

OCCUPY!

**YOUR GUIDE TO THE INTERNATIONAL OCCUPATION
MOVEMENT OF 2011**

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The ultra-rich have us by the throats and they've had us by the throats for a long, long time. While the rest of us suffer through a worldwide economic crisis, the people at the top are just getting richer. In a 2011 study, the richest 20% of the country had 85% of the privately held wealth. For the rest of us, nothing's getting better: the state is closing schools and libraries, rolling back social services, shutting down bus lines and state parks.

But an international movement has sprung up to challenge the foundations of our global system of corporatism and greed. It's a protest movement qualitatively different from any that has come before, a uniquely 21st century form. It's a movement without party politics. It's a movement inspired by the advances of communication that have allowed us to function without authority, allowing every voice to at last be weighed truly as equal. It's a movement that doesn't bring a list of demands to the powers that be but instead suggests that we can build a different society.

The wealth that it takes to get us out of this mess is right in front of us—we know because we are the ones who created it. We designed and built the cities. We fly the planes, crunch the numbers, grow the food, write the software, and do everything it takes to keep this society running. All the wealthiest do is sit there and watch their money make more money.

The wealth is right in front of us and yet they tell us there isn't enough to feed us, to educate us. They're lying. Maybe they're lying to themselves, maybe they're lying to us—it doesn't matter. They don't matter. We don't need them.

We are the 99% and we are more powerful than they'll ever be.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly (GA) model has been adopted by most of the occupations as a way to discuss and make decisions. The GA is a horizontal, leaderless, consensus-based open meeting. This is where decisions are made that affect the whole group and general discussions are held.

The GA is a gathering of people committed to making decisions based upon a collective agreement or “consensus.” There is no single leader or governing body of the GA—everyone’s voice is equal. Anyone is free to propose an idea or express an opinion as part of the GA.

Each proposal follows the same basic format—an individual shares what is being proposed, why it is being proposed, and, if there is enough agreement, how it can be carried out. The GA will express its opinion for each proposal through a series of hand gestures. If there is positive consensus for a proposal—meaning no outright opposition—then it is accepted and direct action begins. If there is not consensus, the responsible group or individual is asked to revise the proposal and submit again at the following GA until a majority consensus is achieved.

Smaller working groups, such as Media, Outreach, Food, Direct Action, etc., make it possible for things to get done a little bit smoother. The working groups figure out specifics, such as what needs to be done or how something could be done, and formulates proposals to bring back to the GA for general consensus. The working groups can also relay important information about things that everyone needs to take into consideration.

Only decisions that affect the entire group need to be brought to the GA. Not every person needs to be involved in every action for them to be successful; people should participate in things that they feel strongly about. Groups can plan and call for people to participate in smaller actions outside of the GA without the entire group agreeing to it.

CONSENSUS

Consensus is an inclusive and non-hierarchical process for group decision making. It is a method by which the input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized in order to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but paving the way for an egalitarian model of community decision making.

Consensus means that the group has come to a decision in which everyone feels their position on the matter was considered carefully and addressed as

much as possible. It doesn't mean that every single person agrees that the decision made is the only way to do things. Hopefully, everyone will think it is the best decision; this often happens because, when consensus works properly, collective intelligence does come up with better solutions than could individuals.

OUTLINE FOR MAKING DECISIONS

1. Someone brings up a topic of discussion or an idea that requires a group decision. This might take some discussion in order for the group to identify what exactly needs to be solved.
2. Discussion takes place about the problem, so the group can start working towards a proposal. The biggest mistake people make in consensus is to offer proposals too soon, before the group has had time to fully discuss the issue. (At the occupations, the majority of these discussions take place in the smaller working groups.)
3. When it is apparent that the group is beginning to go over the same ground, a proposal is made which attempts to synthesize the feelings and insights expressed by the group. The proposal should be clearly stated in very specific language. (At the occupations, the proposals are often created in the smaller working groups and brought to the General Assembly for consensus).
4. Discussion is held on the proposal, in which it is amended or modified. During this discussion period, it is important to articulate differences clearly. It is the responsibility of those who are having trouble with a proposal to put forth alternative suggestions.
5. When the proposal is understood by everyone, and there are no new changes asked for, someone (usually the facilitator) calls for a show of consensus. The proposal is reread with the included changes. The facilitator asks who agrees with the proposal. If people feel that the proposal reflects the will of the group as a whole, they signal their agreement by putting a thumbs up for everyone to see. The facilitator asks if there are any stand-asides. If someone feels that they have reservations, don't feel strongly about the decision, or don't fully agree with the proposal but doesn't have a serious objection to it passing, they indicate that they stand aside. The facilitator asks if there are any blocks. If someone feels that the proposal seriously and irreconcilably

violates the core values of the group, they show a block by making an X with their arms.

If someone has very strong objections to a specific proposal, that person should meet with the relevant working group for further discussion with the aim of coming to a common understanding.

6. After consensus is reached, the decision should be clearly restated so as to check that everyone is clear on what has been decided. Before moving away from the subject, the group should be clear who is taking on the responsibility for implementing the decision.

TYPES OF DISAGREEMENTS:

While the consensus model can be an effective way for large groups of people to be unified in action, we can't expect everyone to always agree. Below are some common ways that disagreement is resolved within consensus process:

Non-support Stand Aside: "I don't see the need for this, but I'll go along with the group."

Reservations Stand Aside: "I think this may be a mistake, but I can live with it."

Personal Conflict Stand Aside: "I personally can't do this, but I won't stop others from doing it."

Blocking: "I cannot support this or allow the group to support this. It goes against the agreed upon values of the group." Blocking consensus is something that should only be done in extreme situations. It is not just a difference of opinion or a strategic disagreement—it is a complete and absolute rejection of the group moving forward. Blocking should be used cautiously and sparingly.

Consensus does not override each individual's ability to make their own decisions. Just as we hope that everyone will respect the decisions made by the GA, the GA should also strive to respect decisions made by individuals outside of the consensus process. Alongside consensus, we can celebrate our diversity and individual strengths. The problems we are confronting are wide and multi-faceted; thus, so our resistance should be too.

ROLES IN CONSENSUS PROCESS

In large groups, it is helpful to designate roles for people to help the process move along. It is important to rotate these responsibilities for each meeting so that skills and power can be shared. Ideally, such responsibilities should belong to everyone, and not just the designated person.

FACILITATOR:

The facilitator's job is to help the group efficiently move through the agreed-upon agenda and to make room for people to have their opinions heard on the topics being discussed. Facilitators should see that speaking opportunities are evenly distributed, that quiet people get a chance to speak and people who talk too much are given a chance to listen. The facilitator should observe when the discussion seems to be nearing the point when a proposal could be made. The facilitator can then call for a proposal or offer one to the group, after more discussion if necessary, and then guide the group through the check for consensus as outlined above. Facilitators should not use their position as a platform from which to offer solutions; solutions should arise from the group, and no one should facilitate if they find they have strong opinions on a given issue. A facilitator can always hand over her or his responsibilities temporarily if s/he feels it necessary to step down. The group should not rely upon the facilitator to solve process problems, but should be ready to help with suggestions on how to proceed.

STACK-TAKER:

The role of the stack-taker is to keep stack—a list of people who would like to speak on the topic. The stack-taker can prioritize people who have not spoken yet in order to get more voices in the discussion and can cut off the stack in order to create room for proposals or if the discussion is going too long or going around in circles.

TIMEKEEPER:

The timekeeper assists the facilitator by keeping track of how long each part of the discussion has gone on. Often, each topic on the agenda will be assigned a time limit. The timekeeper lets people know when the time allotted is running out on that topic, and when the time is up. The group can always decide to add more time if it seems necessary for reaching consensus.

NOTES ON MAKING A DECISION IN A LIMITED AMOUNT OF TIME:

It is the facilitator's responsibility to quickly and succinctly articulate the problem to be discussed and to eliminate those points on which agreement has already been reached. It is the responsibility of everyone in the group to keep the discussion to a minimum if quick action is called for. If your point has already been made by someone else, don't restate it. A calm approach and a clear desire to come to an agreement quickly can help the process. Don't let anxiety overwhelm your trust in each other or your purpose in the action. Strong objections should be limited to matters of principle.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Our system of laws exists to maintain the dominance of those in power, and the police are its armed enforcers. If you doubt this for a minute, look at who are the selective targets of local laws: the homeless, the young, the poor, dissenters. Globally, look at who dies and who gets rich from our wars and other disasters.

For 250 years in this country, the government and their enforcers have consistently fought against people working for liberation: Indigenous resistance, land reformers, slave revolts, abolitionists, labor organizers & workers, free-speech advocates, women and civil rights workers, anti-war and anti-globalization protesters, and recently, animal rights and environmental activists.

As someone advocating fundamental social change, your relationship with the police is at heart adversarial. While there may be cops with hearts of gold, the job of all police is to arrest and prosecute you. As such, it is essentially never in your best interest to cooperate with the police.

Keeping yourself safe and resisting the police state comes down to these simple principles:

- 1) **Non-cooperation:** If you talk with the police, you could unintentionally hurt yourself, your friends, or others.
- 2) **Do not consent to searches:** Never give law enforcement the okay to examine your pockets, car, backpack, or home.
- 3) **Remain silent:** Say nothing except "I'm going to remain silent and I would like to see a lawyer."
- 4) **Talk to a lawyer:** Never take advice from the police, they may try to trick and mislead you.

- 5) Use trust and intuition: Work only with people you have a history of trust. Without being paranoid, trust your intuition.

RIGHTS DURING A POLICE ENCOUNTER

In a police encounter these rules will help protect your civil rights and improve your chances of driving or walking away safely. From here on out, we are talking about your legal “rights” guaranteed by law even though in our view, what you can do and what you can do *legally* are two different things. All of these rights also apply to minors and non-citizens.

Keep Private Items Out of View: This is common sense: Always keep any private items that you don’t want others to see out of sight. Legally speaking, police do not need a search warrant in order to confiscate any illegal items that are in plain view.

Stay Cool & Politely Assertive: Police are well armed and often unpredictable, so remaining cool and calm will keep you safe. Treat them with the respect you would treat a dangerous, wild animal.

Be polite and yet assertive to ensure that your rights aren’t trampled on. Some officers may come on heavy if you are not absolutely submissive, but standing up for your rights will keep you safe in the long run, in court when it really matters.

Determine If You Can Leave: You don’t have to talk to the police. As soon as an officer approaches you, ask the officer, “Am I free to go?” If you get an answer other than a definitive “No,” gather your stuff and leave without another word.

You have the right to end an encounter with a police officer unless you are being detained or arrested. Don’t waste time trying to determine your status. Test if you are free to go, and then go. If you aren’t free to go, the officer will make it perfectly clear.

Use the Magic Words: If you are detained or arrested, use the magic words:

“I’m going to remain silent. I would like to see a lawyer.”

Do not talk to police. Wait to talk to a lawyer representing you. Even casual small talk can come back to haunt you. Anything you say can, and will, be used against you.

Cops have numerous tricks to get you to talk. They can and do use fear, isolation, lies, advice, playing you against others, and even kindness to get you to cooperate. Don't be fooled. If you do for some reason say something, you should repeat the magic words and resume silence.

Keep in mind the credo: If no one talks, everyone walks. Regardless of what you are told by an investigating officer, you have nothing to gain by talking to the police... and everything to lose.

Refuse to Consent to Searches: Officers seeking evidence will often try to get you to allow them to search your belongings, your car, or your home. Refuse to consent to a search with the phrase:

"I do not consent to a search."

Usually, a search request will come in the form of an ambiguous statement, such as, "I'm going to ask you to empty your pockets." Answer such requests unambiguously. Repeat as many times as necessary.

You are under no obligation to allow a search. The only reason an officer asks your permission is because he doesn't have enough evidence to search without your consent. Police officers are not required to inform you of your rights before asking you to consent to a search. If the officer searches you in spite of your objection, do not resist. Your attorney can argue that any evidence found during the search was discovered through an illegal search and should be thrown out of court.

Do Not Try to Bargain: Police officers will often tell you that your cooperation will make things easier for you, and many people hope to be let off easy if they are honest and direct with the police. The only thing it makes easier is the officer's job. Do not let the threat of arrest scare you into admitting guilt. Better to spend a night in jail than years in prison. Ask to speak with a lawyer, and remain silent.

Where to Go For More Help: If you feel your rights are being violated, hold tight until you can talk to a lawyer. If you don't have your own lawyer the court will appoint the public defender to defend you. For more information about your rights, law education, and what to do if your rights were violated, check out:

Midnight Special Law Collective <http://midnightspecial.net> 510-261-4843
ACLU of Northern California <http://www.aclunc.org> 415-621-2493
National Lawyers Guild <http://www.nlg.org/sf> 415-285-5067

There may also be legal help in your community that will specifically help you if you are a senior, low-income, homeless, or a non-citizen. Ask around in your community.

AN INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT

The occupy movement is an international one, inspired by the anti-dictatorial actions of Arab Spring and the anti-austerity occupations of Greece and Spain. Of course, we here in the United States are in a unique place to confront corporatism, since we live in the heart of it, but the crisis we face is a global one and the solutions will come from the 99% of the world.

TAHRIR SQUARE, CAIRO, EGYPT:

January 25th, 2011 was a federal holiday in Egypt to commemorate the police, but thousands of people called for a “Day of Rage” instead and marched on the ruling party’s office in Cairo. Thus began the encampment of Tahrir Square, an occupation of public space that demanded the departure of President Mubarak and one that captured the attention of the entire world. The demonstrators took a new position, somewhere between pacifism and revolutionary violence: they were peaceful by and large, never taking up arms, but they defended themselves with force from police and pro-government aggression. On February 11th, buckling to unrelenting pressure across the whole of the country and much of the world, Mubarak resigned.

It was bloody: at least 846 dead and 6,400 injured. But it provided a new model of revolution for the 21st century, one that used Twitter, Facebook, and other communication tools to create a horizontal structure of resistance.

SOL SQUARE, MADRID, SPAIN:

On the fifteenth of May, 2011, the occupation movement came to Spain. Tagged on Twitter as the #SpanishRevolution, what began with hundreds quickly became 25,000 and still worked on consensus models of decision making. The Madrid electoral committee banned demonstrations so close to the elections, but the demonstrators ignored the prohibition. On May 20th, the occupation spread to other cities in Spain.

The day of the elections, the movement’s slogan became “they don’t represent us.” A week later, the police tried to break up the Barcelona occupation

by force. The occupation, much like that in Egypt, chose to defend itself rather than be bullied out of public space.

After that, the movement spread out to the neighborhoods: there were general assemblies at 41 neighborhoods in Madrid and in 80 municipalities in the region. In June, protestors blocked politicians from entering the Catalan parliament. The Spanish camps were not cleared entirely until August.

SYNTAGMA SQUARE, ATHENS, GREECE:

The International Monetary Fund was demanding severe cuts from all sectors of Greek spending, driving the country into economic ruin and the people into misery. In response and directly inspired by the #SpanishRevolution, occupations sprang up across the country. The demonstrations in Syntagma Square in Athens began with over 30,000 participants. The largely peaceful occupations and demonstrations lasted two months, peaking at 200,000 participants.

At the occupation, anyone expressing an affiliation with a political party was largely excluded from the conversation: the people of Greece had tried electoral politics, electing a leftist party into power, but had been betrayed. Instead, people directly resisted the cuts of public services, refusing to accommodate the austerity measures, and this directly affected Greek policy despite overwhelming pressure from international economic powers.

LIBERTY SQUARE, NEW YORK CITY, USA:

Facing increasing cuts of public services in the United States, and frustrated with a society run in the name of corporate interests, an occupation of Wall Street began on September 17th, 2011. #OccupyWallStreet was directly inspired by the Spanish model of consensus, horizontal decision-making, and the use of popular media like Twitter and Facebook. Live video of the occupation has been streaming over the web since the beginning. Nearing the end of its third week of occupation as of this writing, the occupation has captured the attention of the nation and the world. Non-violent protest has been met with violence and arrest from the police, most notably when over 700 demonstrators were arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge.

Occupy Wall Street has inspired over 60 occupations in the United States and the momentum is growing across the country and the globe.

*They say we don't know what we want, but here we are making our decisions without bankers or politicians intervening in our lives. **This is** what we want.*