

Nashville: “I’m fed up with the way corporations are controlling the American government”

Our reporter
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Participants and supporters of the Occupy Together movement gathered in downtown Nashville on Saturday. After holding a “general assembly” for an hour and a half, the group, which at its peak reached several hundred in number, marched several blocks from the lawn in front of City Hall to the Tennessee State Capitol building and back in a loop two times, chanting, “We are the 99 percent!” Participants included both young and old, and even a few children.

Asked what brought him to the protest, Seth said, “I’m fed up with the way corporations are controlling the American government. I don’t think capitalism itself is the problem. It’s more corporatism—the way that corporations are treated as people and given all the rights of people, and the way that Congress particularly seems to be controlled by the purse strings that are paid by all these corporations.

“I think that’s been a problem for a long time, and that’s why it will be difficult to change, but I think it’s coming to a head right now. I think the problem’s worse than ever, especially the way that the top 1 percent of our country is earning more now than they have in a hundred years.”

Seth added, “I feel that Congress is a large part of the problem. But it would take Congress’s decisions to change it. And they don’t have a whole lot of incentive to do so. And so there’s just a huge public uprising. It would take a huge public uprising for Congress to really feel like their jobs are going to be in jeopardy unless they do something about it.”

We asked whether he thought there should be an alternative to the two-party system. “I would love for that to happen,” he said. “I don’t see that happening very soon because the two-party system is so entrenched in American politics. Something like they have in European countries, where if Party A gets 30 percent of the vote, the parliament will be the same way. It’s not a winner-take-all situation. I think that makes a lot of sense.”

Karen had received a flier from SEP supporters the week before—“The political issues in the fight against Wall Street”—and had decided to make her own copy of it to distribute to others. She said, “One of the most important things I thought that the article brought out was about the SEIU co-opting this movement. I was in the health care reform movement, along with the National Nurses’ Association and a whole bunch of other coalitions, for single-payer health care, and they basically tried to—and they did—kill the [movement].

“They became an extension of Obama’s ‘Change that Works.’ And so basically they became an extension of Obama, and he did not want single-payer health care, which we all had worked for. And we all had worked for him to get elected because we thought single-payer health care was going to be a reality. And as soon as he gets elected, he joins forces with the SEIU, which tries to shut us up. And they did co-opt the movement. They co-opted it here in Nashville.”

Scott interjected, saying he thought the Occupy movement was totally grassroots, but that “Now, the politicians are trying to make it into a political

movement. Especially moveon.org. They're going try to make this into a pro-Obama thing.”

Karen added, “And moveon.org represent themselves as totally progressive and independent...they are not! They are an extension of the Democratic Party.”

“Obama, everybody on his cabinet's from Goldman Sachs,” Scott continued. “He's taken more money from Wall Street than any president in history. If this turns into some sort of pro-Obama thing, then I'm going get out.”

Lindsay, another protester, explained why she supported the Occupy movement. “I'm in support of it,” she said, “because you have disproportionate number of people that own and have a majority of the wealth, and you see so many people struggling. It's absolutely ridiculous, and they control pretty much everything.”

John agreed that the protest involved a struggle of classes: “Like Warren Buffett said, there is class warfare right now, and his class is winning. I think that first we need to go ahead and strengthen social programs, have single-payer health care, and make the tax structure a little bit more equitable.

“If we were even under the same tax system we had under Reagan, all middle class and lower class would be paying less, and the wealthiest would be paying more, and not an outrageous amount, but we're already taxed the least out of the top 20 industrialized nations—at least on the wealthy, but certainly not the lower and middle class. Capital gains [tax] should be taken up from 15 to 30 percent.”



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