Good evening, everyone. Thank you all so much for being here. I am extremely grateful, and consider it a great privilege and an honour, to be addressing you today under this magnificent Melbourne sky.

Let me begin by acknowledging that we stand and sit upon stolen land. Not so long ago the British Crown turned up in this country with military force and declared, with unspeakable arrogance, ‘terra nullius’ – declared that this country was ‘an empty land.’ This declaration was made despite the presence of an Indigenous people that had been living sustainably on the land for tens of thousands of years. The Indigenous people of Australia were violently dispossessed of their land, and they are entitled to be aggrieved by this dispossession in exactly the same way we would all be aggrieved, if the land over which we were or are custodians was violently taken from us. What makes this colonial history even more shameful is that the ecological heath of this stolen land has ever since been degraded and exploited by an economic system ruled by the cold logic of profit-maximization. Let us all acknowledge, therefore, that an ongoing process of social and ecological reconciliation is the duty of all Australians and, indeed, the duty of all nations and cultures with colonial histories. Our collective identity suffers the ache of gross historic injustice, just as there is a deep, seemingly spiritual, ache that flows from the unsustainable burden that the existing economy places on our one and only Mother Earth. We all suffer these aches, and while we cannot change the past, let us ensure, at least, that the future is more dignified than the past, and let us start here and now.

II. ARE WE THE PEOPLE WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR?

Participants in this occupation: your passion for democracy inspires me; it is inspiring others; and I hope that this passion and inspiration can resonate throughout the world and back again, over and over, getting louder and more intense each time – until we have democracy again. While others have chosen to return to their homes this evening to normalize and sedate themselves in front of a television, you have chosen to be citizens, not merely consumers. While others are currently giving their money and thus their support to Starbucks, and the like, across the way, you are choosing to invest your energy and support elsewhere. You have chosen, that is, to engage and create this unique experiment in participatory democracy, and for that you all deserve the highest commendation. I cannot speak for anyone other than myself, so let me just say, on my own behalf, thank you deeply for doing what you are doing. Have no doubt that what you are doing is valid, necessary, and important, and I hope that you recognize that this occupation is a beacon of hope, a beacon of hope in a world that is growing darker by the day. We must keep this flame of democracy alive.

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What is taking place around the world through occupations like these is absolutely necessary if the democratic spirit of our time is to be shaken awake from its long, dangerous slumber. Our so-called representative democracies are broken, perhaps beyond repair, having been contaminated long ago with narrow, corporate interests that serve the few at the expense of the many. But to the extent that our political representatives no longer represent us, then to that extent our own political responsibility increases. If our democracies are failing us, it is because we, the people, have been failing democracy. If our democracies are failing us, it is because we have not always recognized that the power and responsibility to change the world lies in our hands alone – in the hands of the 99%. Economic power does not match, and could never come close to matching, the power of an animated citizenry inspired by a vision of a better future; could never come close to matching the power of spirited and creative collective action.

This implies, however, that up until now we have been too subservient to the economic elites and legitimized their economic power with our passive consent, our apathy. These Occupation Movements, which were globalized last weekend and which are gaining momentum by the day, can be understood as the formal and unambiguous withdrawal of that consent. Let us shout it from the rooftops: Apathy is dead! The economic elites have no democratic mandate, but since their addiction to economic power means that they will not leave willingly, they must be opposed day and night through persistent, non-violent direct actions such as this. Our lives and our children’s lives are at stake; the health and integrity of our communities are at stake; and the planet we share in common with the entire community of life is at stake. Clearly, this is not the time or place for timid souls. We must stand up and be counted.

These Occupation Movements, despite being celebrations of diversity, seem to have at least one thing in common. They are all part of a unified movement that is demanding power back from corporations and corrupt politicians, for the sole purpose of returning that power to the only place where it belongs and the only place where it is safe – in the hands of, we, the people. Of course, this must be, and will be, an ongoing struggle, and we may see no end to it in the foreseeable future. Indeed, we may see no end to it our own lives. But the struggle for a genuine, inclusive, sustainable, participatory democracy is a struggle, a joyful struggle, that we must ignite, and which we are in fact presently igniting. And if the fire of these Occupation Movements eventually dies down, or is suffocated, then we must blow on the embers and ignite the fire elsewhere, in our own creative way, passing on the torch everywhere and wherever we go, both in our words and especially in our deeds. This is the irrepresible nature of the global struggle that is materializing before our very eyes, here and across the global stage. We are the people we have been waiting for. We must be.

Courage to us all.

III. What are we doing here?

It is a strange thing indeed that we find ourselves having to explain to people why it is that we are here – as if the need for this occupation were not perfectly obvious! But since the media is generally presenting us as confused idlers – if they give us any attention at all – I thought it would be wise to state in a few words and to the best of my understanding, why it is that we are here. I have spoken with many of you over the last week, and it is clear to me that despite the diversity of free spirits that have gathered here in opposition, there are threads of commonality that unite us. So let me attempt, with all the humility this task demands, to articulate those threads for the sake of those who have made no attempt to understand us.

We are occupying this space because the global economic system that has been created in recent decades is failing humanity and it is failing the planet. It is grossly unjust; it has produced inequalities that are socially and politically corrosive; and it is
socially, economically, and ecologically unsustainable. We all know this very well, both in our heads and in our hearts, and in this we have the courage of our convictions. This economic system has absolutely no future, and we are the ravens that are circling above, signifying its imminent demise and calling for a new economy. Posterity will support us and respect us for our actions here, even if some of our contemporaries mock us and dismiss us prematurely. If only those who dismiss us would look in the mirror, however, they would discover that they, too, are a part of the 99%, and that the fight we are fighting is on their behalf as well as our own. This includes the police, if only they knew it. When those who dismiss us come to realize this, perhaps they too will be drawn in to stand with us, in occupation, as brothers and sisters united with a common purpose. When this time arrives, then it will be clear that the distinction between City Square and the rest of Melbourne will be nearing its end.

We are occupying this space because our mainstream politicians are proving impotent, incapable, or unwilling to do anything other than affirm our broken status quo, and for that they should feel the deepest shame. Not only is this a profound dereliction of duty; not only are they neglecting their responsibility to act in the best interests of the citizenry and the planet; they are choosing to serve the economic elites whose greed has become pathological and whose power and influence has become patently undemocratic. This is obvious to anybody who bothers to think about it, but it seems we live in an age in which thinking has become unpopular. Tony Abbott, for example, Australia’s greatest embarrassment, is a looming political presence that should terrify us all. Exactly how politicians like this gain the positions of power that they do utterly defies the imagination. It would be comical, were it not so bloody terrifying.

We are occupying this space, then, because our blood has begun to boil. The threshold of tolerance has long since been crossed and this occupation represents our primal scream for a new direction for humanity and a new relationship to nature – one based on the respect for and reverence of nature, not its arrogant exploitation. In a word: we have had enough of the undemocratic, unrepresentative, and unsustainable economy of our times. And we have come here together, in solidarity with the global movement that is currently rising from the ashes of the old world, to say that another world is possible. In fact, we are here to declare that another world has already been born! Whether or not we win this particular battle – the battle of City Square – we are destined to win this war, if not today, then tomorrow. And when that times comes we will at last have a sane and humane society, one in which men and women of every community – of all races, creeds, or sexual orientations – will have an opportunity to flourish peacefully within the sustainable carrying capacity of our beautiful planet. That is the future of which we dream, and that is the future we are here to create.

So far we have met with some success, but our work has only just begun. We are at the beginning of the journey, not the end.

IV. What do we want?

When critics demand an agenda from our grassroots uprising – an uprising that has only just been born – this shows that they clearly do not understand what is going on here. We are Children of Democracy, just as they are Children of Empire, but our destiny, unlike theirs, has yet to be determined. That is to say, we will be what we make of ourselves and nothing else, just as they will be what they have already chosen to become. Nevertheless, even if our detractors do not understand our revolution, it is imperative that we understand it, even if that understanding is never complete, universalizable, or static. It would be foolish, therefore, if we did not address the question of what we want to achieve from these occupations, otherwise we are at risk of repeating the mistakes of previous counter-cultures. A few months or even a few years of festive anarchy will not do the world much good, thrilling though it may be for the participants. We must not settle for merely escaping the system, therefore; we must
transform it. So while I acknowledge the great dangers of stating in concrete terms an agenda for a new economy and a new society, I feel there are far greater dangers in drifting along without focus and direction. If we do that, soon enough we will fade away and be forgotten.

Accordingly, allow me to begin, presumptuously and without authorization, by laying down four proposals that seem to me to reflect the Occupy Movements and the 99% which they represent. They are only proposals, of course, and their legitimacy depends solely on your mandate. Since this is not the forum for policy details, please take what follows simply as an “invitation to discuss.”

**POLITICS AND CORPORATE INFLUENCE:** The first proposal is to get money out of politics. Our political representatives are supposed to represent, we, the people, not the economic elites. But we live in a democracy, so-called, where political campaigns are financed in large part by big business, and so it should be obvious that our politicians are going to be influenced greatly by the economic interests of the corporations that are funding their campaigns. We will never have a democracy worthy of the name until our politicians are freed from this type of corporate influence. Put otherwise, democracy cannot exist if it is dependent on corporate funding. This demands a political response. I refer you to Joo-Cheong’s Tham’s text, *Money and Politics: The Democracy We Can’t Afford* (2010) for a sophisticated discussion of this issue.

**FREE PRESS:** The second proposal is to create a genuinely free press, which implies deconstructing the ‘sham’ free press that we have today. We live in an information age, in a world where media matters. We rely, in many ways, on our newspapers and journalists to provide us with important social information. However, we also live in a world in which Rupert Murdoch, Google, Facebook and a few other media conglomerates have taken control of the information that is put before the public. This provides the 1% with terrifying power to shape the public consciousness, and no true democracy can tolerate this concentration of power. If we are to have a genuine democracy then we must have a truly free press, and this implies having many small institutions of media, not a few ultra-powerful ones. So the second proposal is to create a genuinely free press by passing a law that fragments the dominant media conglomerates that exist today and puts in place clear limits on the size of media institutions. Again, the details of the proposal can be worked out in due course, but again the essential message is clear: We will never have a genuine democracy if power is concentrated in the hands of a few huge media conglomerates. This is an issue that demands a political response, and it is a demand that I propose the Occupy Movements should consider making.

**ECONOMIC INEQUALITY / POWER INEQUALITY:** The third proposal is to demand a political response to economic inequality. In the United States, the richest 1% owns more than the poorest 90%. No democracy could possibly function on these terms, and while the disparity between rich and poor is not quite so great in Australia, it is nevertheless true that most of the benefits of economic activity have been channelled into the hands a few, while the rest of us live lives of economic insecurity. This is unacceptable. It is unacceptable that poverty exists in Australia amidst such plenty, and so the third proposal I wish to make today is that our political leaders explicitly acknowledge and accept their duty to lessen the great divide between rich and poor, and, in particular, to eliminate poverty through a limited but significant redistribution of wealth. This proposal could take many forms, including wealth taxes, inheritance taxes, more progressive income taxes on the rich (culminating in a ‘maximum wage’), and/or financial transaction taxes (i.e. the Robin Hood Tax). It could also take the form
of establishing a Basic Income Guarantee, or a Negative Income Tax (which would provide tax credits to all those who earn below a certain threshold), as well as reconceiving the nature and obligations of corporations. The worker cooperative model may be the best model to replace the current model, in order to redistribute the power, not just the wealth, between the people. Once again, the details on how to lessen inequality and how to eliminate poverty through political reform can be worked out over time. For present purposes, the important point is to demand that our politicians seriously dedicate themselves to these tasks.

- **ENVIRONMENT**: The fourth and final proposal is that we use some of the proceeds from the taxes mentioned above to protect the life support system we call Earth from further degradation. Our planet’s ecosystems are trembling under the weight of a global economic system that knows no limits, and it is perverse to think that we can continue much longer on the path we have been treading. To put it paradoxically, if we do not change direction, we are likely to end up where we are going. It is time, therefore, to fundamentally change our course and take our planet’s biophysical limits seriously. This might involve investing heavily in renewable energy, or investing heavily in more sustainable infrastructure, or taking conservation more seriously, or supporting the relocalization of the economy in various ways, or whatever. The world is not lacking in practical solutions to our environmental ills. What is lacking is the political will. Those days, however, are coming to an end – one way or another.

Participants in this occupation: those are the four proposals I place on the table for your consideration. I will repeat them now in summary form: (1) The first proposal is that politicians be freed from the undue influence of corporate interests, by fundamentally rethinking campaign funding (among other steps); (2) The second proposal is that we demand that the huge media conglomerates be fragmented and limits be placed on the size of all media institutions; (3) The third proposal is that we demand tax reform as a political response to economic inequality for the purpose of lessening inequality and eliminating poverty; (4) The forth and final proposal is to use some of the proceeds of those increased taxes on the rich to protect the ecosystems that we all rely on to flourish. The many ambiguities here are intended to provoke discussion.

Obviously, these four proposals are not going to solve all our problems, but, if they were taken seriously and shaped into sound policy, I am convinced they would help create a democracy within which we could solve the great challenges of our age. At the very least, they would free us from the corporate interests that currently seek to entrench and maintain the status quo. These four proposals, in other words, could create the preconditions for a genuine, sustainable democracy, and once those conditions were established, it would be up to us to use that regained power responsibly, for the good of all and for the good of our planet. Democracy is an experiment that must be reinvented every generation, according to time, place, and circumstance. What this implies, to borrow Albert Einstein’s words, is that we cannot solve our current problems using the same kind of thinking that caused those problems. We cannot simply tinker with capitalism as we know it. We are being challenged to make things new.

I invite you, the Occupiers, to discuss the four proposals just stated over coming days and weeks, and I propose that sometime in the near future, if it be your will, they be put before the General Assembly and voted on. What you do with these proposals, of course, is up to you. You may add to them, refine them, rewrite them, rearrange them, or reject them entirely. They are now out of my hands. Do with them what you will. My modest hope is that I have simply gone some way to providing our movement with some
greater focus and direction. At the very least, I hope that this might spark a debate about what our focus ought to be and in what direction we ought to be heading.

V. Conclusion

In closing, I’d like to make one comment about our slogan, ‘We are the 99%.’ In many ways I feel this slogan is a very good one, because it properly signifies that this occupation is not just some radical eco-socialist movement, but a movement for the great majority of people, whether on the Left of the Right. And I certainly agree, as I made clear earlier, that the wealth that has been concentrated into the hands of an ultra-rich 1% ought to be systematically shared for the good of all and for the good of the planet. You don’t have to be an eco-socialist to see this as plain, commonsense and, indeed, as a necessary part of any transition to a just and sustainable society. However, by creating an enemy of the 1%, I feel we are deflecting attention away from the role that we, the 99%, play in creating the growth economy that has given rise to our grievances. Every time we consume goods and services beyond what is necessary, and ever time we invest our money in the hope of ‘good returns,’ we are playing a part in propagating the growth economy. It follows that if we are sincerely trying to ‘live in opposition’ then we must try to live as simply as possible, and consume as little as possible, by somehow reimagining ‘the good life’ beyond consumer culture. Otherwise we implicate ourselves in the very economic system that we are opposing. This form of opposition will not be easy; in fact, it is likely to be a lifelong struggle, especially since we live within pro-growth, consumerist structures that can lock us in to high consumption lifestyles. Living simply in a consumer society is certainly a great challenge. But it seems to me that we must recognize that our acts of consumption propel the growth economy, and limitless growth on a finite planet is a recipe for unprecedented ecological (and thus humanitarian) catastrophe. Accordingly, I feel a truly oppositional social movement, whatever its political demands may be, must be based on low-consumption lifestyles of voluntary simplicity. This is not tangential but touches the core of what living in opposition is all about. I’m not convinced, however, that the Occupy Movement has come to this realization yet. I hope that I have said enough to provoke some critical self-reflection on this matter.

It is not enough for us to demand revolutionary reforms from the top down and wait until that reform arrives. No – we must begin building the new society at once, at the personal and community levels, irrespective of the political response, or lack thereof. We must, as Gandhi so famously declared, be the change we wish to see in the world. And we can begin by living simply, so that others may simply live.

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If we look hard enough we will see that a glimmer of light has appeared on the dark horizon of our times, and this is an omen that a new day is dawning. Thank you once again, from the very depths of my nature, for being a part of this struggle. Let this occupation be the butterfly that provokes a ‘butterfly effect,’ dislodging Empire’s keystone through the cumulative impact of countless peaceful acts of opposition. Let this be the small beacon of hope that is dropped into the pond sending ripples to the other side of the shore and back again, changing the world, little by little, as it also changes itself. And if this movement is crushed, let it rise up again elsewhere in a new form. Let there be joy in this struggle, brave Occupiers, and let us rediscover our freedom and recreate our democracies, right here, in City Square, among the grassroots.

Citizens of the world – the time, at last, is upon us. We must now proceed with unshakable resolve: humbly, passionately, and in the spirit of celebration.