

The First 48 Hours

Alex Balch

On Saturday October 15th, the people of Toronto joined with inhabitants of 950 other cities across the world in initiating an international "Day of Global Change." After converging outside the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX) at King and Bay, an estimated 3000 people marched east to St James Park to kick off Occupy Toronto, a movement based on Occupy Wall Street, now entering its fourth week.

The occupiers spent several weeks carrying out intense organizing and outreach through social media and public general assemblies. They moved quickly to secure the park and begin to establish infrastructure. Tents were immediately erected, and people spontaneously set to work establishing physical locations for several pre-established coordinating committees. These efforts were granted a huge boost when generous donations from organized Labour—including porta-potties, sanitation stations, generators and several huge tents—began pouring in that afternoon.

The Occupy Toronto movement is centred around its twice-daily

General Assemblies, experiments in direct democracy run on a loose consensus model inherited from the "People's Forums" of the international climate justice movement, and further popularized by Occupy Wall Street. At the first General Assembly, the volunteer facilitators spent a great deal of time outlining the hand-signals associated with this form of group consensus, and outlined the proposed 90% super-majority required should full consensus prove impossible.

By nightfall of the first day the entire south-east corner of the park was covered by a veritable tent city as hundreds of activists braved the cold autumn weather to camp out overnight.

The second day of the occupation began with various committee meetings, followed by the morning general assembly—where a decision was made to march on the heart of Toronto's commercial district, Dundas Square. This march saw several hundred people join, including dozens of enthusiastic onlookers and would-be shoppers. After a short symbolic occupation of the square, activists marched back to the park, their chants of

"**You are the 99%**" echoing through the neighbourhood's concrete corridors.

Despite initial fears of a night-time raid, sources within the Legal committee say that the police have told them they have no plans to raid the encampment, stating that as long as things remain peaceful there'll be no need for force or fines. While much of the park is public property, a municipal by-law makes public assembly on the grounds between midnight and 5am an offense punishable by a \$105 fine.



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Occupy Toronto marches in the financial district

Flight attendants doubt Federal government willing to change

Brian Robinson

CUPE flight attendants are helping occupy Toronto, but some doubt the Harper government will correct the inequities provoking worldwide unrest against the "1%."

"Unfortunately, everyone has their own agenda," said Shannon Leigh Jones, a member of CUPE 4092, the Toronto local of the Air Canada flight attendants' union. "Could they [address the problems]? Absolutely. Whether they'll be willing...is something different. It's every man for himself, really."

A lively group of flight attendants joined the Occupation at the north end of St. James Park early Saturday. Why help occupy? "I'm here to support the people, the 99 per cent that are finally coming together because they're not going to take it any more," said Sheri Cameron. "People who used to be able to take care of their families, put food on the table, a roof overhead, send their children to school, can't do that any more. It's not right."

They're in their own struggle right now, of course, trying to fight off Air Canada demands for two-tier

wage systems and pension plans for new hires. Air Canada wants these things, apparently, so they can start a discount airline to compete against, amongst others, Air Canada.

Canadian working people have been subjected to a torrent of demands for two-tier working conditions. Some unions have given in to them, setting themselves up for divisive future disputes between the younger and older sections of workers (especially as younger workers with sub-standard rights come to outnumber the older).

Many consider these demands to be an integral element of the latest attack on the young, further codding the 1% against the needs of the 99.

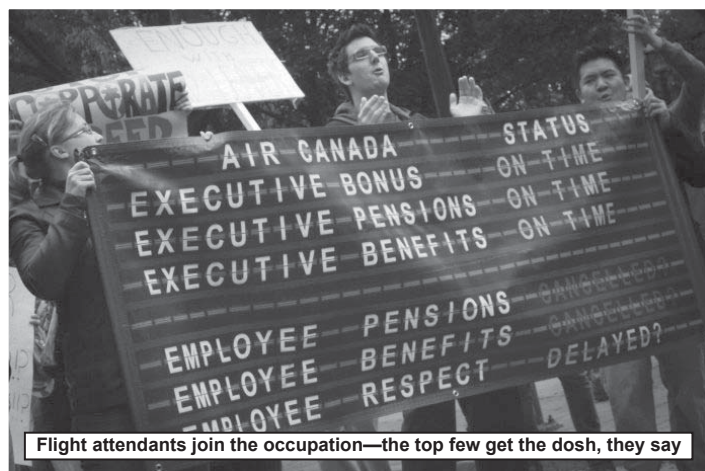
"Our struggle is a struggle for the entire middle class," said Michel Cournoyer, a Vice President of the Toronto local. "We may be the first group they're coming at, but eventually it will be the teachers, the fire fighters, the police officers, it will be everybody."

Cournoyer said there's no reason for any of this. "We need [instead] to create jobs for the people who don't have jobs. We have all the resources, we have 20 per cent of the fresh water, we have the minerals, we have the trees. There's no reason we can't be setting an example [in creating jobs]."

"It's bigger than just us," said Jones. "It's not about just us."

"We care about the younger people," said Filomena Pitoni, a 4092 member. "We have children. We want them to live in a fair society, we don't like the way our society is moving. I will **always** support the 99 per cent."

Cournoyer called on 99 percenters to do more than rally to make change. "You have to vote. It's the vote that counts, and that's where the 99 per cent will come together to create more jobs."



Flight attendants join the occupation—the top few get the dosh, they say

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

Food For Change A Demonstration Marches on its Stomach

Megan Kinch

Occupy Toronto's Food Team is a major success story.

It started from a sign-up list at last week's general assembly, and now feeds 1,000 meals a day to hungry activists and some locals from a white tent by St. James Cathedral.

Colleen was serving out food, sorting out the compost, and fielding questions from journalists. "There's been a constant flow of food in and out of there," she said. "The supply from the community, individuals, even corporations has been amazing. I don't think that 10 minutes have gone by without a donation of some kind coming in here." Anthony agreed. "We've had all kinds of donations from people dropping off large amounts of food to little old ladies with ten homemade cookies." Antonin is another "foodie" who was taken aback by the amount of public support. "I've been doing activism stuff for a few years, not in a major way but in a minor way," he said. "But I've never seen this level of support for something. It's like everybody has been waiting for something like this and people from

all places, all ages have been coming together under Occupy Toronto. I can tell you, if the donations are any indication, all of Toronto supports us."

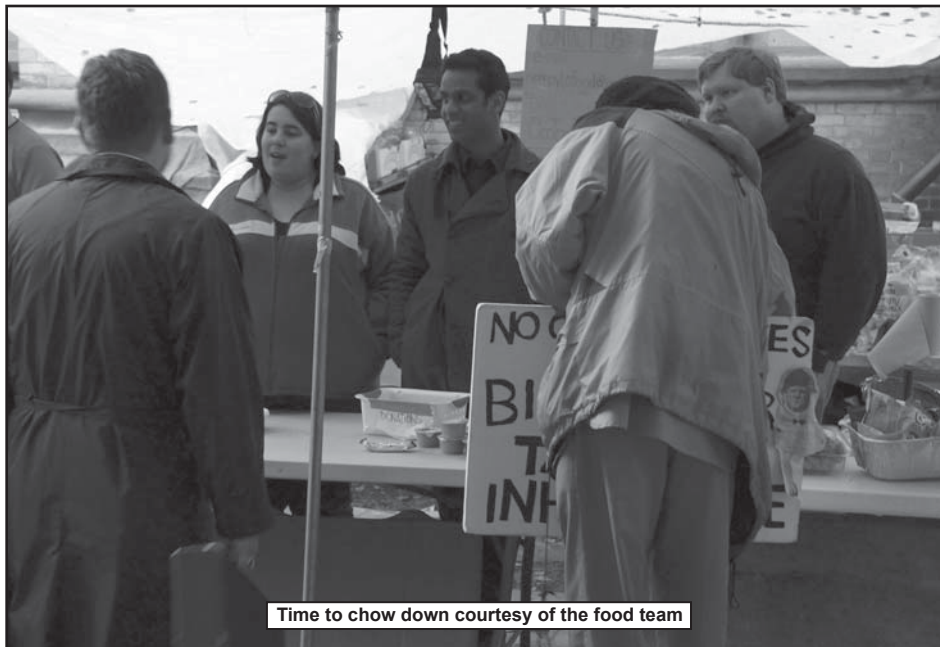
In addition to food being dropped off, they have a fleet of four vehicles to pick up donations and supplies. Some having worked hard from early morning, at 11pm team members were still serving filling vegan soup with potatoes. Vegetarian or vegan food is the order of the day, both because it's easier not to handle meat and because many protesters are vegan.

Much of the food is cooked off-site in commercial kitchens who have

donated the use of their space to the occupy movement. Three commercial chefs are also cooking. Some food team members have experience cooking for large groups of activists, such as Amanda Gabrielle, who has been doing food activism for a few years now at OCAD U and Food Not Bombs, feeding thousands of people at a Rainbow Gathering. For others it's brand new: Anthony is utilizing organizational skills that he gained through running his own business. Colleen used to work at Loblaws. I asked her how volunteering for the food team was different from working there:

"We don't even have a schedule, but there's always someone here. A lot of people talk about how people need money to motivate them to work, but I say that's bullshit. We had people cleaning dishes for hours and hours here. If people do things for love then you get way more out of it. At Loblaws my motivation was my paycheque. But here my motivation is the human race."

A Message from the Food Team: "We just cooked 350 lbs of raw material for the movement in off-site commercial kitchens. If we get more places to cook we can keep this going forever. The Food team needs commercial kitchens! If you can help, write occupytofood@gmail.com."



Time to chow down courtesy of the food team

What Do We Demand? Most Pressing Issues from Occupy Toronto

Eli Horwatt and Salah Hassanpour

After a weeklong blackout, mainstream coverage of Occupy Wall Street began with the resounding conclusion that no coherent message could be discerned from the sea of signs, slogans, and banners in Zuccotti Park. CBC's Kevin O'Leary declared, "It looks pretty nothing so far... just a few guys, guitars, nobody knows what they want, they can't even name the names of the firms they're protesting against." O'Leary's impressions were typical.

Not until David Maris's piece for Forbes Magazine, "Some Say Occupy Wall Street Protesters Aimless; Facts Say Otherwise" (Oct 17, 2011), did the mainstream media

progressive taxes to combat this trend, while others argued for more radical methods of democratizing the economy—a complete restructuring of society.

2) Corporate influence on public policy and environmental regulation: These three issues were closely tied together, with over 2/3rds discussing either the financial sector's support of the tar sands and mining and/or the threat of unchecked environmental exploitation. The role of corporations in dictating government policy on the environment and the failure of self-regulation were common topics, with many urging a political overhaul to limit the influence of private capital in the political process.

3) Accessible and affordable education: Natalie, an educator and organic farmer, argued that "education is the keystone to a functional society," and if we were to see any progressive change in Canada, "we need to treat it that way." A disproportionate number of protesters were either educators or students, denouncing the steady rise in tuition fees of the last decade and the parallel drop in public money for education. Students described a potentially desperate future: "I won't be able to start my life until I pay off all this debt," lamented a third-year Laurentian student, "and I'm worried I won't even be able to find a job." Demands went from moderate public support, to all-out debt forgiveness for students.

4) Budget cuts and the reduction of social programs: While many focussed on global and national economic issues, around 1/3 of respondents discussed Rob Ford's budget cuts and local austerity measures, especially given the city will have a \$140 million surplus this year.

With the Occupy Toronto movement devising strategies, goals, and potentially a list of demands, Luke Melchiorre, a PhD student at University of Toronto, suggested protesters take a page from the American civil rights and global anti-colonial movements, whose success "was based on wide-spread consensus on simple goals" which could win public support.



Three women express empowerment gained from their first protest

go beyond such cursory accounts. Conducting a survey of just over 5% of the Zuccotti Park occupants, Maris's article directly refuted the corporate media's. Claiming that most mainstream descriptions of the movement are untrue, Maris concluded the protesters, "knowingly or not, are fairly unified by a few basic beliefs," including raising higher taxes on the rich, regulating CEO pay (possibly by limiting it to 20 or 30 times that of the lowest paid employee), placing caps on healthcare insurance, controlling drug prices, and forgiving student debt.

In the spirit of Maris's poll, 99 asked Occupy Toronto participants in St James Park what motivates them in an effort to discover their most urgent demands. Speaking to 30 individuals from a broad ideological spectrum, it was clear that protesters have both common concerns and demands. Here are some:

1) Income inequality and unequal distribution of wealth: Nearly everyone highlighted the growing gap between rich and poor, many citing a recent study by the Conference Board of Canada showing income inequality in Canada rising faster than in the US. Most demanded more



Group hug!

Photo credits: Mike Barber, except for food team: Liberation Cooperative Organization in Toronto (LCO-TOR)

Briefs

Despite 141 arrests in Boston, at least 175 in Chicago, two of the more well-attended Occupations in the US remain entrenched, undeterred. Occupiers in Seattle, Denver, Phoenix, Tucson evicted, detained, and/or arrested.

Breakaway actions in Rome lead to damage to private property, direct action against police (who in turn use crowd-dispersal tactics), disruption of *main* protest, which attracts tens of thousands of people.

Uniformed Cleveland police officers donate clothing, supplies to occupiers.

Occupy Wall Street protesters rally in Times Square Saturday. Attempts underway to expand camping to other parks—if successful first major expansion of Occupation within a metropolitan area.

Hong Kong saw 500 protesters descend on the HK Stock Exchange, 300 occupying plaza front of HSBC HQ.

Attempts to occupy Seoul Plaza in Korea unsuccessful due to riot police blockade. Despite inclement weather, vigil held instead. Organizers planning another occupation attempt.

Tokyo, two separate rallies on Saturday, more well-attended being the anti-nuclear power protest at Tokyo Electric Power Co (owner of Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plants).

Thousands of protesters descend on St Paul's Cathedral in London, England. Crowd addressed by Wikileaks founder Julian Assange. March towards London Stock Exchange blocked by police barricades.

Likely largest gathering in world, in Madrid, up to half-million people gather in Puerta del Sol. Up to quarter-million in Barcelona.

Water cannons used by police in Santiago de Chile. Country undergoing persistent series of protests and rallies, centring on student-led demands for drastic education reform, indigenous land rights, momentum likely explaining turnout of 100,000.