

Occupy LA protests enter second week

A WSWWS reporting team
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The Occupy LA encampment at Los Angeles City Hall's north lawn completed its first week Friday. Several hundred people were present as protesters lined the block with signs denouncing the "one percent" super-wealthy and calling for justice for the 99 percent.

Although not large by the standards of some of the other protests, the encampment encompassed a wide variety of people impacted by the economic crisis: students caught in the squeeze of tuition increases, heavily indebted graduates unable to find work in their fields, the underemployed and the unemployed, and other workers.

Local Democrats and union officials have begun to mouth support for the Occupy LA protests. The purpose of their presence is to make the protests innocuous to the financial oligarchy which the Democratic Party as well as the Republican Party serves.

Last Thursday, the Alliance of Californians of Community Empowerment (ACCE) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) joined Occupy LA protesters in a march whose main slogan was "Make the Banks Pay!" Police arrested eleven protesters.

Both the ACCE and the SEIU supported Obama's election and continue their unabated support for his policies, including his "American Jobs Act."

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team talked to some of the protesters.

Nick, who has worked as a psychiatric nurse, came to LA from Riverside. He said, "I'm here to let people know we're getting ripped off by the big banks and corporations, by politicians who aren't on our side, who are rubbing elbows with the same people raking in the dough.

"What would make me happy is if this movement would bring forward the real issues that are affecting this country, that our media and everything you read in the papers don't tell you. If they do mention it, it's just a blip

on the screen and it's gone and you never hear about it again."

The WSWWS asked Nick what he thought the Occupy Wall Street actions had accomplished and what he believed the next step should be. "I think that it's a victory if the people get the message loud enough that our political leaders have to answer to questions that we're asking. I don't have all the answers. I don't know where this will lead because every day kind of turns and transforms and that's what we are, trying to culminate an idea, a singular approach to get the world on our side."

Antonio is a student at UC Davis who comes from a working class immigrant family. "I agree with most of it, what's going on here, I mean against the whole elitist point of view," he said. "I'm clearly against that, coming from a working family like most of us, and we have come here in a sense of solidarity.

"My parents are really hard workers. They came to this country with nothing really, as immigrants, and now they have two houses. My father only takes breaks on Sundays, that's every other Sunday. He's a truck driver. I guess I'm really mostly here for them. It's a struggle in this society.

"The students right now can attest to it that they're paying increased tuition every year. It's gone by quarter now for ridiculous amounts. They started with 32 percent, now it's heading up to 80 percent. It keeps growing exponentially.

"As of now, the Cal Grants system covers a lot of people, all working class individuals, but I see it in the future that Cal Grants is not going to be enough, and it's going to come to the point where people won't be going to college anymore, future workers' sons and daughters. It's intentional. It's class warfare."

The WSWS asked Antonio about the declarations of the “nonpolitical” nature of the Occupy Wall Street movement. “I think everything’s political,” he said. “Just not being political is political in itself... I don’t really agree with the whole consensus thing. I mean, all of the people are not being represented but rather tokenized in some respects.

“I like your web site; I heard about it at UC Davis. It is one of the web sites I consult.”

Antonio related an experience regarding the state of the unions. “The union heads are getting very comfortable with their positions,” he said. “I was at a [United Farm Workers] rally in Sacramento. Dolores Huerta went up on stage. She’s a fossil of the movement now. Her policy has become outdated. Even Cesar Chavez, I disagreed with him because he used to call on Immigration to go after undocumented workers.

“She was saying, ‘The Democrats will bring us justice,’ and they actually booed her off the stage!”

Samantha recently graduated with a degree in art. She has been getting by on freelance work. “I think everyone’s been affected, even people who ignore what’s going on have been affected some way and being aware of that is an important part of being a citizen of this country.

“I think that in a country where 99 percent of it is controlled by 1 percent, it’s obviously some kind of pyramid scheme and any country where that happens there’s something wrong.”

The WSWS asked Samantha about what impact the protests would have. “I think that demonstrations make people aware that a change definitely needs to be in order. I think if people just get out and try to change the system from the inside, just participating in politics, representing their city, it’s a start in the right direction.”

Regarding the two-party system, she added, “It’s not a two-party system! With all the lobbyists and stuff like that, it’s one party--different names, but it’s all one. I really would like to see the breakup of the system, but the change that needs to come about, offhand, I just don’t know. I just know to go in a certain direction and see what we can get from there. I think we need to change this from a plutocracy back to a democracy.

“I don’t believe anything you do is nonpolitical. Everybody here is trying to get a change and the only change we’ll be able to do is politically. I think that people don’t want to associate that with politics because politics is a very, very bad reference.”

Justin came to the protest for the first time on Saturday, mostly to observe. However, he has several years of experience in political activism. “This is my first day here. I live in Long Beach. I’m a student, I’m going back to school. I’ve been unemployed for about seven years, just kind of earning money teaching languages and tutoring people, trying to make ends meet. I moved back in with my family for the first time in ten years.

“We need real leaders, we need real ideology, we need real policy in order to get ourselves to a solution to focus around. I hope we get a real mass consensus, that 60 percent of the population that doesn’t participate in the electoral process, really activate the lower 80 percent, get them involved and get them in on this discussion. I think truth will prevail, I think people will understand as we implement more and more solutions and address more of the crisis.”

The WSWS asked about Justin’s view of Obama and the Democrats. “I think it’s just the other head of the same beast,” he said. “I’ve been involved with the Democratic Party very actively for the past 6-7 years, on the left of the Democratic Party, mostly to investigate what kind of potential is there to move, and I’ve determined that it’s pretty pathetic and I don’t waste my time anymore with them.”



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