

A letter on Occupy Toronto

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A supporter sent the WSWS the following on-the-spot report from demonstrations in Toronto. We encourage our readers to submit reports from their areas, and to download and widely distribute WSWS statements on the protests.

Mingling with the crowd on the first day of Occupy Toronto is a contradictory experience. Two young documentary filmmakers from Queens University cheerfully confess themselves baffled: "Everybody here seems to have their own issues. Everybody we've talked to has had a different thing to tell us."

The occupiers are mainly young but every age group is represented. They are not really a crowd. They are hundreds of small clumps of people dotted around a shared landscape. Each clump has its own cause, its own opinion—some clearly defined, some almost defiantly vague. The mood is upbeat but restrained, everyone is being considerate and polite. There is to be a wedding in nearby St. James Cathedral this afternoon and word is being passed to be careful not to spoil the happy couple's special day. The small squad of bicycle cops is going to have a stress-free afternoon.

Talking to people, three themes emerge. First of all, the present economic system is grossly unjust, and the lives of the majority of people (the 99 percent) are getting worse and worse, while a tiny minority (the 1 percent) is enriching itself at the expense of everybody else. Secondly, the established political parties and organizations are irrelevant, hardly worth mentioning. And thirdly, there is a mystical faith that by simply coming together and talking to each other, change can be brought about.

Danielle, who is a service worker in the retail industry, speaks for the broad consensus when she says: "It's about time people started standing up to the large corporations. I just feel like the economy could be spread a little more evenly. It's nice to see people get together and unite on

various different issues but it all still means the same thing."

Theodora feels that Occupy Toronto is the culmination of a long process: "What's been happening is that for several years a lot of people have been feeling a sense of injustice and infringement on personal rights, whatever their working background may have been. And they weren't able to articulate it, they just went through the motions of their life trying to survive, trying to think whether they could or could not plan ahead and have a sun-shiny future. Unfortunately more and more clouds appeared on their horizon."

For a while, Theodora was drawn to the Zeitgeist Movement, a utopian group which advocates the abolition of money and calls for social decisions to be made using advanced artificial intelligence techniques. She was not, however, convinced by the solutions they proposed. "What's important is that we're starting the conversation about the unequal distribution of wealth; we're tired of being emotionally beaten down as we work ourselves silly ... we need to topple the 1 percent somehow and there's only one way to do it and that's being on board with each other."

There is no shortage of solutions being proposed. John from Midland, Ontario, wants the power of the banks to create interest-bearing fiat currency to be curbed and the nation's finances to be rationally controlled for the benefit of society at large.

Andrew from the public transit advocacy group Transport Action thinks that "With so many people out of work I would love to see a high-speed rail corridor put in place between Chicago and Quebec City. We'd be getting people back to work and improving our environment at the same time." He believes that the wealthy can be part of the solution: "I'd like the 1 percent to take heed of Warren Buffett's advice ... the top 1 percent should pay just a little bit more to eliminate our deficit problem and help everyone else in society."

Sheri from Toronto was reading a blog yesterday that said, "It's time to start taxing the richer people 75 percent

more so we can balance it all out.” Does she think that might happen? “I think that a lot of rich people are starting to recognize that ‘Yes, I’ve got way more than I need and I don’t mind sharing.’”

Nobody mentions the established political parties except to disparage them: “Right and left is the paradigm they keep giving us for our choices but I always worry that the big Fortune 500 companies are funding both sides. They seem to find a way, whether you elect a left government or a right government, to move their agenda forward.” The speaker points out that even as Canada participated in the imperialist assault on Libya “... we had an election going on, and none of them even mentioned it. It seems to be OK to murder Muslims and brown-skinned people as long as they’re on top of oil and as long as it profits the Fortune 500 companies.”

A group from Environmental Justice Toronto is camping out for the duration. Dave is exhausted from lack of sleep but the urgency of his message pushes him to keep talking: “I was born and raised in Walkerton, lived there during the water crisis [Note: 7 people died in 2000 and thousands became ill from drinking contaminated water after the water supply was privatized] and that began my education into what privatization does for communities. I’m here because I don’t have a choice but to be here. I work with an indigenous community near Fort Chipewyan in Northern Alberta, which has been devastated by the tar sands expansion, and epidemics of cancer and changes to the land. When you go up there and see the changes and listen to the elders, it becomes not a choice. We need to change direction.”

Unlike Andrew and Sheri, Dave does not have much optimism in the likelihood of the super-rich reforming themselves: “It’s a globalized elite that are making decisions that are vocalized through undemocratic processes like the G20, where rich nations parrot what global financiers want to see done. It’s to the detriment of the globe and they are the minority.”



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