

Canada: Occupy Wall Street movement hits twenty cities

A WSWS reporting team
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Thousands of youth, workers, professionals and retirees marched in “Occupy Canada” demonstrations held in 20 cities and towns across the country on Saturday. Targeting the financial or governmental centers in cities like Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, Halifax, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Regina, protestors set up tent villages in downtown public spaces and vowed to continue their action indefinitely. On Sunday, occupiers of St. James Park in Toronto’s financial district voted to march on the stock exchange Monday morning to express their outrage over the burgeoning social inequality in Canada. Similar actions are being planned from coast to coast over the coming days and weeks.

The spread of the Occupy Wall Street protests internationally has undeniable political significance. The movement that is developing is, in its essence, anti-capitalist. The protests are animated by aspirations for social equality. Their banner slogan, “We are the 99 percent,” is imbued with working class hostility to the monopolization of society’s wealth by a tiny financial and corporate elite—the “one percent”—and its domination over political life. They are giving voice to the opposition to mass unemployment, the slashing of wages and conditions, soaring education and health costs, environmental degradation and war.

The critical issue now is to make conscious the impulses that have given rise to the Occupy movement. The fight that faces the working class and oppressed will require a worked-out political perspective of revolutionary social change on an international scale. It is essential that a thorough discussion take place on the questions of political program, strategy and tactics.

Already in Canada, political representatives of “the 1%” have stepped in to channel the movement back into safe political channels. Conservative Party Finance

Minister Jim Flaherty who presided over the \$75 billion bailout of the Canadian banks in 2008 and is now preparing massive cuts to every aspect of what remains of the social safety net in the country, voiced his “understanding” for the concerns of the protestors currently occupying Wall Street in New York – although he added, things were not so bad in Canada. Bob Rae, interim leader of the federal big business Liberal Party attended St. James Park in Toronto Saturday to voice his “support” for the protestors. Rae’s cynical foray into the “99%,” however, was met with cries of “Shame” and “Fraud” from the assembled crowd. In Regina, election campaign teams for the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Greens glad-handed amongst the throng.

At demonstrations in Vancouver, Regina, Toronto, Kingston and Montreal supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed thousands of leaflets calling on workers and youth to organize around an international socialist program and reject the political trap being prepared by all those organizations—the NDP, Greens and trade unions amongst them—who have historically sought to herd nascent social movements back into the safe confines of the capitalist system.

Reporters from the WSWS spoke with many protestors across the country who are angered by the tremendous growth of social inequality in Canada and their own economic insecurity.

Wayne Martin, a Vancouver worker with the British Columbia provincial government and a part-time student spoke with our reporter. Wayne was carrying a sign that read “We Are Not Your Slaves. It’s Time for a Revolution”.

“I’m here today because I have a mother with Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease. She’s living in

an assisted retirement home and she's barely surviving. As a former middle-class person I find it impossible. The banks and the pharmacies and the big corporations seem to be making all the money... I'm carrying this sign today because I think we need a revolution. The power has to go back to the people. It's us that have the power. Every generation has their time and that time for us is now. We can't just let this die.

"I don't think much of our politicians or the unions. I'm part of two unions. We have big corporate people in the leadership. I don't believe in unions anymore. We haven't had a raise in almost ten years. They tell us there's no money. This is the union leaders. I don't think I'll ever retire. But all I need is a place to live, food on the table and enough to feed my children. That's impossible now."

Aiden Mahon, a Vancouver high school student, said, "I've been following the movement since it started in Zuccotti Park on Wall Street a few weeks ago. I find it hugely inspiring. I think this is the thinking man's revolution that my generation has been waiting for to stand up and be heard. There's such a wide disparity between the corporations and the population in North America. Here you have one percent of the population owning forty percent of the wealth. Putting profit before people is the wrong way for things to be run. There are so many issues being raised today, too many to list really and that says there are an awful lot of things wrong with the system."

Colin, a retired worker at the Vancouver rally, said, "The financial system is now an arena for gambling. Banks are basically gambling houses. They gamble with our money; the government finances their losses out of our pockets and they walk away with the profits. Our governments have never been independent. They've always been subject to corporate influence but today it's greater than it ever has been. There's no democracy in Canada. It's just a word that the government and the media use. Democracy comes directly from the people. If you talk to the politicians or the unions, well they are happy with the current power structure. The union leaders today put themselves first, not the working man."

In Regina, Saskatchewan, Lane, a call centre worker, said he paid seventy-five percent of his paycheck just to cover rent. He expressed his solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street protestors and the American working class.

"I think everybody needs to vocalize as much as they can about the state of our economy. The North American economy is the Canadian economy; it's not just American. We have so much that we trade and that we have in common. We want to show our solidarity and make people here realize that we do have a passionate feeling about what's going on in the United States."

In Montreal, Hugo, a student, explained why he came to the demonstration in the financial district. "We are here today because we do not accept that a tiny portion of the population gets all that money while there is nothing for us. I also think that a very important question is to have a more ecological approach. We have to find a way to get the media to circulate our message. I am looking to join an organization to do something to change things. I will look at your perspective."

In Toronto, a financial analyst spoke to the WSWs on his way to a weekend shift at one of the banks. "I'm sick to death of what is happening. I see it every day in the office. They're selling these 'investment vehicles'—loser stocks, suspect bonds—and they know they're just a bunch of trash. They just don't care about you. They don't care about you at all. It sickens me."

Sivanantham, a restaurant worker originally from Sri Lanka, said, "I came away from a civil war and terrible poverty. My own brother was killed by the army. I thought that it would be so much better for me here. But I live in the St. Jamestown housing complex with the cockroaches and the broken elevators. There are six of us in a one-bedroom apartment. It is lucky we have different shifts to sleep. I work in the kitchen of an expensive restaurant but I cannot even buy a meal there because of my low pay. So I find this manifestation curious. People are speaking about many things. About the pollution and the bad transport and Mayor Ford. But they should be speaking about one thing only: about how to take everything from this 1%."



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