

Anti-Wall Street occupation continues in Lexington, Kentucky

Ryan Rahilly
14 October 2011

The Occupy Wall Street protests that have taken place in New York City, Chicago, Portland and other cities across the United States have spread to Lexington, Kentucky.

Protesters have occupied the sidewalks in front of the JPMorgan Chase building in downtown Lexington since September 29. Attendance has fluctuated, with over 300 people present at times. Protesters expressed deep discontent over the current economic and political climate.

India Allen, a 19-year-old sociology student at the University of Kentucky (UK) and one of the organizers of the demonstration, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “We’re here because of the injustice of the economic system and the severe inequality that stems from it in our country. The 1 percent of the richest Americans in this country own the vast amount of resources and wealth and this causes great suffering and unhappiness for so many of us. We’re here to show that this can’t continue.”

“Up until a few weeks ago I was a student at the University of Kentucky,” she said. “I moved from 2,000 miles away to attend because I wanted to be closer to my family, some of whom are actually employed at UK. I have a chronic pain condition but I’m unemployed and uninsured so it’s difficult or impossible to manage it. So, I went the first three weeks of class, but it became clear that there was no financial way to make it work. I became extremely depressed and ended up having to spend time in a hospital.”

India elaborated on the importance of education for society, and the difficulty receiving it in the United States. “You know, quality education is essential in our society,” she said. “And there should be absolutely no reason why it shouldn’t be available to everyone given that we give huge tax breaks to the 1 percent, and given that we’ve shelled out ungodly amounts of money to fund wars. These wars are unnecessary and the tax breaks are

criminal. We should be reconsidering our priorities.”

“I’m out here because capitalism is not a viable system,” 19-year-old UK student John O’Shea told the WSW. “It corrodes social relationships. It exploits people. It corrupts humanity. People are good, but capitalism forces us to compete and not cooperate.”

John expressed his discontent with the response of the Democrats and the Republicans to the economic crisis and the escalation of war. He said, “I feel that both the Democrats and the Republicans are not good enough. They are not reacting strongly enough to the situation at hand. The response by both parties has been incredibly underwhelming. We should stop the wars immediately. Our government is murdering thousands of people and draining the budget to do it. End it, and put the money we save from that into programs that meet social need.”

Twenty-seven-year-old Laura Guthrie works two jobs in the restaurant industry. She is a UK senior majoring in public relations. Expressing anger over the bailouts, she said, “Basically, there’s a revolving door between government and corporations. The government bailed out Wall Street for the worst financial crisis of my lifetime and there were no arrests—no one was held accountable.”

She said that the two-party system no longer works: “They put on the facade of trying, but the policies aren’t showing progress. We need to restructure a lot of things. We need to stop the lobbyist and special interests groups and corporate campaigns. In no way should money drown out the people’s voice—but that is exactly what is happening.”

Laura spoke about the situation she and some of her recently graduated friends are facing. “I have about \$25,000 in student loan debt,” she said. “It’s so hard to save money. That’s what I want to do because I am absolutely terrified about graduating and having to repay my student loans. Almost everyone I know that has graduated is either struggling terribly to pay for their

loans or they've already defaulted. I'm just scared to death of it because I don't want my credit to be affected. I think it could come to me being quite literally unable to even get by."

"I'm a student and I have two jobs. I wait tables and bartend. For the last year, I have been trying to get a job in my major," Laura explained. "I've had some part-time offers where I'll help out for a little while, but it's all very low pay so it's worrying me. I'm literally applying for work across the nation. I'll move to get a good job. I just want to be financially stable. I've applied for the last six months and nothing has come back at all."

Laura denounced police abuses at demonstrations in New York City, Boston, and elsewhere, where protesters have been arrested for exercising their basic democratic rights. "I think it's an atrocity," she said. "We have a right to speak our mind, protest, and give our opinions in the public forum. It's not a violent movement so there should be no infringement of these rights whatsoever. Things like that come down from a higher level, which is even more sad—because it's not just individual police officers getting a little too riled up. I think it's direct orders and that's why these arrests and abuses in New York are happening. And that is a complete infringement on our rights as Americans."

Laura explained that the protesters in Lexington were determined to stand their ground. "People are planning on staying here through the winter," she said. "I'm sort of terrified of staying out here during the frigid winter months because I don't have health insurance and I can't afford to go to the doctor. We're staying out here because we want fundamental changes. We want bankers held accountable and we want the banking process to be transparent. We want fundamental changes between corporations and government. We're advocating for polices and programs that meet social need. Corporations are not people; they should not have the same rights as citizens."

An unemployed nurse living in eastern Kentucky, who asked not to be named, told the WSWs she has been struggling to find work. Originally from Texas, she and her husband were hopeful she would be able to find work in the state, "But, when I started applying—and despite the fact that I was first in my class from one of the best nursing schools in Texas and have several years of experience under my belt—I haven't been able to get a job. I'm guessing that they are not hiring part-time employees anymore because they don't want to have to pay for their benefits."

"Abraham Lincoln once said, 'corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed.' They have been enthroned, for a long time. The top 400 people make more money per year than the bottom 150 million. I mean, a person can't even work full-time on the minimum wage and climb above the poverty line."

She said that the political foundation established after the American Revolution has deteriorated: "The Founding Fathers set up a scaffold, a framework, but there were weaknesses in that framework. And over the last couple hundred years, people have taken advantage of those weaknesses and now we have a situation where there is immense inequality."

"I really think it's going to take a major revolution to fix our problems. I don't want a bloody revolution," she said, "but we are going to have to have revolutionary thinking in order to revamp the system. Wall Street is completely disconnected with what is happening in the world. They're insulated from the trials and hardships that so many face. When you make millions of dollars a year and you lose a couple hundred thousand, it's not really that big a deal. I read a story on the Internet about this rich guy who was complaining that if he had to pay the taxes based on a truly progressive tax code, that he would *only* have \$400,000 left over. So, there's a really big disconnect."

She asked, "Why is it that working people, people who have to work to survive, pay taxes on the money they *earn* whereas people who bet for a living, like those financial speculators on Wall Street, don't have to pay taxes on the money they *win*? The capital gains tax is way too low, for example—and it's not a good thing that people who bet money get off virtually scot-free."

"Corporations are not people," she added, "our government is owned by the corporations—both the Democrats and the Republicans. Not all of them, but most of them. It's very hard to trust anything they say."



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact