

“Occupy Chicago” protests continue into second week

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Under the banner of the “Occupy Together” movement, the city of Chicago has seen small protests continue into the second week. Between a few dozen and a few hundred people at various times have camped out at Chicago’s financial district, in front of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) and the local headquarters of several major banks. As in New York and other cities, anger against corporate greed and Wall Street remains the main message.

The core of the protest organizers and occupiers are youth, but as the occupation ebbs and flows, older participants—including seasoned anti-war protesters, members of Iraq Veterans Against the War, anti-Federal Reserve activists, and Ron Paul supporters—have made up a significant portion of the occupation.

The protests continue to attract the curious attention of many passersby. Bus drivers and taxi drivers frequently honk in support as they pass the protesters. Some in business attire were standing around and talking with participants on Thursday evening and Friday afternoon.

On Wednesday, police officers began to threaten arrest and citations for camping out on the streets of La Salle and Jackson. The police have cited a city ordinance that prohibits people from placing personal belongings in public way, with fines up to \$250 if charged of this violation. The protesters have been forced to keep moving around the block and around the city to avoid arrests and police harassment.

On the same day, while protesters held up placards and signs with populist slogans such as “We are the 99%” and “Stop corporate greed,” traders with the CBOT put up taunting signs saying, “We are the 1%.” According to Progress Illinois, the pit trader that put up the sign was Eric Wilkinson, also known as Wolfman. He was one of the traders that featured in Rick Santelli’s Tea Party-inspired screed, on the television market network CNBC, against average working families facing foreclosures and the paltry stimulus package meted out by the Obama administration in 2009.

The protest included a march Thursday around many parts of the downtown area, eventually meeting up with anti-war protesters outside Obama’s 2012 campaign headquarters in Prudential Plaza. Slogans such as “Occupy Wall Street, not

Afghanistan” and “War crimes must be prosecuted” featured in the march.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with protesters in the financial district Thursday night and Friday afternoon.

Dusty Woolsen, a 28-year old sales representative, was joining the protests for the first time.

He said, “When I first heard of Occupy Wall Street, I was a bit skeptical. But it has grown across the country. It’s been cathartic to voice my discontent. I’m lucky to have a job, but I know if there’s a downturn, I could easily lose my job. I just got this job recently and have been laid off twice in the recent past. The last three years have been a struggle for me personally.”

He added, “I think we should have a political alternative to what we have now. We need a serious, third party.”

Keith, 31, an art teacher at a public school on the south side of Chicago, stated why he was motivated to come to the protests. “We are all in debt here. I am \$66,000 in debt from all my college education and I came from a blue collar union worker family.”

Speaking on the social crisis, he noted, “Capitalism only works to a certain point. It is now the best system for social stratification and class inequality. Both parties are owned by the corporations with the big money that runs them.

“For the first time the cultural psychology has shifted in America. Now that we are feeling a lot of pain in our lives, we are coming out to the streets to say something. This is a culture that has been based officially on individualism, promoted by the media to no end, and it takes a long time for people to think collectively in their mutual interests. But we are getting there now. I don’t know how this is going to turn out, but we are here to voice our anger.”

A 28-year-old high-frequency trader in a small firm dealing with equities wished to remain anonymous. He came out to the protests to voice his support. “Obviously people are fed up with

the way things are now,” he said. “I think the big banks were gaming a system that was meant to be gamed politically. It’s all private gains and socialized losses.

“And these banks are at it again just as the two parties are becoming indistinguishable from each other. I voted for Obama and wanted real change, but I’ve realized that’s not going to happen. People think Bush and Obama are different, but I don’t see that anymore. The wars should be stopped. We can put all that money to good use.

“My girlfriend went to Columbia College but couldn’t finish her degree. She is now saddled with many thousands of dollars of debt and doesn’t know if she can pay them back. She has been working for UPS for many years now to pay back these debts. But it’s not easy at all. A lot of things are not right with what’s going on today.”

Kate Drown, 26, a music teacher who works part-time as a contractor to a public school, came down to the protests Thursday for the first time.

She said, “I’m thousands in debt. I can make payments, but barely. I don’t make enough since I depend on private lessons every month to make ends meet. As I pay my debts off, I have absolutely no savings.”

Asked about the wars continued by President Obama, she added, “If our country can’t even afford to feed our citizens properly, we shouldn’t be bombing other countries pretending to liberate them. Right now we are bombing other countries while people continue to lose homes. We have a political system entirely run on money, profit and war. I want to see that stop. We need real democracy.

“I agree we have a plutocracy, not a government of working people. I was recently reading the Declaration of Independence for the first time in full. Our world today does not live up to what it promises.”

Zach and Sarah, both Columbia College students, spoke about why they have come out to participate in the protest.

“We’ve had it, and at least we’re trying to make a change,” Zach said. “It’s unfair that we’re sitting here underemployed and all in debt while we’re bailing out banks and the executives are getting giant bonuses.”

Sarah added, “It’s not like you can just *not* go to college. You need to, to get a good job, but once you do go, you can’t get out of debt without jobs.”

Ali, also a Columbia College student, said she had come out

because her father had lost his job without severance, and although he has found some freelance work, she is very unsettled about the fact that her family is facing financial uncertainty for the first time.

“It’s a place my family has never been in. We’ve never had to worry about it,” she said.

Charles, a student at Chicago-Kent College of Law at the Illinois Institute of Technology, told the WWSWS that he came out to support social and economic justice, and remarked that he was quite sympathetic to socialism.

“We have a corporate-controlled political system and there’s incomprehensible wealth that’s not being shared in this country. It’s unjust, it’s criminal and it’s not democracy,” he said.

Loren Taylor was picketing nearby, and remarked wryly, “We have socialism ... we have socialized debt!”

He went on to explain that he had come out to oppose the control corporations have over American life.

Jeff responded, noting that unlike a lot of people at the occupation he is a traditional conservative. When asked why he had joined the protest, he explained, “Capitalism cannot work if we do not make people take responsibility, and hold them accountable.”

Referring to the banks he said, “People should be punished if they harm each other. I’m talking about negative reinforcement.”

On Friday, the general assembly of Occupy Chicago will vote on a list of demands the movement is making, which include the investigation into and prosecution of those involved in crimes in the financial industry, increased regulation on financial operations, tighter regulations on political lobbying, and the forgiveness of all student loan debt.



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