

Occupy campers seem reasonable to me

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Much has been written about the Occupy Movement since I visited Victoria Park in early November. During the course of two hours of earnest conversation with articulate protesters, Daniel and Kailee, I listened to their answers to my question which was, “Why are you protesting the present conditions within Canada?”

They assured me that what they were protesting were not exclusively Canadian problems, but that the Occupy Movement had its origins in New York’s Wall Street district and now encompasses much of Europe. The issues that concerned them were part of a worldwide set of modern problems common to the developed world. Their total list was lengthy, but with some editing here is the “short” list.

The economic engines of the world are controlled by large banks and huge corporations. Political leaders generally design controls that permit the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer. Students graduate from universities often burdened by debts of \$50,000 and more. Yet jobs sufficient to pay off such debts are rare. One of the reasons good jobs are scarce is that large corporations out-source jobs to China, Mexico and other low-wage countries. Meanwhile, our Canadian Government annually permits thousands of workers to immigrate to Canada. Canada exports raw materials including asbestos, oil, and natural gas to other countries while some of our own natural resources approach depletion. There is also a growing danger that our water will be sold on international markets, through a quiet negotiation of trade called the Canadian-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). If this happens Canadians may find themselves, in the future, buying back their own water at exorbitant prices.

Another high price we pay for our exports is the ecological damage done to our environment by such operations as the aggressive development of the tar sands and the mining of asbestos. Other important issues mentioned were that health care becomes increasingly expensive; women’s rights are not adequately protected by laws; freedom of information is difficult to obtain from our courts or governments, yet in order to work well, good democratic systems require that citizens receive accurate information. Freedom of the press and freedom of speech remain important corner stones of democracy.

Poverty continues to grow as our middle class faces lower wages and are unable to

keep up with the rising costs of living. So our middle class inches its way downward, towards the level of third world countries. Many find themselves unemployed, and in the worst cases they face homelessness and starvation.

Canada spends money liberally on military production in spite of the United Nations calculation that the cost of keeping peace is only .05% of the costs of fighting a war. As I listened to the protestors, I found that they seemed to possess a strong ethical commitment to improving the world. The Occupiers were not selfish in the things they wanted for the future. What they hoped for were reasonable objectives that many hard working Canadians also desire.

Yet, some writers in recent *Letters to the Editor* in our London Free Press express quite a different view of the Occupy Movement. Some see the protesters as lazy, unwilling to work, uninformed, naive, unfocused, and ineffective. Many believe that, as our Canadian winter approaches, the Occupy Movement will thin out and fade away.

I believe that if the Occupy Movement disappears, the problems discussed by the Occupiers will remain with us. But those problems will be more deeply hidden from our daily consciousness. Joblessness, inequities, abuse of women, and homelessness will still exist. We are the ones who are naive and unrealistic if we think our problems will simply fade away with the disappearance of the protesters, or that enforcement of a city by-law, while valuable, is more crucial to a democracy than the freedom to express ideas about our world economic crises or the ability to find jobs that are able to make us self-supporting. If the Occupiers are correct in their views, what they tell us will still be true and ethical whether it is presented from our church pulpits, from parliament, or from street corners or tent shelters in a public park.