

Police evict Occupy Toronto protesters

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25 November 2011

Toronto police moved in at dawn on Wednesday to evict supporters of the international Occupy movement from their encampment at St. James Cathedral Park. Over a hundred tents were dismantled and removed. There were eleven arrests.

That same day police in Ottawa dismantled the Occupy camp in that city. The evictions were part of a concerted effort by state authorities to bring an end to the Occupy protests across Canada. Earlier in the week, police mobilized to close the Vancouver, British Columbia and Quebec City camps, whilst mayors in Montreal and Calgary pressed forward with plans for similar evictions.

Much has been made by the mainstream Canadian press of the relatively peaceful police operations, pointing for instance to the absence of riot police in the front lines of the St. James Park eviction— but ignoring the presence of mounted and other tactical units sequestered in the side streets of Toronto’s downtown core that were to be deployed in the event the eviction was contested.

If the protesters chose to temporarily retreat from their round-the-clock positioning in the park, it was in the face of a massive campaign to vilify the social movement and mobilize the forces of the state against them. Newspapers, broadcast outlets and city politicians relentlessly depicted the protesters as drug addicts, sociopaths and self-indulgent “punks.” They have dismissed outright the opposition to social inequality that informs their protest and has garnered majority support amongst the Canadian population.

After the successful police eviction, City Councilor Doug Ford, brother of right-wing Mayor Rob Ford, gloated that, “Woodstock Toronto is all over.”

However, Ford ally Councilor George Mammoliti, in a moment of unguarded candour, admitted that the elite’s real concern was that the protesters’ call for the redistribution of wealth would resonate among broad layers of the population. “I think we should have (evicted) after a couple of days,” said Mammoliti, “after we realized that people were turning it into a Sherwood Forest (where) we have Robin Hoods and makeshift Jesuses walking around”.

The *Globe and Mail*, Canada’s national newspaper and the traditional mouthpiece of the Bay Street financiers, devoted no less than three lead editorials in the five days preceding Wednesday’s eviction to demand police action against the demonstrators and argue that they had “exhausted” their rights to free speech and assembly. Owned by one of the wealthiest families in the world, the *Globe* has promoted a social policy counter-revolution that has done untold violence to countless working families in Canada and internationally.

Particularly odious was a Tuesday editorial that virtually incited police violence against the movement. It described the occupiers as an

“immediate menace” who have “stationed themselves with bullying force in neighbourhoods and public squares.”

The threat of a police riot was certainly foremost in the minds of the youth and workers who had settled in the Toronto camp. Only eighteen months ago, police forces were mobilized to wreak havoc in Toronto during the June 2010 G20 summit.

At that time, the violence and repression carried out by the authorities in Toronto was worthy of a police state. An army of security officers, both in uniform and undercover, took over the downtown portion of Toronto, a major world city, creating conditions of martial law. Protesters were kicked, bludgeoned, tear-gassed, trampled by police horses and shot at with rubber and plastic bullets.

Even prior to the beginning of the anti-G20 demonstrations, homes were raided in the middle of the night and without warrants being shown in a series of “preventative arrests.” Journalists covering these unprecedented events were arrested and assaulted. The 1,200 citizens who were apprehended were placed in primitive detention cages, strip searched, and denied legal counsel.

Toronto politicians were certainly cognizant of the lingering shock amongst broad swathes of the population stemming from the G20 attacks. Deputy Mayor Doug Holyday stated the city administration wanted to evict the protesters earlier, but the timing was not good. “There would have been a lot of arrests, I think there would have probably been a lot of injuries, and I don’t think we wanted the bad publicity,” said Holyday.

Instead, the ground had to be properly prepared. Along with the vicious press campaign, city officials in Toronto (and elsewhere) sought the imprimatur of the courts to legitimize their attack on the constitutional right to protest. Superior Courts across the country weighed in against the Occupy encampments, taking dubious and outright concocted charges of health and safety risks and “violent activity” as good coin.

In a landmark ruling, former Toronto corporate lawyer Justice David Brown distinguished himself with the opinion that the protection to dissent enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms must be over-ridden by virtually every other right. If the parks are occupied, he asked, “Where do I ride my bike?”

Central to the preparation for the dismantling of the camps has been the strong support provided by so-called “lefts.” In Vancouver, it was the New Democratic Party-affiliated Mayor Gregor Robinson who initiated eviction proceedings.

The *Globe and Mail*, in their Wednesday editorial, noted independent “progressive” Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi’s moves to end the occupation in his city. “If you’ve lost (Nenshi), you’ve lost the country,” they crowed. In Toronto, “progressive” Councilor Adam Vaughan praised

the rightwing mayor stating that Ford deserved a lot of credit for the “peaceful” eviction—“for [exhibiting] something which he doesn’t show a lot of, which is restraint.”

Vaughan’s praise of Ford is all the more reprehensible given that it is well known that his administration is preparing to lock out city workers early in the new year and hire strikebreakers. In respect to these preparations for a major confrontation with the working class, the shutting down of the Occupy protest was viewed by the Toronto establishment as important, so as both to remove a potentially radical element and to send a message that occupations and other acts of civil disobedience won’t be tolerated.

The refusal of Toronto’s “left” councilors to defend the occupiers should come as no surprise. In the wake of the G20 police riot, the council, which at the time held a “left” majority under the regime of NDP-aligned Mayor David Miller, voted unanimously to commend the police for their service during the 2010 demonstrations.

No less treacherous has been the posturing of the trade union bureaucracy. The unions, long transformed into mere appendages of the corporations within the working class, have accepted and presided over the implementation of concession contract after concession contract across the country. If they have paid lip service to the Occupy movement it is only to steer it into the safe channels of support for the New Democratic Party.

On the day of the police eviction in Toronto, the Ontario Federation of Labour Annual Convention was in session for a four-day meeting at the posh Sheraton Centre Hotel—a site only a few blocks from the St. James encampment. Two thousand union officials were in attendance fully aware of the impending eviction threat. In fact, they had already sent a delegation to reclaim the tents that had been earlier donated.

As police moved against the encampment on Wednesday morning, the assembled officialdom continued their deliberations. At the lunch hour, in order to maintain a fig leaf of credibility, a few score of officials marched to the police lines and left several observers to “monitor” the eviction proceedings. Such was the “strength” and “commitment” of the official labour movement.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with a number of people at St. James Park during the eviction.

Ryan has been with the occupation since the first day. Asked what his plans were now that they were being evicted, he replied, “There are a few things in the works. This can’t die. You think if they kick us out of the park that’s the end of it? Absolutely not—we’re here to change the world. So is the world changed yet? No. And even after the world changes, I’m going to put my heart and soul into everything I do—even when things are good—to keep them good.”

Wanda, a community worker studying at nearby George Brown College was observing the eviction at the park and was concerned about what would happen to the occupiers. “I really hope no one gets hurt, that’s all. I know they’re fighting about homelessness and things like that. Most of the people that are protesting right now are homeless people, so maybe they’re just fed up. I’m just worried about what the future holds right now.”

Joshua works across the street from the park and said that most of the people he worked with were in support of the Occupy movement. “I think

now it’s getting a little crazy with all the police coming in. It’s no longer peaceful with the police presence here, which is unfortunate. This seems a little over the top. But I definitely support the movement and the 99 percent, and the fact that we as a people need to stand up for what’s going on. Where I work there’s a lot of wealthy, wealthy people that just don’t understand the movement whatsoever and don’t want this going on any more. I definitely hope that something can be done, but I don’t know what we can do to make such a large change.”

The suppression of the Occupy movement reveals two basic truths. The first is that democratic rights are incompatible with a system in which society’s wealth is monopolized by the richest one percent. The demands of the financial elite—for austerity, the destruction of social programs, and war—cannot be realized through democratic means. The opposition of the overwhelming majority can be overcome only through the ever-greater resort to authoritarian methods.

The second is that the state—the politicians, the police and the courts—is not a neutral body. It is a *capitalist* state, which functions to defend the property and political rule of the corporate and financial oligarchy.

The impact of the worsening social conditions is driving ever-larger sections of workers and young people into struggle. It must be understood that this is a political struggle involving irreconcilably opposed social and class interests. If social needs are to take precedence over the profit interests of the banks and corporations, a fundamental and revolutionary transformation is needed. The working class—the vast majority of the population—must take the reins of political power in its own hands.

A redistribution of wealth from the top to the bottom is urgently needed. This requires replacing capitalism with socialism so that society’s wealth is put at the disposal of the majority—that is, the working people who produce the wealth.

The key issue confronting the Occupy movement is to turn out to the working class. This can be achieved only independently of, and in opposition to, the trade unions, with workers developing rank-and-file committees and other new forms of organization to advance their struggles. Above all, what is required is a new socialist and internationalist strategy that aims at ending the corporate-political domination of the “one percent” by abolishing the profit system internationally.



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