

Occupy New Orleans enters seventh day

13 October 2011

The New Orleans branch of the Occupy Wall Street movement, known as “Occupy NOLA,” has entered its seventh day of demonstrations. The movement began on October 6 with a march of approximately 400 people that led to an occupation site right outside of City Hall.

The march began outside of the Orleans Parish Prison in order to protest police brutality associated with the notorious New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) (see “New Orleans Police Department rocked by scandals”). It proceeded through downtown New Orleans with no interventions by the police, who lined the roads on both sides. The march ended outside of City Hall, whereupon approximately 200 protestors stormed the building, shouting “this is what democracy looks like!” They then exited and began to erect tents at Duncan Plaza, across the street from City Hall.

A WSWS reporting team spoke to protestors on the first day of the occupation. A young history teacher at an area charter school spoke on the devastating effects of the recession. “Historically we are the first generation to do worse than our parents,” she said. “We are people who know people who are homeless. My mother just lost her house. Nobody bailed my mother out.”

She noted that she still has student loans to pay off, and that teachers at charter schools are forced to pay for school supplies for their classrooms. She estimated spending \$2,800 per year on basic supplies for her students. “They cut the budgets and expect us to pick up the slack,” the teacher said. She found teaching her students about the US judicial system to be difficult, explaining that when students asked about the recent execution of Troy Davis in Georgia, she felt conflicted due to her disgust with the outcome of the case.

Sheila Washington, formerly a worker in health care

administration, expressed anger over the repeated blows to the area’s working population. “First it was Katrina, then the BP Oil Spill, and now the economy is falling apart,” she said. “I’m frustrated that there were bailouts for the banks and now nothing is happening.”

Sheila said she feels compelled to homeschool her children due to the deplorable conditions of education in New Orleans. “I am not homeschooling by choice—I have to,” she said. Her two oldest sons are in college, with one enrolled at Loyola University of New Orleans and the other at Delgado Community College. They struggle with tuition payments. “I’ve got higher taxes, higher insurance payments and higher tuition,” she said. “How much more can we take?”

Concerning the right-wing policies of the Obama administration she remarked, “I’m particularly frustrated when we voted. We believed in ‘change.’ Now we don’t. I don’t see an interest in the people. I only see an interest in the businesses and corporations.” Despite her frustration, Sheila said that she remained motivated and was excited by the occupation. “First Egypt, then New York, and now here. It’s good to know that it’s coming here. I think it’s our collective consciousness coming together and realizing that something is wrong.”

The leadership of Occupy NOLA has pledged “no politics” and as of yet they have proposed no list of demands whatsoever. In reality, the supposed banishment of politics only opens the demonstrations to the political exploitation of Democratic Party politicians like New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, who made an appearance at the demonstration for a campaign photo opportunity, said nothing, and has not been back since.



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