

New York City: “The banks are selling our future”

7 October 2011

The day after Wednesday’s mass march and the police attacks and arrest of 28 demonstrators, several hundred people remained in Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan, where the police presence has been beefed up and metal barriers have been deployed to limit access to the area.

In an indication of the international influences and sentiments animating the demonstration, the Occupy Wall Street medics, who have been providing medical assistance to those staying in the plaza in lower Manhattan and facing police attacks issued a statement Thursday expressing their solidarity with medical personnel who have been sentenced to up to 15 years in prison by the US-backed regime in Bahrain for providing care to injured demonstrators in that country.

“We demand the immediate release of the imprisoned health care providers who are guilty only of doing exactly what we, the Street Medic Committee, do every day: tend to the healthcare needs of peaceful protesters standing up against tyranny, corruption and oppression,” the statement said. “We wish to join all the people of Bahrain fighting for their freedom as the people who occupy the street in New York City stand and fight for ours. Now, we call upon all others in the medical profession to join us in solidarity with these imprisoned brave men and women who have spent their lives caring for the sick and wounded in Bahrain.”

Among those who have joined the occupation of the park was Jose Jerez, an Iraq war veteran who spoke to the World Socialist Web Site.

“I’m at the City College of New York (CCNY), and I’m unemployed,” he said. “Honestly, the reason I am here is because of the way they are taking education for granted. I don’t agree with the way they charge such high tuitions, and the interest they charge on the bank loans.

“When I was in the military, my ex-wife was charged

\$12,000 for tuition at Columbia College in Missouri, when she and my salary put together was \$23,000 a year. That is not fair. I didn’t get bailed out. I had to take from my savings to pay for college and rent.

“I have the GI bill. One of the reasons I went into the military was to pay for college. I was born in a poor section of Harlem. There were no real options for me because my parents couldn’t pay for college. My parents had to jump around to work two jobs at a time, and they didn’t make very much money.

“At first, when 9/11 happened, I knew I had to do something, so I joined the military. I went to Germany, and then I went to Iraq. Then I was stationed in Missouri for a while. When I came back from Iraq, I was chosen to hold the flag at the 2009 baseball All-Star game in St. Louis where President Obama threw out the first pitch.

“I never really agreed with the war in Iraq. I don’t think we should be occupying a foreign country. We shouldn’t be trying to fix other people’s problems when we can’t solve our own. I think the war was really about oil.

“They have military contractors over there making \$100,000 from companies like DynCorp and Halliburton. They pay people who dispatch vehicles just like military people do salaries like that, and there are people over there with the defense contractors who are making \$50,000 pumping gas. All the defense contractors are doing is buying government contracts. Then they pay the contractors working in Iraq a high wage, but the CEOs at the top make much more than that.

“I did one tour. I left in 2009. I thought the fact that they bailed out the banks was terrible. I thought that it was the free market and capitalism to let them fail. I don’t understand the government bailing them out. All of the politicians pushed for the bailout. Bush pushed

for the bailout and TARP. Obama campaigned for it as well. I think a lot of these politicians are paid off the books. The banks have a lot of friends in high places. The politicians are out for themselves. As long as I can remember, the politicians have said the same things. Then the banks get richer, and the working people get poorer.

“When I got out of the military, I looked for a job, and it was hard to find one. So I decided to go to school and get educated now because they are probably going to cut out the GI bill soon.

“I think the tuition going up at CCNY is going to hurt in my pocket. When they are attacking education, they are undermining and taking away our future. The banks are really selling futures here. They are selling our future.

“They should make education free. It should be free for all. It should be like it is in Germany. There you can choose to go into the military or you could choose college.

“I hope the working class builds its own party out of this. If you have 20,000 coming to the demonstration, that’s all it takes to start a new party in New York.

“This party should stand for free quality education for all. It should create jobs for everyone. It should be for health care for everyone, and it should protect teachers’ jobs and wages. They should stand for re-building the infrastructure. It should stand for not sending troops out to any war. We should be supporting our troops, but not sending them out to war just anywhere.

“I think with Bush and Cheney, they are war criminals. I’m not sure about Obama. And nothing has happened to the banks and corporations who caused the economic crisis. The banks and corporations aren’t charged with anything, but I can go to jail for small things.”

Mary Hickock is a Penn State student who recently arrived at the occupation with four others, including her 13-year-old son, from Harrisburg. She described Harrisburg, the capital city of Pennsylvania. “It’s bankrupt,” she said. “People hate the mayor, and they won’t fix the roads. They are trying to implement a tax on everyone working in the city. Ultimately, the bankers hold the debt, and ultimately, the taxpayers are going to pay for it. I don’t know how they are going to fix it. Now they are trying to sell off the city parking lots; while the mayor has gone out and bought new

office furniture costing the taxpayers thousands.

“I came here to see what the experience is like and to join the protest. This protest is different because it is nebulous, but it expresses America’s discontent. This is the general angst that we feel. We can look around and see that things are not the way things should be. This is a broad movement, and I want to contribute to it and support it.

“The arrests sound like mass confusion. I saw the women getting sprayed with pepper spray, and the guy being thrown into the police van hitting his head. After that I thought the police would be on their best behavior. The police have been another mechanism to maintain the current structure of society. They can be oppressive, and in what has occurred over the last 14 days here, they have been oppressive.

“I believe this is a seed, a birthplace, a starting point to change the structure of our nation. I believe the potential is here.

“Part of the reason I am here is to hold the banking industry responsible for their misuse of funds and power. They need to be held accountable for their contribution to the economic crisis of the country. They abused power. They made profits and paid themselves huge bonuses. Maybe this system was messed up to begin with, but the banking system called attention to how bad the system really is. Then the government bailed them out.

“What I find infuriating is that workers’ wages are being cut so that the CEOs of corporations can make profits and big bonuses. The capitalistic system is not a sustainable system. It is not one that promotes equality.”



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