

# 99

**DISPATCHES FROM  
OCCUPY TORONTO**

Issue #3 October 22, 2011

## Austerity and Occupation

Michael Romandel

On October 15, 2011, the Occupy actions which began on Wall Street in mid-September spread around the world, becoming a rallying point for existing movements against austerity and corruption in several European countries, and a spark for those in places where resistance to austerity is less advanced. In Toronto, large demonstrations in recent months against an agenda of service cuts and privatization, which Conservative Mayor Rob Ford is

trying to push through city council, have been spearheaded by Labour Councils and a coalition of community activist groups. While the anti-Ford campaign known as Stop the Cuts has attracted new voices in addition to the existing community activists, trade union militants and radical leftists, the arrival of 'Occupy' has brought a very different group into political action than those who came out for the first time against Ford.

Many of those politicized through the Occupy movement are young and enthusiastic about their connection to Occupy Wall Street, and the international movement against the top 1%. Many are interested in an array of issues beyond the two pillars of the Occupy movement (income inequality and austerity measures). These issues include environmental sustainability, the nature and form of modern democracy, the right of indigenous people to self-determination, individual liberty, and the relationship between technological development and human social structures.

Despite problems with the fetishization of tactics used in Occupy Wall Street, as well as the political inexperience of some of its prominent organizers, there can be no doubt that this movement has already shaken the world. In 2008, when the financial crisis entered the public consciousness, many activists in North America were disappointed by the lack of

a large-scale response from the masses of working people. By 2010, many had come to believe that an opportunity for a working-class movement against the financial elite had been missed. However, an analysis of history will show that changes in societal consciousness often occur very slowly through a series of fits and starts, with unexpected events becoming the catalyst for such a movement.

This is exactly what occurred in May '68 in France, where a student protest around seemingly 'middle-class' cultural issues relating to student life became the spark for a large scale workers' uprising that shook the entire socio-economic structure of French society and nearly led to the end of capitalism in one of the most economically and culturally developed capitalist countries. The catalyst for this action was an attack on students by the police.

The Occupy movement currently building around the world could potentially provide a similar spark. Italy, Greece and Spain have all seen massive workers' demonstrations against austerity in recent years, and the movement currently being driven forward by youth inspired by Occupy could provide the spark for a full-blown uprising in any one of these countries, or even somewhere less expected. If this occurs, nowhere, including Toronto, may be immune from the reverberations.



## Night March takes Toronto's 'Times Square'

J Hunter

On Tuesday, October 18th 2011, Occupy Toronto demonstrators took to the streets for a night march, led by a group of indigenous people who are part of the Occupy camp in St. James Park. Chants could be heard throughout its length as the march went up Yonge Street, stopping to take the intersection of Dundas and Yonge. Demonstrators used a truck to help block the intersection for a traditional Indigenous ceremony, which took place

directly between the privately-owned Dundas Square and the Eaton Centre. Respect and acknowledgement were given to the first occupants of the land (the indigenous people), who lived here before the European invasion and colonisation.

Following the ceremony, demonstrators headed back down Bay St. toward the encampment at St. James Park, where they were greeted by a large welcoming crowd. Bystanders, and those in restau-

rants and businesses along the route who were not yet part of the movement, watched with smiles and expressions of curiosity about a movement which has given voice to increasing frustration with social injustice, and has taken control of the streets. Further actions are planned to take place throughout the week, with a mass march planned for Saturday, October 22, 2011 at 2 PM.

Get videos, podcasts, stories and more (or upload your own!) on the #occupy movement across Canada at [mediacoop.ca/occupy](http://mediacoop.ca/occupy).

### A Message from the Food Team:

"We are serving over 1000 meals a day for this movement, we cook off-site in commercial kitchens and bring it in via the food fleet. We need more commercial kitchens! If you can help, write [occupytofood@gmail.com](mailto:occupytofood@gmail.com)"

99 is a project of Toronto Media Co-Op which operates as an independent outlet for citizen journalism, radical media and non-corporate coverage of the Occupy Toronto movement and related global struggles

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# Consenting to Consensus?

Owen Sheppard

Interviews with Occupy Toronto participants have revealed a wide range of opinion on the effectiveness of the movement's process for making group decisions.

According to Brandon Gray of Occupy Toronto, decisions are made through a consensus system where possible, with a 90% "supermajority" vote if consensus proves impossible.

Some participants highlighted the constructive aspects of the current meeting procedure. Danielle, visiting from Occupy Guelph, observed that GAs help people to get "a grounding in how to speak to each other effectively, how to problem solve, and how to use different models of communication like consensus." Another activist visiting Toronto from Mujeres Libres, an women's anarchist group in Spain, drew parallels between the Occupy assemblies and similar forums on the streets of her native Barcelona. Despite imperfections, she encouraged Occupy Toronto to persevere in consensus-based decision-making.

But Alex Balch noted that structures for revising and resubmitting proposals to general assemblies (GAs) have not been established, and that GAs have simply ignored some proposals - most notably, a request to stop using the 'People's Mic' so that people with autism can better participate in meetings. The People's Mic, a communication system which involves assembly members repeating statements in a chorus, was popularized in New York due to the local illegality

of amplification systems. It has since been eagerly hailed as a participatory practice, and widely adopted.

In blog posted on the Toronto Media Co-op website, one participant describes how use of the People's Mic affected her:

"The first time it happened, the chorus of voices coming from all sides (to announce a general assembly taking place in a few hours) was so loud and overwhelming that I actually found myself cowering... This felt like a form of segregation to me. I will not be returning to that park until/ unless I can participate in the meetings."

Claire Voltarine is a member of the accessibility committee, which is "made up of disabled people and their allies." Voltarine describes the People's Mic issue as complicated. "It is quite a barrier for people with... difficulties such as hearing disabilities or anything on the autism spectrum, or auditory processing challenges. But there are people with hearing impairment who say that it helps them [too]. People are definitely committed to finding different strategies, but its been really difficult with the logistical and...

ideological constraints".

Lynn, a member of Occupy's Legal Committee (who spoke to the Media Coop outside of her official capacities) noted that improvements had been made to GA procedure via a rotating facilitation system. Despite this, some have noted a disproportionate number of white, male speakers and facilitators at GAs. One female participant noted that males outnumbered females by three to one at the Sunday evening GA. A male participant at the same GA agreed that "it seemed that all of the loud and aggressive males were the ones who were picked [to speak] first."

Balch concurs with this analysis. "There have been a lot of people... who are using their sense of entitlement to make their voices heard over those of others," he said following Tuesday afternoon's GA, where the new rotating facilitation procedure was discussed. One woman related the announcement of a "silence is consent" policy, implying that participants who do not, or cannot, make known

their opposition to proposals at the GA

are nevertheless bound by the consensus of the group.

The assumption of equal ability to participate was also highlighted at a stand-up comedy event following the Tuesday afternoon GA, when an activist challenged event organizers because comedians were telling rape jokes; her comments only elicited justifications as to the comedic merit of the jokes.

"We'd be fooling ourselves if we thought that by a snap of the fingers we could create a new society here in the park," Gray observed. "We're still struggling in the old society, and that means racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia."

The approach to equal and empowering participation in Occupy Toronto's decision-making will be a challenge for the movement in the coming days.



## Briefs

20 people were arrested by police at occupy Cincinnati, while being evicted from their occupation site. Meanwhile, a press conference is scheduled for 8am on Friday in Piatt Park.

At Occupy Seattle police attempted to arrest a native man practicing his prayer on a blanket as they had said he was "Camping". The General Assembly intervened and no arrests were made.

Occupy Denver has planned an elaborate evening on the one-week anniversary of the international October 15th actions, featuring a large rally, music and festivities.

Police arrested multiple occupiers in Sacramento, California, despite an entirely peaceful encampment. Police said the arrests were due to occupiers staying in the park after curfew.

Occupy Rhode Island has stated that they need a 'Tent bailout' after 2 days of heavy rain. Like Toronto, however, they have refused to budge.

On October 20th New York City, New York protesters marched to the FERC hearing on the proposed Spectra pipeline, to show opposition to the environmental effects of the 'fracking' project, which could devastate the drinking water supply.

Protesters in Los Angeles are marching to the LA branch of the U.S Federal Reserve at 9am on October 21st, in a demonstration against the federal banking system.

Occupy Melbourne went viral yesterday, as demonstrators in a public square faced intense repression and violence from mounted riot police. 100 demonstrators were arrested.

Occupy Athens has gone largely unnoticed for the past 2 days, as a general strike in Greece gave way to widespread riots. The country has ground to a virtual halt in response to the austerity measures approved by the Greek government.

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