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DISPATCHES FROM
OCCUPY TORONTO

Issue #6. November 18, 2011

November 15: 'Eviction Day'

Justin Saunders & Megan Kinch

It was a whirlwind day for Occupy Toronto. Residents woke to the news that an eviction order had been issued for midnight. At the same time, word arrived that New York's Occupy Wall Street, the heart of the Occupy Movement, was being evicted from Zuccotti park. A morning march in solidarity with protesters in New York resulted in two arrests.

Bylaw officers soon entered the park, tagging tents and other structures with notices. Camp organizers met with clergy from St.

James Cathedral, which technically owns a portion of the land the camp is situated on, and a General Assembly convened to discuss potential responses. The camp buzzed with nervous energy as people prepared for an eviction and the possibility of police violence. A surge of support for Occupy Toronto became evident as the day wore on, with large numbers of peo-

ple streaming into St. James, and prominent support from unions and even some celebrities.

Sid Ryan, President of the Ontario Federation of Labour released an 'Open Letter to Rob Ford. "Please take this letter as formal notice that I will be personally joining the occupiers in St. James Park tonight, along with many other labour activists and community leaders, to link arms with the Occupy Movement. We are all part of the 99 percent. (We) have a long and

proud history of support for civil disobedience. It represents the finest instincts of citizens in a democracy to correct the actions of their governments... without it, there would have



been no Civil Rights, women's rights, environmental or other seminal movements that have changed the course of history."

The eviction order, signed by City Manager Joe Pennachetti, states that protesters are being evicted due to business complaints and the need to winterize the park. While media have highlighted several complaints from busi-

ness owners, the Toronto Media Co-op has reported on several business owners in the area who are supportive of or benign to the Occupy site.

Julie, a City Liaison from Occupy Toronto, said that Occupiers were more than willing to help with the process of winterizing the park. "Of course we care about the park, we live in it". She told the Media Co-op "I contacted 5 people at the Parks and Rec department. The only one I could get on the phone told me that he had been instructed not to speak with people from Occupy. I left very polite messages on Thursday the 11th and Monday the 14th with four other City workers indicating our willingness to cooperate with them, and received no reply". Lana Goldberg, another protester living at camp, says that the City has not approached Occupy Toronto regarding winterizing the park. "We would obviously be willing to work with them on doing so," she said.

Late in the day, the tide had shifted. As a result of negotiations through the church, police had promised not to follow through with a midnight raid, and a ruling on the injunction previously filed by several camp members against the eviction came down. Lawyers from Green and Chervcover successfully argued for a stay

against the eviction until a full hearing could be held to determine its legality. The injunction was granted at 5:30pm, giving the camp a temporary reprieve. The legal team are scheduled to debate the ruling in court on Friday, with a final ruling on Saturday; they are expected to argue that Charter of Rights and Freedoms, namely freedom of expression and freedom of as-

sembly, protect protestors from any action against the camp. "I think this case is about whether City bylaws trump Charter rights, which is pretty incredible if you think about it," says Dave Vasey, an occupier living at the camp who sits on a number of committees. Meanwhile, 11 City councillors have signed a letter calling on the Mayor to stop the eviction.

Some activists were unhappy with attempts to call off a planned solidarity rally, and with the injunction itself. Bruce Darden said "I think its irresponsible for anyone to ever demobilize people, to thwart community members desires or will to action....The effect (it will have) is that people will continue to look to the institutions of the 1%, that of the courts, to solve our problems instead of trying to act together and to deal with our issue in collective spaces like the park." In spite of this development, a large assembly gathered in St. James for a General Assembly, which went late into the night.

Protestors have vowed to stay and continue to fight the eviction.

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What Happens After Eviction Day?

Eli Horwatt

It's on the minds of many Toronto Occupiers right now, but few want to think about the inevitability of eviction since City Hall bylaw officers littered the park with trespassing warnings. Once dismantled, other Occupy camps have had difficulty either retaking space or setting up new camps. Rather than face the death knell of the local movement, Toronto has sought to develop contingency plans.

Occupy Toronto marshals Dick Johnson and Brandon Gray say that talks have begun on how best to respond to a raid, both immediately (i.e. how to protect individuals, save belongings and remove infrastructure) and in the long-term (as in, what happens next?). Johnson suggested that, in the case of eviction, "social networking tools will help the movement regroup" and potentially locate

a new camp to occupy. Gray mentioned that many occupiers are adamant about maintaining St. James Park as the campsite, describing how support from neighbouring St. James Cathedral would allow for the camp to locate to parts of the park owned by the church itself (though more recently, the church has said they will cooperate with police).

With some of the most developed on-site infrastruc-

ture in the North American Occupy movement, both Gray and Johnson are concerned about the potential destruction of property during a police raid, which could seriously harm the reconstruction of a future occupation. Various ideas have been floated, including the rehearsal of a rapid dismantling of tents, and setting up the non-violent defence of the most important structures.

“The Anishnabek of this territory support Occupy Toronto”

Deb O'Rourke

“The Anishnabek of this territory support Occupy Toronto,” John Fox told a crowd of hundreds who gathered on the knolls of St. James Park. This was a declaration that many had been hoping for.

Discussion around the Occupy movement has shown that to Indigenous people, occupy is an ugly word. As Mohawk/Chinese activist Jessica Yee pointed out, “THIS IS INDIGENOUS LAND. And it's been occupied for some time now.” Yee had waited awhile to see if the activists of Occupy Wall Street would mention that “New York City is Haudenosaunee Territory and home to many other first nations.” When she finally had to bring it up herself on Sept 30, she was mad.

The American Indian Movement has been on-site at Occupy TO Since Day One, to ensure the visibility of Indigenous people in the Toronto movement. It's been a struggle, for even committed lefties tend to be blind to the ongoing genocide that freed the land for our obsessions and activities.

But a number of the St. James Park campers have

been working for years on Indigenous solidarity and on issues like resource extraction, where theft and destruction of Indigenous lands is a daily reality. They've been working hard to educate their fellow campers.

It all came together as Occupy Toronto celebrated its one-month anniversary with a 3 hour Indigenous Solidarity March, which took occupiers to a number of locations including the Bay street offices of Barrick Gold and Royal Bank of Canada, the US consulate and the Ontario Legislature. Banners declared “(de)Occupy Toronto” and “Decolonize Bay St.”

Addressing the complex issues the democracy in the

park faces day after day, Tannis Neilson advised: “The heart of the struggle is in community. If the forces that act upon us are operating globally, still our resistance must be local, and embody a diversity of tactics.”



The crowd was informed that democracy itself is indigenous to this place: “The Anishnabek have a constitution and a governance mode that are truly democratic. We also have the strategies and techniques to live in harmony with the land.”

The disenfranchisement and exclusion from the economy that radicalized the Occupy campers, and the fear of violent eviction and arrest that they face is not new to Indigenous people: “We've

been on the front line resisting these oppressive techniques for over 500 years.”

The speakers emphasized unity and solidarity: “We are all Indigenous from somewhere. We are all related to the land and we are united by the land. We all have the duty to protect the land from corporate destruction.”

As people interested in the Occupy movement have found, there is a vast difference between the way European-based cultures see the land, versus the way it is seen by the traditionalists in places like Pine Ridge and Fort Chipewyan.

“The right word isn't ‘occupy,’ said a speaker. “It's to ‘reclaim’ public space. We are promoting the idea of the public good.” Marchers were told: “Our system, capitalism, is only one reality, and we don't need that reality. We need to decolonize Bay Street. We need to decolonize our minds and ourselves.”

This article has been edited from its original version which can be found at toronto.mediacoop.ca

Briefs

Hundreds of Occupy Halifax demonstrators temporarily retook Parade Square, the site of their camp, after being suddenly and violently evicted by police on Remembrance Day. There were at least 17 arrests in the eviction and subsequent reoccupation, and several people were injured. Occupiers remain uncertain about their next move, but have vowed to continue their actions.

The recent death of a woman at Occupy Vancouver was accidental, a city coroner has ruled.

The report, which said the 23 year old died of an overdose of cocaine and heroin, comes amid ongoing legal battles between the city and the camp that have gone all the way to the BC Supreme Court.

On the verge of its one month anniversary, Occupy Montreal published the first issue of its official broadsheet on the Montreal Media Coop website. The

broadsheet, called ‘99%’, has now been printed twice.

The heart of the Occupy movement was attacked in the early hours of November 15th, as Occupy Wall Street's Zucotti Park encampment was raided by the NYPD. Millionaire New York mayor Bloomberg defended the eviction, claiming that the camp was a ‘threat to public health and safety’. City workers were filmed destroying much of the camp's infrastructure; personal belongings, and the entire

contents of the peoples library, were thrown into dumpsters.

Evictions and eviction threats have now been made against a number of Occupy encampments, including Oakland, Vancouver, Portland, London, Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and New York.

In the U.S., the ‘Move your Money’ campaign, which encouraged occupy participants and supporters to transfer their money out of the financial institutions responsible for the financial crisis. Credit unions report that so far, more than \$4.5 billion in savings have been transferred from big banks.

An international day of action was called for November 17th to mark the 2 month anniversary of the Occupy movement. N17 demonstrations occurred in cities around the world, many coinciding with local anti-austerity struggles and student occupations of Universities.

Upcoming Events (at St. James Park unless otherwise noted)

Saturday

2 PM Hell NO, we WON'T GO!!! Evict Rob Ford Instead. March to City Hall
4-7 PM Occupy the Picket Line: Get on the Bus to Support Ming Pao Strikers

Sunday

2 PM- 5PM Learn about Occupy Toronto: Community Outreach and Family Day
2 PM Defending the Rights of Earth and Providing for People's Needs (Study Session by Bolivia Solidarity Network) OISE, Room 5280, University of Toronto, St. George Station

Tuesday Nov 22nd

4 PM Resist Repression: Community and rally and march against G20 Repression