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## The #15o and Occupy Movement in Slovenia

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If you stand in the square of the stock exchange in the centre of Ljubljana these days,<sup>1</sup> you will be stepping into the centre of a **global movement**. You will see two rows of small tents leading up to the building, with a few larger canvas ones on the left. Up on the main building in front of you are letters that once read *BORZA* (stock market), but which now read *BOJ ZA* (struggle for) following a modification by some activists. This is a symbolic location, chosen for the **occupation** because it represents the main site of struggle for the global movement: the expropriation of commonwealth through financialization. But while there might be a 'main' site of struggle, if you look a bit further into the movement, you will find great diversity in methodologies and priorities.

Take a few more steps into the occupied square, and you enter the largest tent named *Skupno Blagino* (Commonfare). Depending on the time of day, there may be a workshop by the Direct Social Work group on Molecular Counterrevolution, a group workshop with activist from Invisible Workers of the World on Housing as a Right, or a discussion on precarity. Maybe there will be just a few people drinking coffee, cooking and eating, reading, or discussing the other occupations at the Faculty of Arts and of Social Work. In any case, you will see it is a space where anyone is welcome and all find their own way to contribute.

If you come around six in the evening, you will participate in the **Common Assembly**, where the days events are discussed, communal problems addressed, and logistics agreed on. On some days you may participate in demonstrations, teach-ins in banks or the Theatre of the Oppressed in the Ministry of Health. Over the two months of the occupation, the *BOJ ZA* has hosted a famous Slovene punk band (Demolition Group), movie screenings, a stand-up comedy show and a few birthday parties. But no matter when you come, or what is going on, it is clear the space has been transformed into an autonomous system of **resistance and struggle** that can be accessed by all, that can provide food and temporary shelter, and comradeship for the disaffected. It is supportive in areas and ways government and civil society are not. The next question then is, what is this movement?

This global movement, under the names of **15 October (#15o) and the Occupy Movement**, finds its roots in the uprisings of the Arab Spring, the *indignados* struggle against austerity in Spain and Occupy Wall Street. Following two key meetings in Barcelona and Tunisia in September, 2011, common statements were produced and a decision to launch the movement globally on October 15 was reached. In this sense, the movement was also born out of the ongoing financial crisis, the declining economic situations around the world and the indignation towards corporate and bank wealth and bailouts. Filmmaker Michael Moore recently quipped that Goldman-Sachs organized the movement.

Globally, it is based on the **network principle**: no centre and no leadership hierarchy. Instead: a series of organized groups and individuals working through direct democracy, common struggle and horizontal solidarity to manage the space and produce articulations and actions around the issues. In Slovenia there is a unique mechanism used for the decision making process: **Democracy of Direct Action** (DDA). This system empowers people to organize actions and workshops without the consensus of the whole camp; to take responsibility for it; and avoid long discussions around proposals people are not willing to take charge of. Another important characteristic is it allows for the transfer of knowledge and experience between people, as people are empowered to organize themselves and find ways to bring others into the process. Young activists too, can turn their newly gained knowledge into practice.

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<sup>1</sup> The article was written on December 22, 2011.

However, much **criticism** has been levied against the movement for a lack of clear, centralized demands or singular articulations. Mainstream media has struggled to understand it and articulate it; often they ignore it or only report on its problems. Political parties have been unable to access the movement or co-opt it, and so they too generally ignore it except when they are ordering its repression. Even former union activists have not been quick to embrace the movement. Recently **Lech Wałęsa** (Solidarność leader) suggested in his San Francisco Chronicle op-ed, that the movement was potentially dangerous for the reasons that it had no central thread and was not making clear demands. Writing about his own experience with Solidarność in the struggle against the Polish communist regime, Wałęsa argued that success of the movement was down to the clear demands people could access. If this is not present, then he fears the movement will just become undirected energy and not achieve anything. This, he writes, can only lead to greater frustrations and violence.

With a little time spent at the *BOJ ZA* however, you see Wałęsa's analysis does not consider that this movement is a struggle organized around a very different set of problems. In Slovenia alone, *BOJ ZA* hosts groups against the criminalization of drug use, the institutionalization of the mentally ill, home evictions and the privatization of education to name a few. The movement is thus responding to the **problematic social conditions** exposed and accelerated by the global financial crisis. Rather than struggling against a monolithic enemy as one might argue the Polish regime was during the Solidarność strikes, #150 and the occupy movement is uncovering and fighting a system that has global reach and impacts everyone in different ways.

The nature of this struggle and the fundamental recognition of its (and our) diversity makes the reductive process of codifying the movement into some basic demands untenable. Simply, it is occurring simultaneously on **multiple fronts**, in search of multiple solutions. According to activists in the movement, its network structure and the occupations are designed precisely to be as expansive as possible, taking into account the multitude. One Occupy Wall Street activist recently said, in a discussion at the New School of New York, that the movement has provoked a huge increase in online use of terms like 'greed', terms and conditions often ignored by mainstream media, suggesting a shift in the mainstream discourse.

In the spirit of alienation and laceration from this system, the movement avoids replicating the mechanisms that appear to have failed in satisfying needs and desires of the majority. Predatory loans, privatized education, degraded work conditions, lack of space for non-conformist lifestyles are a few of the areas particularly well represented. In this sense, the movement sees itself reacting to the **needs of people**. Rather than through alienating policies and political parties, the activists are taking it upon themselves to build alternative structures and find ways to keep the process open to include as many in the process as possible.

Consider the slogan: "**we are the 99%**": within the 99% are also all the various identities that experience different manifestations of financialization, and to greater or lesser degree. Consider freelance journalists, without contracts to protect their integrity and bargaining power, next to the student forced into unmanageable debt simply to gain a first degree, next to the migrant worker dependant on their company for a visa and housing, and so on. It would be impossible to articulate even a series of demands to cover these various realities, and yet, they all have their place within the movement and all are part of the process of researching how deep the problems run.

When you leave the main tent at *BOJ ZA*, next to the sign reading No-one is Illegal! We are All Migrants! you will find a **common statement** produced last September in Barcelona taped to the wall in front of you. The first lines of the fifth point of the statement read: We must transform the models of democracy and re-appropriate politics through direct participation in all spheres of political, economic and social life. As a simple statement, this is precisely what appears to be happening in Slovenia and many other parts of the world. People feeling un-represented by political elites, structures and those with power are coming together to open spaces in society, to

look for new ways to address problems and then to act on these conversations. It is clear that the discourse in society has been shifted, that a rupture has occurred, from which a whole new generation of politicized activists are inspired to struggle on.

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