

# Thoughts on the Movement by a Participant No 3: Nov 2, 2011

*Distrust the rich and powerful, control your own leaders, rely only on your own organized strength!*

*(this newsletter is written, edited, printed, and distributed with his own funds and on his own behalf by an anonymous citizen who is part of the occupy movement and who values accountability, transparency, and democracy).*

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**1) The last town hall meeting that took place at 7pm November 1<sup>st</sup> at the Library was run completely undemocratically. The people who showed up never had a chance to be part of deciding what the agenda was, how long it was going to last, or who was going to be the facilitator.**

I was invited to speak to a church's Sunday School last Sunday and I had a very productive time discussing the movement with the people gathered there. They generally supported the 99% message and several of them expressed an interest in getting involved and they gave me their emails. I told them about the town hall meeting and invited them to it. I don't think any of them made it out, which is fortunate, because I felt it was probably the least accessible, understandable, or democratically run meeting I have ever been to in my life.

*If a meeting is started without any structure or organized roles in place, it is not going to be a productive meeting.* At the town hall, people who were comfortable talking over others who had raised their hand up before them spoke to one another for one hour and 15 minutes. No time was allotted to discuss any specific topics. After hearing committee reports discussion wandered aimlessly. People who cared more about their own comments being heard than they did about listening to *everyone's* opinions dominated the evening. Many people who probably had good things to say or good questions to ask raised their hands and looked around confused. They often looked at the person who had been talking the most and who on their own initiative but with no democratic mandate had been "leading" the meeting. People hoping to be called on by this person were never called on.

This one person (that no one elected to anything!) effectively ran the meeting and talked as long as they wanted to during the first one hour and 15 minutes. At that point I was rather fed up with seeing people raise their hands and not get called on. I asked this person, who had herself done most of the talking and who started the meeting and was defacto leading it if she was indeed the facilitator. She said she was not. She said "no one" was running the meeting. Clearly, that was not working very well. In an effort to remedy the situation I then introduced a resolution to the floor for me to take stack for the next 10 minutes to go through people who had been raising their hands and hear their comments. The motion was seconded. And consensus was taken in favor of it.

I called on the first person who had had his hand up for a while and wrote down the next two people who also put their hands up on a speakers' list. At that point the aforementioned one person who had talked more than anyone else in the room for the previous 1 hour and 15 minutes interrupted that speaker and said "we didn't have time" to hear more people. She was asked to respect the stack and she had trouble doing this. As the last person who raised his hand was heard from she walked towards the back of the room and began talking to others who gathered around her about how upset she was with the fact that I tried to take a speakers' list. At this point the meeting broke out into working groups, which met, though there was not time for them to come back together and say what they discussed to the general body.

*Was the shortage of time due to the fact that I had intervened to allow a few previously ignored people to be heard before we broke up into working groups, or was the shortage of time due to the fact that THERE HAD BEEN ABSOLUTELY NO STRUCTURE, AGENDA, OR TIME KEEPING FOR THE PREVIOUS ONE HOUR AND 20 MINUTES?*

Our movement is plagued by many difficulties. We are plagued by people who show up to meetings and talk as long as they want. We are plagued by people who come to meetings and attack people who try and propose a useful, democratic structure for them. We are plagued by people who want to make decisions on behalf of an "occupying" movement who have themselves never occupied anything. I don't know if these are just people with poor social skills, or if they are actual enemies of the movement who have infiltrated it in order to disrupt it. It is pointless to accuse such a person of being either, because the the effect is the same. These people, unrestrained by democratic structures work to perpetuate the continued disempowerment of everyone present. And they will continue doing this just as long as structurelessness, disguised as "liberatory anarchism" is allowed to continue unchallenged.

**IF YOU ARE PART OF THIS MOVEMENT AND YOU WANT IT TO SUCCEED YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO FIGHT THE "TYRANNY OF STRUCTURELESS" AND STAND UP FOR DEMOCRACY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THE STRUCTURED FACILITATION OF MEETINGS.**

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## ***2) Those Occupying SLC today do not Control the website occupyslc.org***

The people occupying Pioneer Park do not control it. The people occupying nothing but their apartments and their chairs but who do attend town hall meetings at the library in order to relate to "the movement" in some way also do not control it. Neither do the people occupying the Fed. WHO DOES CONTROL IT?

I don't know.

As it was discussed at the last town hall meeting, someone built the website, and then "got busy" with their personal life. So they have not been updating it. People with events to post on the calender and not been able to do so. I have not been able to post minutes from GA meetings that take place at Pioneer Park on it. We do not control our own public face! A new web team has assembled as a working group at the last town hall. They are planning to build a new site and get access to put it up. I asked how long they thought this would take. They said they don't know. I reminded them that many people who are sleeping out in the cold every night for several weeks very much ought to have prompt control over their own public face. I was criticized for phrasing things so "dramatically". *This is exactly why our "leaderless" movement will fail! We have no accountability! People volunteer for things and then flake out! People in positions of power, such as website mangers, are not elected! Under the name of "Anarchy" the same structures of power we say we oppose have been recreated!*

Please come to the next town hall at the library this Thursday at 7pm if you are a serious person with web skills who can help us to remedy this situation.

### 3) How to Run a Meeting

This is how you run a meeting. First, leave your ideology at the door. It doesn't matter whether you think "consensus" or "voting" is a better way of making decisions. It doesn't matter if you think "after capitalism" having "no leaders" would be nice. You have to look here at the crowd that is right in front of you right now. Think about how much time you have, what things need to be accomplished, and then start figuring out how the meeting can best be run to be efficient, to allow everyone to participate, to make sure malicious and disruptive people will not be able to hold up the meeting, and to make decisions in an orderly way.

First, get roles assigned. You will need to get people to volunteer and be approved by the group to be a facilitator, a time keeper, a stack taker, and a minutes taker. A **Facilitator** is important. He or she is not a dictator, but they can at times jump in and say things. They are there to make sure we do not get off topic, that what should be a general discussion does not devolve into just two people talking to each other about specific details that could be worked out after the meeting. They keep an eye on the big picture, and if, say, people start trying to all talk about what someone just said as an announcement, they can remind the crowd, "Hey, this is just announcements right now. Please only raise your hand if you have an announcement. After announcements are all heard we will have general discussion."

The **Time Keeper** is also important. Let's say the agenda of a meeting is a) 5 minutes for announcements, b) 15 minutes for committee report backs, b) 20 minutes for general discussion c) 30 minutes for working group break outs, and d) 15 minutes where working groups come back and report what they just discussed and introduce proposals to be voted on by the generally assembled people. A time keeper needs a watch and can give like a "5 minute warning" if we're running close on time. He can remind the facilitator when time is up for a specific topic.

The **"Stack Taker"** keeps a speakers' list. A speakers' list is sometimes called a "stack". This person must be very observant and look around the whole circle or room often. If someone raises their hand, they write it down on a piece of paper. During the discussion they call on the people who raised their hand in order that their hands were raised. An exception to this is if one person keeps raising their hand and always seems to want to talk after every person talks. The stack taker should move this person to a lower place in the list and allow people who haven't spoken before yet to speak before them. *A stack taker should be a different person from the facilitator.* If a facilitator is so focused taking stack he will be distracted and forget to keep his eye on the bigger picture.

Lastly, have a responsible person be the **Minutes Taker**. This person writes down the essence of what was said, what announcements were made, what issues were discussed, what were the basic arguments of each side of a discussion, what proposals were introduced, and what decisions were made. In a democratic organization these minutes are shared with everyone who is part of the movement as soon as possible after the meeting. In a movement such as an occupation with limited internet access, minutes should be sent out online and also put on the website, *but they must also be printed* and distributed among everyone at the occupation.

**Decisions** in a meeting can be made in many ways. Sometimes decisions are never up for discussion or debate, they are just spoken of like they are already going to happen. That is an undemocratic way of making decisions. A better way is to allow voting, or to use "consensus"- which I personally think is really confusing and redundant- but which some people who are part of this movement which is currently extremely disorganized, inefficient, unaccountable, and in danger of collapse seem to think is a better way to make decisions. I don't care how you make decisions. But whether you vote on stuff or use "consensus", here is how it must work:

Number one, someone formally introduces a **proposal**. Number 2, the proposal is not discussed or voted on unless it is *seconded*. You second a proposal by raising your hand and say "I second this proposal". Then some time should be set aside for it to be discussed. **NO OTHER DISCUSSION NOT RELATED TO THE PROPOSAL SHOULD OCCUR UNTIL THE PROPOSAL IS EITHER VOTED/ CONSENSED ON AND ADOPTED, OR UNTIL THE PROPOSAL IS REJECTED.**

That is it. That is how you run a meeting. If you decided not to have a facilitator, and a stack taker, and a time keeper, people who love to hear themselves talk are going to talk the most, while people who like to hear what is said, think about it, and then maybe say something are not going to be heard at all. Any meeting with more than a small handful of people who already agree with each other on what they are there for and who are very respectful of each other, will require these basic structures. If you have a facilitator, a stack keeper, and a time keeper, you have a chance at having a democratic meeting. If you decide not to have these things, you **WILL** be condemning yourself to a "dictatorship of the loud and arrogant." There is no middle ground. That is exactly how it is. And lastly, beware, for **PENS AND NOTEBOOKS ARE NEEDED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY. DISTRUST ANY MEETING WHERE THEY ARE ABSENT.**

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### 4) The Park is Really Chaotic and the Occupation There is in Danger

The park is super chaotic. Someone named "Tank" who hung around for a while and decided to be park of the medical team stole Heathers' dog. It is a pregnant black and white pit bull. People still fight each other pretty frequently. We are organized enough to feed ourselves, and we finally got port a potties. Jesse is trying to organize donations better. Rob is trying to make the free school work better. Edward and Johnathan have done great work to get finances more organized and flyers finally printed and distributed. But there is still much to be done. Of all the people sleeping here, there is not enough energy or inspiration or self discipline to **EVEN HOLD SIGNS UP ON THE STREET CORNER DURING RUSH HOUR.** That is the **ONE** most basic thing we can do to share our message. I was at the park today and at 11:22 AM I took the tarp off the library/ lit table. That table is the one most basic political resource we have. It is where you go when you visit the park and where we have materials to share with visitors. And by 'nigh noon no one of all the people sleeping there had even bothered to take the tarp of it so the stuff there could be seen.

Most people staying at the park are more interested in personal survival and not freezing to death than they are in political protest and fighting the 1%. They are not helping with day to day organizing, but because of this the future of the park existing as a safe place for them to eat and sleep is not guaranteed. Most people "part of this movement" who *say* they are interested in fighting the 1% do not show up at the park, do not help us get things organized, and do not help create, print, and distribute political materials. The park is loosing its political focus. Our best activists are over extended and burning themselves out. We have no security, no control over our website, we do not write up and share minutes of the General Assemblies, and very few people camping here even bother to come to the General Assemblies. If we want the occupation to continue some behaviors need to change. If you are camping here and you like the fact that you have a place to not freeze to death you need to step up and help keep it clean and peaceful. If you are very involved in some kind of political work but you are not trying to come up with a longer term plan and goal for the park, the whole occupation will stagnate around you and eventually crumble.