



# BALACLAWA!

Unceded Coast Salish Territory

NUMBER 34

OCCUPY VANCOUVER SPECIAL

NOVEMBER 2011



## Occupatience

By Zig Zag

VANCOUVER - What is especially notable about the Occupy movement is not its decline from a mass mobilization, but rather the mass support the movement had to start with. Millions of people in North America supported it—they embraced it when it started out as “Occupy Wall Street,” clearly targeting financial capital, banks, and corporations. That so many responded is indicative of the great yearning for social change, and the understanding by so many that change is necessary.

It is no surprise that the great numbers of people who supported Occupy did not flock to join the tent cities by the tens of thousands. The situation is not yet so extreme, as was the case in Egypt, for example. The Occupy movement has been too inexperienced and naïve to appear to have any chance of success, an important factor in motivating people to join a resistance movement.

Along with the naïve political cadre who initially organized the Occupy sites, the movement was host to an exceptionally large number of wing-nuts from early on (conspiracy theorists, etc.). While some have seen potential in the movement, most radicals in Vancouver took a ‘wait-and-see’ approach, and apparently didn’t feel like joining in after what they saw.

By no means are such observations meant to undermine the efforts of those who participated in Occupy—in Vancouver they endured over a month of wet, cold weather, continual observation by city workers, harassment from police, smear and disinformation campaigns, as well as the death of Ashlie Gough. Numerous rallies and actions started from the Occupy Vancouver site that



**Top:** Vancouver’s tent city at the Art Gallery. **Middle:** General Assembly. **Inset:** Moving house to the Courthouse following the city’s injunction.

carried out direct action and which displayed a growing militancy—disrupting the flow of capital and challenging police control (despite the pro-cop elements).

The struggle against state and capital is a conflict, however, no matter how much Occupy idealists wish it could all be love and hugs that defeats the system. Conflict involves factors such as human and material resources, logistics, communications, morale, etc. Genuine mass movements have these. Those in Egypt took Tahrir Square by force and defended it with force. They physically defeated the police and suffered several hundred deaths, despite efforts by pacifists to portray it as “non-violent.” The size and scale of the uprising meant it had enormous human and material resources to draw on.

The only Occupy movement even approaching this level of conflict was the Oakland Commune, and there it climaxed with a massive one-day general strike shutting down the Port (**continued on Page 2**)

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(From Page 1) on Nov. 2, with some 20,000 - 40,000 people participating.

Oakland appears to have been unique from other Occupy cities in North America for various reasons. It had more radicals and militants participating in it from the outset, helping to organize and influence the politics of the occupation. Oakland also has a large, primarily Black ghetto, a brutal and racist police force (the police killing of Oscar Grant sparked rioting in 2009), and a strong legacy of resistance (the Black Panther Party started in Oakland). Because of the demographics of the area, more working class and people of colour were involved in Occupy Oakland, unlike virtually all others (it would appear).

As a political phenomenon the Occupy movement overall is very much a sign of the times. The economic system of capitalism is in crisis, fueling a growing cynicism and anger amongst large numbers of people, including middle-class youth (the bulk of the Occupy participants, from my observations). More and more people are questioning the capitalist system itself, with its greed, consumerism, and ongoing destruction of the environment. That there was so much initial support for Occupy shows this to be true.

Radicals should see the Occupy movement not as a media-driven, hippie-pacifist love-in, but rather as a barometer with which to gauge public sympathy for social change and, by implication, anti-capitalist resistance. Consider it a reconnaissance mission, one



that reveals a growing disconnect between the rulers and the ruled, and, therefore, a growing potential for rebellion.

*The crowd, Run on The Banks, the message. Photos by Michael, Caeli Frampton, Isaac Oommen, David P Ball, Murray Bush, Trevor Kehoe.*