

Chicago: As anti-Wall Street protests grow more than 175 arrested at Grant Park

Our reporters
17 October 2011

Occupy Chicago drew more than 2,000 supporters Saturday night as protesters joined in a global day of action spawned by the “Occupy” movement. This was the largest mobilization to date in Chicago after more than three weeks of protests.

Demonstrators gathered Saturday evening in Chicago’s financial district at the corner of Jackson and LaSalle. They then marched along Jackson to Grant Park. A heavy police presence, with many carrying plastic handcuffs, followed those marching.

Hundreds of handmade signs peppered the marching crowd, with slogans such as, “I want a future,” “Where is the education bailout?”, “Banks got bailed out. We got sold out,” etc. One person had a sign with a picture of Obama with the word “hoax” written underneath.

At Grant Park protestors set up more than two-dozen tents. Various speakers addressed the crowd including representatives from the Chicago Teachers Union, the Steelworkers and other unions, along with their supporters in pseudo-left organizations such as the International Socialist Organization (ISO), the ANSWER Coalition and Jobs for Justice. The organizations are seeking to tie the Occupy movement to the Democrats and thereby strangle it.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party handed out the statement, “The way forward in the fight against Wall Street,” along with leaflets from the International Students for Social Equality. They explained the need to build a political movement of the working class in opposition to the capitalist system and both big business parties.

The role of the Democrats was quickly displayed as police, dispatched by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Obama’s former White House chief of staff, moved in to suppress the protest. At 11 p.m. the police warned

protestors they were violating city laws by occupying the park and ordered them to disperse. Chants such as “Whose streets? Our streets” were made along with “The whole world is watching.” Protesters also cried out slogans denouncing the Democratic mayor.

Protestors formed a chain around the tents as the police circled round to make arrests. Arrests began around 1 a.m. and by 3:30 a.m. the police arrested over 175 people, dismantled the tents and cleared the plaza. Those arrested face fines for violating municipal ordinances.

Earlier in the day the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to some of those participating in the protests.

Sandra, an IT worker, carried a sign calling for her brother to be brought back from the war in Afghanistan. She said, “I have two degrees in art and music, but I couldn’t find any jobs. I am now working in the IT field. Music and the arts are no longer supported in the United States, so I had to switch careers.”

Asked why she was protesting, she added: “I voted for Obama, but there has been no real change.” Hearing our viewpoints, she said, “I can agree with a socialist program and socialist policies, but I’m worried about corruption. Will our leaders get corrupted like they have in the past? Or will we have real democratic control?”

Edwin, a tech support worker, addressed the limitations of the protests: “There is no broader strategy here unfortunately. They haven’t taken it beyond protests at this point. The next needs to be: how do we interact with the existing system and find out how we get what we want.” Asked about what he thought about the two political parties in this country, he added, “The two parties represent the same master. I have no real confidence in either party.”

Thomas, a software engineer who came with his wife and child, told us: "These protests are long overdue. This is the start of something different in this country. We think the main issue is that we need to tax the rich. The millionaires and the billionaires caused the mess we are in and they should pay for this crisis." He added, "We are very, very disappointed in the Democrats.

We also spoke to an art history professor who teaches at a local for-profit art school. Speaking from personal experience about the conditions facing educators, he said, "I know a lot of people in graduate school who I was friends with that are having a terrible time with the job market."

Robert, a college graduate from Augustana College, spoke to us about his recent disgust at all official politics. "I'm coming to realize that Obama and the Democrats' policies are not working. I feel let down with the Obama administration. More and more I'm skeptical and I don't know if anything will be different if he wins another term."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact