

Occupy Wall Street marches on millionaires' row

Our reporter
12 October 2011

A section of the Occupy Wall Street demonstration made its way uptown Tuesday for a march up Fifth Avenue past the luxury apartment buildings of New York City's multi-millionaires and billionaires.

After assembling in the early afternoon at the southeast corner of Central Park, the marchers made their way past the building where the right-wing Fox News media mogul Rupert Murdoch has his apartment, purchased for \$44 million six years ago.

It passed under the windows of the Knickerbocker Club, one of the city's most expensive private social clubs, where a bow-tied member, drink in hand, gazed down from an open window laughing, while much of the club's maintenance staff came out on the sidewalk to watch the march.

One Fifth Avenue matron watching the march pass by commented that the protests were "pointless". She said, "It's silly. This is costing the city millions of dollars in extra security, which means that there will be less money to help these people."

Security was in strong evidence. A New York Police Department helicopter monitored the movement of the protesters, while they were also watched from the other side of Fifth Avenue by cops wearing the distinctive uniforms of the NYPD's Counter-Terrorism Division.

Chanting "We are the 99 percent" and "Banks got bailed out, We got sold out," the marchers chanted as they passed the homes of right-wing billionaire David Koch, New York City's richest individual, and hedge fund chief John Paulson, before ending up outside the Park Avenue building that houses JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon's apartment, purchased for nearly \$5 million in 2004.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg defended his fellow billionaires at a press conference at a library in the Bronx Tuesday. Specifically objecting to the protest outside of Dimon's building, he said, "He's brought more business to this city than maybe any other banker in (the) modern day. ... To go and picket him, I don't know what that achieves. Jamie Dimon's an honorable person working very hard. He pays his taxes."

Bloomberg continued with the theme he has sounded repeatedly in recent weeks in response to the protests: equating members of the super-rich like himself with workers in the financial district and elsewhere in the city. "I don't appreciate the bashing of all the hard working people who live and work here and pay the taxes that support our city," said Bloomberg. "The city depends on Wall Street. Let's not forget, those taxes pay our teachers, pay our police officers, pay our firefighters. Those taxes we get from the profits companies and the incomes, they go to pay for this library."

Meanwhile, Paulson & Company, the hedge fund firm run by John Paulson, issued a statement defending the super-rich, while issuing a veiled threat that increased taxation could lead it to leave New York City. "Instead of vilifying our most successful businesses, we should be supporting them and encouraging them to remain in New York City and continue to grow," it said, while adding that New York has the highest income tax of any state.

Tuesday's march was organized in part by the trade union bureaucracy and liberal Democratic groups like *MoveOn.org*, which are trying to bring the Occupy Wall Street protests under the wing of the Obama administration and the Democratic Party. These organizations sought to focus the protest on the expiration of New York state's "millionaires' tax" in December. The failure to renew the surcharge on those making \$250,000 or more a year will cost the state at least \$4 billion in revenue.

The same unions and liberal organizations staging the protests backed the election last November of Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo, who rejected proposals to keep the millionaires' tax. Instead, he proposed \$8.9 billion in spending cuts, striking most severely against aid to schools and Medicaid funding.

Kathryn K, 66, a retired teacher, was among those who joined the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City on Tuesday.

She told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "I know that incomes are falling in this country for ordinary people, and for the poor it is even worse I am living on Social Security. I get a total of \$900 a month and it has not gone up and will not go up. However, I am rich compared to many who make less than I do and have more to support."

“The Republicans are beneath contempt. I can’t even talk about them. It breaks my heart to watch Obama do the same things that Bush did. Obama has not stopped the war machine. Quite the contrary, he very much continued the wars exactly as Bush has done. This is my biggest disappointment.

“I have a 24-year-old daughter serving in the Army in Iraq. I am very sad about that. She made this choice in order to obtain economic security. She has been there for nine months, with three months to go. I hope this movement will slow down the military process, although it is a very faint hope.

“I believe that these wars are being fought for Wall Street and all the people in this country who have the money.

“I am from Portland, Oregon. I left on the fifth of the month to participate in this struggle. After I left I found out that there is an occupation movement that has started there. When I get back I will join them.

“I was a teacher in theater, but I lost half of my pension because my pension fund lost a lot of money in the stock market from 2000 to 2005. I lost the other half because I needed the money to take care of my four children—two biological and two adopted from Africa. I went to Africa to promote theater for social change and for AIDS education.”

Steven, a postal worker for 10 years, said he had come to the protest “out of fear for the future.”

He said: “I see a system today in crisis. The working class and middle class are suffering while the rich live in luxury.

“I was out during the march Wednesday. When I got home I saw a tweet by someone about how the unions were gone, and that police had started arresting people. I figure if more people like me are out here the police won’t come in and arrest them. The kids out here are not just hippies, like the media says they are. They are kids who are trying to change the system.

“The problems facing the post office have a history. To give an example, in 2006 it was passed through the lame-duck Congress that we pre-fund pensions for 75 year in 10 years. We are setting aside money for people not even born yet. They could only be doing this to create problems. The private sector wants in on its profits.

“If the private sector takes over it will cut costs and eliminate the union. It would probably stop shipping to some areas.

“I’m not just saying this because I’m a postal worker, but the post office can hold a community together. It is necessary for democracy; not everyone lives in New York, some people vote through the mail. It is needed for commerce; people buy shoes and even medicine in the mail.

“The postal workers can’t legally strike. The unions are afraid for two reasons; they are afraid to lose sympathy, or are afraid that it will show how weak they are. The unions in some ways are big business.

“We need to wake up America. Ideally we could have a third party, but these two parties now have so much wealth that they don’t want to give up.

“People treat the word ‘socialist’ as if it was a dirty word. But that road [pointing at Liberty Street] was built by socialists. It is an ideal that people aspire to.”

Jacob Soiffer and Emma Lesser, students from Stuyvesant High School, which is near “Liberty Square”, were standing holding signs for passersby to see. Jacob’s sign said “Democracy not capitalism.” Emma said it was her first day joining the protest, while Jacob had been at the large demonstration last Wednesday.

Jacob said, “Last Wednesday was really impressive. I saw a lot of my teachers there, too. There are a lot of Stuyvesant students here.”

Emma described their political experiences at Liberty Square: “Our parents’ generation was politically involved, and it is good that more young people are getting involved. But we don’t agree with everything people here are saying. A lot of people don’t know what they are talking about. There are a lot of different people here. I even ran into supporters of Ron Paul, who is an arch conservative, as well as socialists. There is a large spectrum. This is not totally anti-capitalist.”

Jacob commented, “I am for socialism but I don’t think we can make a radical jump to a socialist society yet.”

Max Strong told the WWS, “I just graduated from college and am worried about the state of the country. Once I realized I needed to get a job and become part of the real world, I started to become politically aware. I can’t imagine how this gets so little coverage in the media, but the Tea Party does. In college I went for international relations, but I am now working as a stone mason in construction, making walls and patios, even though I would like to go into the field I studied for.”



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