

Buffalo: “This movement does not support the current political system”

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On October 15, hundreds of Occupy Wall Street protesters gathered for a second week at Niagara Square in downtown Buffalo, New York. Their message is the same as thousands of other similar occupations in cities across the world: to end the grip of the financial elite over politics and economic policies.

Even as a gale blew in off Lake Erie, hundreds of protesters gathered to show their commitment to the cause, taking part in open discussion at a general assembly, and holding signs in protest of greed and destructive political policies, which received support from passersby in cars and fire trucks and NFTA bus drivers, who honked their horns as they drove past.

At least 50 people have camped out in a park adjoining the square since the protest began in Buffalo last weekend. So far, the protests in Buffalo have been peaceful and the police have not interfered with the occupation.

“Some politicians have been trying to make up new laws to stop us from camping out here, but so far we’ve been left alone,” said Shannon, a 21-year-old Buffalo resident who has attended the protests every day since they began. “I am angry at companies who are hoarding cash and refusing to hire people. I am poor because I can’t find a decent job, and so far all I hear in the media is how it’s my fault that I’m broke. They never talk about the companies that won’t hire people, even after they got all these tax breaks from the government.”

Joe B., another young protester, stated, “I’m here to fight for fair taxation. They need to tax the rich. Another thing that is unfair is the idea that corporations

are treated like people. Corporations are not people! I wasn’t very political before this movement started, but I wanted to join because I need to learn about politics and help change things. I am stuck working at McDonalds, even though I’ve put out about 50 job applications. I can’t find a better job.”

“It’s the 99 percent who should control politics, not 1 percent of the people,” said Devin, a young community college student. When asked what he thought of the message that this movement is apolitical, he responded, “I think what that means is that this movement does not support the current political system. We aren’t represented in this system. We can’t appeal to that system to do anything for us.”

Jessica, a Buffalo public school teacher, stated numerous reasons for being in the protest: “I have to work two jobs to make ends meet. I have to make a huge contribution toward my health insurance even though I belong to a union. I am disgusted that Wall Street destroyed our economy, but there has been no accountability for them!”

Kate, a non-profit administrator and artist, who also has to work two jobs to get by, cited her reasons for participating as the wealth gap and the fact that the American Dream is no longer a possibility for the vast majority of Americans. “We are all slaves to health insurance payments and other debts. Just paying heating bills is an enormous hardship. With the way things are, the American Dream is impossible.”

When asked who she believes is to blame, she stated, “It’s the politicians. Neither party works for their constituents. All they do is line their pockets and serve their donors. The Democrats are all talk, but they do nothing to help people like us. I have no hope in the

upcoming election. There is no one to vote for. No one has a message that matters, just empty rhetoric.”

Franklin, an unemployed worker, said, “It’s not social programs that have ruined the economy, like the media and politicians like to say, but corporate tax loopholes and the military-industrial complex that are the real drain.” He continued, “My primary reason for being here is the influence of Wall Street on politics. This has removed 99 percent of the people from the political process.” When asked about the goals of the Occupy movement, he stated, “This is a political movement. It’s about class, it’s about exploitation of workers, and it’s about the destruction of the environment by corporations.”

On the role of the labor unions, Franklin said that the protesters have been largely “suspicious of noisy union reps who are seeking to gain control of the movement. They are very manipulative in trying to cajole the protesters into subverting the movement into one that’s controlled by the labor unions, but people were pretty turned off by their efforts and basically ignored them.” However, the AFL-CIO and other unions maintained a heavy presence at the occupation.



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