

Grassroots Movement Occupies Everywhere

On September 17th, 2011 the financial crisis came home. Occupy Wall Street, which originated with a callout by the Canadian counter-culture magazine Adbusters, and gained momentum after being endorsed by Anonymous, leapt onto the political scene that day and has surprised many observers with its resilience as a non-traditional protest movement with real mass support.

The Occupy Movement, as it has come to be known, is the most profound rejection of the corruption and corporate greed that is at the heart of giant financial institutions – what Glenn Greenwald referred to as ‘crony capitalism’ – to emerge in the United States since the peak of the anti-globalization movement ten years ago. After several weeks, it has become clear that, not only is the Occupy Movement not going to go away, its spread was inevitable. Class inequality is the core issue in these protests and is what drives its membership; the narrative of the class divide has been distilled to a simple condemnation of the power and the politics of the top 1%, whose shenanigans led directly to the crunch that has been felt by increasingly greater num-

bers of people, including those in the middle class. ‘Occupy’ is simply not a product of the Left, and this is reflected in the vast reach that it has gained in less than a month, and the participation individuals and organizations from the Liberal mainstream.

Additional occupations have now occurred in dozens of cities in the US, leading observers to make the obvious comparison of ‘Occupy’ to the Arab Spring. This weekend, solidarity demonstrations will occur in cities in Canada, Europe, and elsewhere. Although it remains to be seen if they are similar in scope (in Europe, this is almost certain to be the case), the impact of Occupy Wall Street has been undeniable, and it has certainly captured the imagination.

Apart from its outward impact, Occupy Wall Street has transformed the concrete heart of New York, with the emergence of many community services such as a public library, media centre, food, and a sanitation system.

Like all spontaneous, decentralized grassroots operations, ‘Occupy’ is not without its problems and has faced a range of

Justin Saunders

critiques from more established social justice activists (not the least of which is its choice of branding in a society that is based on the mass displacement, and destruction, of native peoples), and concerns about diversity within the ranks of its organizers. Yet its successes have been numerous, and there are a growing number of calls for activists to support this burgeoning movement.

Three years after the collapse of the Lehman Brothers kicked



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off a global financial collapse, the anti-austerity movement that the Left has been trying to organize may finally be emerging, from Athens to New York to Toronto to Rome.

Its potential may depend largely on what occurs around the world in the next few days.



In the Shadow of G20

by Mick Sweetman

It's Thursday evening and a general assembly of Occupy Toronto is happening in a small parkette off Bloor Street, ringed by trees whose leaves are turning golden. Half a dozen uniformed police watch from the sidewalk. Despite the overcast skies, the shadow the police cast looms large. People remember the police violence, and the largest mass arrest in Canadian

history, which occurred during the G20 summit last year.

“Their main role is to protect property. That’s why you can have a mass movement—with full public support—go and occupy something and if the owner of that, whether it be public or private land, wants them to leave it doesn’t matter if they have a democratic mandate from the majority of the population. Police follow the rule of property,” said Brandon Gray, 30, a university graduate with \$50,000 of debt who can’t find work and is participating in Occupy Toronto.

The class divide has been central focus of the Occupy movement, which emerged on Wall Street on Sept 17th, in response to the financial crisis.

“For the 99 per cent of us, the vast majority of who own no property, they do nothing for us. They are there only to police us. They protect and serve the one per cent against the 99 per cent. That’s why their goal from the start has been to destroy and disrupt these occupation movements, because (we) are a threat to the private property of the one percent.”

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

99 is a media collaboration among the Toronto Media Co-op and other independent media projects, which operates as an independent outlet for citizen journalism, radical media, and non-corporate coverage of the Occupy Toronto movement and its related global struggles. While we share some of the goals and ideals, we are in no way an official organ of Occupy Toronto, nor would we be so presumptuous as to speak for such a broad and diverse movement. We aim to report on the multiplicity of goals and motivations in Occupy Toronto as best we can, while maintaining critical distance as independent journalists.

99 is a project of toronto.mediacoop.ca

Preparing to Occupy

Mairin Piccinin with files from Eli Horwatt

On Oct 15th Occupy Toronto will kick off its occupation of the city's financial district. Are they prepared? That's the question many have been asking since the group's first general assembly meeting on Oct 7th demonstrated the challenge of turning an idealistic vision into coherent action.

Drawing 250 people to Berczy Park, the meeting highlighted wide-ranging political views, first-timers as well as seasoned activists, united by frustration with growing inequality, austerity, corporate cronyism, and lack of control over their world.

"What are people waking up to? We are waking up to a world where all young people and working class

people have no future," said Fight-back member Farshad Azadian, to applause from the gathered assembly. "The conditions for our people are getting worse and worse, while bankers and industrialists are making huge amounts of profit and getting government hands outs, tax breaks, and bail-outs. What we are saying is we're not having it."

The group chose to forgo creating a concrete list of demands and grievances. As one woman told the crowd, the success of the Occupy movement can be attributed in part to not being restricted by concrete demands or specific ideologies. She said, "People who are not already part of the left infrastructure have felt ownership of what is going on and have been a part of it. We cannot try to control each other because then everyone leaves."

A small group of facilitators had taken on the majority of the movement's responsibilities, maintaining the Occupy Toronto website, planning for the upcoming protest, and organizing meetings. But they insist they do not actually lead the

group, and seemed committed to adopting the non-hierarchical system of direct democracy—known as people's assemblies—used by their Occupy Wall St counterparts. According to takethesquare.net, a people's assembly is "a participatory decision-making body which works towards consensus. The Assembly looks for the best arguments to take a decision that reflects every opinion—not positions at odds with each other as what happens when votes are taken."

While many appeared to support using the people's assembly process in principle, participants were unable to reach unanimous agreement on how that assembly would make decisions. This left many feeling that the process had been forced on them by facilitators.

Undiscouraged by these hurdles, many participants remained positive, saying it is natural for a people's assembly to be a little chaotic and messy in the beginning. "It's taking the first step, you've got to start somewhere," said one participant, who asked to be identified

only as a Jane and Finch resident, "In society in general, people don't get their voices heard, they don't get to play a role in making choices that affect them. This is a chance to do the opposite, to be truly democratic." But this stalemate was soon rectified at the second General Assembly on October 13th, which took place on the front lawn of OISE, where at the close of the meeting, participants agreed to strive for consensus on all major issues except for those demanding immediate attention. In these cases, it was agreed upon that a 90% majority could determine how best to move forward.

Fighting Ford with People Power

by Megan Kinch

Several thousand people gathered in front of City Hall on September 26th to support "The Rally for Toronto" against Rob Ford's proposed cuts to public services. Ford had already temporarily backed down and delayed a vote on cuts, as some city councillors



previously supportive of him balked at the unpopular plan, which includes cutting day care, firefighters, and public health.

Kamilla Pietrzyk from the Greater Toronto Workers Assembly said, "We came out in force to say 'No' to Ford's cuts – to 'stop the crazy train,' as the colorful transit union signs proclaimed." There was significant union presence, including TTC workers, United Steelworkers, teachers' unions and CUPE, as well as many community groups.

In a creative action the week leading up to the major protest, parents and children set up an affordable day-care area in a hallway at City Hall, where children entered Council chambers and fed healthy snacks to city councillors, who agreed to 'pinky swear' they would not cut childcare. The next day, a die-in at Nathan Phillips square protested Ford's proposed cuts to public health,

including programs designed to prevent the spread of HIV and to support those living with the virus.

Priorities for the actions were agreed upon during a People's Assembly in Dufferin Grove Park, where 900 people put together the "Toronto Declaration." The document states: "All public services are vital to communities. We reject the attempts to divide and conquer by pitting community groups against each other in a



battle for funding," and goes on to demand that services not be cut, that user fees not be implemented and that attacks on the poor, immigrant communities, marginalized groups, and labour unions be halted.

Gunjan Chopra told the Media Co-op that when she does community organizing "It seems almost everyone I talk to already has a sense that Ford is intent on destroying our communities. The momentum is definitely building."

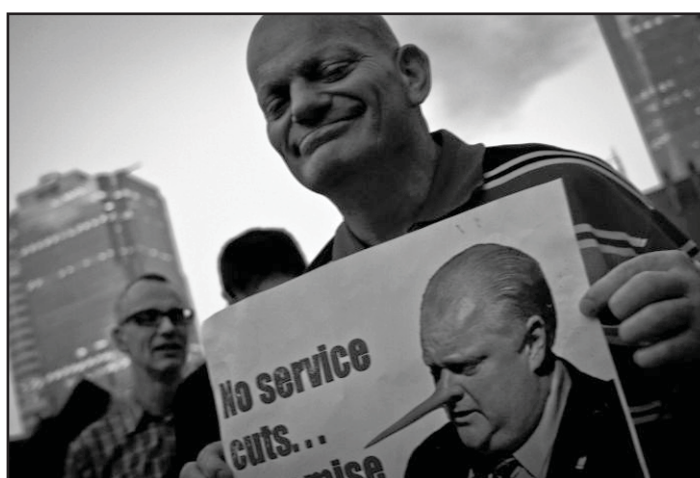


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p.1: David Shankbone; p.2 Mike Barber

Tweeting the Occupation

[simmelian](#) tonight we'll be busy baking #OccuPies to share at #occupyns tomorrow, you know, because #sharingisgood #ows #occupycanada

[Samatar25](#) RT @ [Insurghunt](#): A person making \$45K a year pays a higher tax rate than a multi-billion dollar corporation. "@nowtoronto Why #OccupyBayStreet" [now.uz/qg4YA9](#)

[hologramrainbow](#) for me, #occupymontreal is about human and language rights, affordable education, sustainability, community-building and communication.

[luclefebvre](#) RT @ [PacoLebel](#): Si les braves d' #Occupymontreal réussissent à s'implanter... dans notre climat? Hostie ils seront le Chuck Norris des mouvements Occupy!

[POCworkinggroup](#): All day, all week #decolonize Wall Street: Dispatches from Indigenous Peoples' day at #OWS [bit.ly/o3uiQC](#) #poccupy

[octopuiwallst](#) We need to fight Wall Street with all our carp and sole. #ows #occupy