Ireland had huge and vital impacts on their respective societies in terms of laws and reform. History shows that there are two basic aims that the Occupy movement in Ireland, needs to proceed with if it wishes to succeed. Firstly, it needs to ensure that it does not move straight from the first stage of protest to the last, without coalescing some of its objectives. It can do this by initiating a mass civil disobedience campaign, which although may be short-lived, has historically been proven to succeed. And secondly, it needs to articulate a more concrete set of demands that will have resonance with a large section of the population. 'We are the 99%' is a gripping slogan, but it's not enough to sustain interest and support.

The unusual thing about Occupy though is that not only is it an occupation of space, but also time. Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution*[55] has relevance here. It offers a particularly useful wide-frame optic into today's Occupy protests. Williams' study argues forcefully for the need to think of 'revolution' as a long, complex, unfolding human process, uncontained by pre-set categories or conventional spatial, imaginative or political limits. He says that because the scale of the whole process is 'too large to know or even imagine', it is reduced to a series of disconnected or local changes, and this 'scaling-down only disguised some of the deepest problems and tensions, which then only appear as scattered symptoms of restlessness and uncertainty'.[56] With this in mind, therefore, lessons from history show that now is *not* the time to scale down, but to think, and act, big.[57]

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[54] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, p. 1.
[55] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (London, 1992).
[56] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp. 12-13.
[57] David Palumbo-Liu, 'Thinking Big', *Boston Review*, 4 December 2011.