

Occupy Wall Street protesters condemn US political establishment

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Hundreds of protesters continue to occupy Zuccotti Plaza, renamed Liberty Plaza, in the heart of New York City's financial district. The occupation continues to attract thousands of workers and young people from around the US and the city itself. In the last few days, the sentiment is one of discontent and hostility to the financial and political establishment.

On Wednesday, supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed hundreds of reprints of its articles and engaged in lively discussions with dozens of people who were angry at the capitalist system. Many of those who had come to show their support for the occupation felt that the political establishment, through the medium of the Democratic Party, was attempting to co-opt the movement for the benefit of the Wall Street billionaires.

The action continues to bear a deeply contradictory character. It remains without a program—and susceptible to a pro-Democratic Party influence though the unions and the media, but is swelled by a growing number of people who are hard pressed by the lack of jobs and educational debt. Others oppose the wars the United States is engaged in. Many of them are young and are looking for a way to fight.

The coalition Beyond May 12th, an alliance of ex-lefts, trade unions and community groups who sponsored a rally of several thousand in the financial district on May 12, organized a march Wednesday by a few hundred to 1 Chase Plaza next to Wall Street to protest the \$436,000 tax cut that JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Diamond will receive this year.

While telling marchers that they had until December 31 to stop the repeal of the tax, the coalition pointed out nowhere in its literature or banners that Diamond's tax break will be a gift from New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Democratic Party. Cuomo, a Democrat, removed the 8.97 percent tax rate on individuals who earn more than \$250,000 annually from his proposed budget for next fiscal year, and has adamantly defended his action.

Members of SEIU Local 32BJ, joined the demonstration late in the afternoon. The union, whose members include 60,000 office-building cleaners, is currently in contract negotiations with large building owners throughout the East Coast. SEIU Local 32BJ, like a number of unions across the US, has issued statements of support for the Occupy Wall Street protesters.

According to a press release by the union, the rally was called "To spotlight the need for good jobs and the growing wealth gap between the ultra rich and working people." The actual practice of the SEIU, however, supports those who bailed out the banks and have overseen the increase in the gap between rich and poor. The SEIU has lavishly funded the representatives of Wall Street in the Democratic Party. The union was the top contributor to the Barack Obama campaign at \$28 million, and its former president, Andy Stern, had met with the Obama over 50 times before his resignation from the union post in April 2010.

Good wishes and advice also came from Vikram Pandit, the CEO of the third largest bank in the US, Citigroup, who said at a breakfast event sponsored by Fortune magazine on Wednesday, "Trust has been broken between financial institutions and the citizens of the US, and that is Wall Street's job, to reach out to Main Street and rebuild that trust."

"The economic recovery is not what we all want it to be," Pandit continued. "There are a number of people who can't achieve what they're capable of achieving and that's not a good place to be." Pandit, however, is not one of those people. He owns a 10-room, \$17 million apartment in Manhattan's Upper West Side.

This "sympathy" is a part of a highly choreographed public relations act. Its aim is to keep Citigroup's enormous profits rolling in and to disarm those who question the dictatorship of the banks.

The World Socialist Web Site interviewed a number of those who came to support the occupation and learn more about it.

Julia Register, a sophomore at the State University of New York in New Paltz, told the World Socialist Web Site:

"I understand that income of workers is on the decline. I am struggling with going to school and working two jobs. One of the jobs is working for minimum wage at the library at my school. The other job I have is working for someone organizing films.

"I need to work in order to pay off my loans, live at the college, and pay for my books. I am studying theater. I am an actress, writer, painter and musician. I love the theater and the opportunity to create. The problem is that by the time I graduate I will have \$20,000 in loans, which they say is not bad

considering that there are a lot of students with bigger debts. Some of my friends have \$50,000 to \$60,000 in student loans.

“People in this country tend to not want to acknowledge that there is a difference between the rich and the poor. They have been taught that we are all equal Americans. But economically and politically we are not at all equal. Wall Street controls the government. The multi-billion-dollar corporations are feeding the politicians and creating their opinions. This is true for both the Democrats and the Republicans. Obama listens to the same rich people as did Bush. We are fighting against this.”

Ricky Schlagel told the WSWS, “I came here about seven or eight days ago from Philadelphia, and I am going to stay until whenever. My personal situation was bad, and I came to the conclusions that if I wasn’t doing anything actively against capitalism, I was contributing to the poverty and ecological crisis all over the world. It became blatantly clear to me that capitalism had to be replaced. It was once progressive. Now it is obsolete. It is a time for a change and a complete overhaul of the system.

“I honestly stopped paying attention to Obama and the Democrats. I’ve never voted because it was always the choice between the lesser of two evils. I feel Occupy Wall Street has provided hope for people all over the world. A lot of us, like me, tried our hardest to go to school and get a good job. I have come to the conclusion the system is rigged. It is a scam.

“For two and a half years, I worked for a haul-away company where people pay to throw away their old household furniture like couches and tables. I drove a truck, gave estimates, picked up furniture and drove it away. I worked 35-40 hours a week. I used this to pay my bills to go to West Chester College full-time. While I was working, I still had to take out loans, even though the school isn’t that expensive. Then at work they put me on suspension for nothing. They are lying to make sure I cannot collect any unemployment compensation.

“I feel all of this is part of a failing system that they can’t put the lid back on. I think the demand to abolish student loans is a good one. There should be no compromise on this.”

Noah Shuster is a CUNY Graduate Center student and works at the library.

“I am very worried about what is happening to co-opt the movement, especially with the Democratic politicians.

“We don’t like Obama. We didn’t vote for Obama. The elections are political theater. It doesn’t matter who is in office. The corporations and banks still run things. I like to compare it to the period of slavery. When the slaves in the field would get upset and restless, they would change the overseer and tell people now we improved things and slavery can continue to run smoothly. In the elections, the media will make a spectacle of things and try to pretend there is a change. But like slavery, there is no way you could live under slavery no matter what they changed.

“The stage that we are at now is one where we have to

consider jobs and parties. I support the idea of a growing socialist party in the near future. The steps will be many, and we can’t predict all of them. But we cannot ask for reforms in the present system of free market capitalism. We have to change the whole system.”

Aaron Lackowski, an unemployed worker, told us, “I have been out here about a week. I came out because I want a revolution. I thought this would last a week or two and flop but it just continues to grow.

“It is possible for this to win over labor. I think the unions can be won over, but my problem with them is that they give money to the Democrats. If the unions can get people out here and give us money that’s great, but we still have to stay autonomous from them.

“I used to work for the CWA [Communication Workers of America], and the Verizon strike just ended. I was already unemployed and in Mexico when it happened and I got this e-mail out of nowhere saying we are returning to work.

“I wonder what will happen in the winter. We need to stay here. We have a large support, this is going to be a sustainable movement. How far we get is not a resource issue. Whether we are effective depends on having a cohesive ideological message.”

Josh Vega, a documentary filmmaker from Florida, told the WSWS: “Coming out to New York was unexpected. I was in DC first, making a documentary with Zeitgeist.

“On the Gulf we really felt the economic crisis with the oil spill. It is really based on the tourist industry.

“There are so many reasons to come out here. I want more liberty, and I don’t want my taxes to pay for wars I don’t support. We need to cut the military budget, and build things back home. I’m going to take what I learned here and bring it back home.

“Obama sold us out. Now he is for corporate backing. He is a puppet and has no control and no power. It will take power to change things though; that is why we are out here.

“The arrests [in Boston] are a crime. The more arrests that happen the more it will grow. It is picking up steam. There is a lot of people who support this but aren’t out here. This will fizzle out or ignite something. A fuse is already lit.”



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