

Occupy Wall Street protesters resist expulsion from Liberty Plaza in New York

Sandy English
14 October 2011

Protesters in the month-long occupation of Liberty Plaza, a small brick-paved park across from Wall Street in the heart of New York City's financial district, have announced that they will peacefully resist any attempt on Friday to remove them from the park.

The office of New York City's billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, announced late on Wednesday that protesters would be asked to leave the park so that it can be cleaned.

Deputy Mayor for Operations Cas Holloway told the protesters in a letter, "The last three weeks have created unsanitary conditions and considerable wear and tear on the park. The situation is not in the best interests of the protesters, residents or the city."

At first an attempt was made to let the protesters believe that they would be allowed to stay as the park was being cleared. But it soon became evident that the city establishment is attempting to shut down the protest.

On Thursday, Brookfield Properties which owns the park (and calls it Zuccotti Plaza, after its CEO) issued a statement that said, "The park has not been cleaned in four weeks, a process that is normally undertaken every night. Our goal is to keep the park clean, safe, and accessible to all," and added, "It will take approximately 4 hours to clean each section of the park. Once a section has been cleaned, it will be reopened to the public for lawful use consistent with our regulations."

The content of these regulations became clear when representatives of Brookfield began distributing a leaflet on Thursday to the protesters at the park outlining a list of rules for protesters after the scheduled cleanup. The rules prohibit not only "tents or other structures," which are already banned from the protest, and "storage of personal property on the ground or benches or sitting areas" but also "lying down on the ground, or lying on the benches or walkways ..."

New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly spelled this out when he told the media after an appearance at a ceremony in Battery Park on Thursday: "People will have to remove all their belongings and leave the park. After it's cleaned, they'll be able to come back. But they won't be able to bring back the gear. The sleeping bags, that sort of thing, will not be able to be brought back into the park."

In other words, the protesters will be removed by force and prevented from returning with equipment – if at all – by a cordon of police.

This is a calculated attempt to suffocate the protest that has sparked a nationwide movement against the super-rich that reflects growing anti-capitalist sentiments in the American population.

The Bloomberg administration already conducted mass arrests on September 25 when it arrested scores of people marching on Union Square and an NYPD deputy inspector was caught on video gratuitously pepper-spraying young women.

This sparked disgust across the country and among young people and workers in New York City itself. Another mass arrest of 700 occurred on the Brooklyn Bridge, when, as many protesters believe, the NYPD lured them into a trap on Saturday, October 1.

The next weekend saw the largest demonstration in the city in years, venting anger at the police but also at the conditions of social inequality, unemployment, indebtedness, and poverty under which the population lives now.

As the "Occupy" movement has spread to hundreds of cities across the US, police have used increasingly brutal tactics to break them up. Over 100 were arrested in Boston early Tuesday morning. Hundreds more have been arrested from Washington, DC to Sacramento, California and Portland, Oregon.

From the start of the occupation on September 17, the protesters at Liberty Plaza have endured a strong police presence including regular surveillance by the NYPD's TARU surveillance unit as well as tactical anti-terror units.

The protesters have also been barraged by visits from Democratic Party politicians and particularly by the trade unions, all of which are aimed at co-opting the movement under the umbrella of the Obama 2012 campaign.

Bloomberg and his advisors appear to have concluded that this process is neither rapid nor effective enough, and are now seeking to break up the occupation by force. Bloomberg himself visited the occupation on Wednesday, where protesters booed him and he left to chants of "You are the one percent!"

Thursday evening Liberty Plaza was full as usual with those who are conducting the occupation, many new arrivals as well as workers getting off work and walking through the park showing interest and support for the Occupy Wall Street protest. However, there was an underlying tension over Bloomberg's threat to force occupiers out the park.

Many of those occupying the park staged their own clean-up on Thursday, saying that they did not need, nor would they accept the city moving them to accomplish the same task.

One protester, Dan, was taping equipment up with blue duct tape

and speaking to another occupier who was carrying a large clear plastic trash bag as part of the cleaning operation for the area.

Dan took a short break to speak to the WSWS about the situation, “Personally, I think it has been shown that if Bloomberg says he will come in and clear people out of the park in sections and allow people to return if they abide by the park’s rules, it is a means to drive us out of the park. But the occupiers have decided to do the cleaning themselves. We are not allowing them in because if we let them in, they are basically going to use that as a foot in the door to kick us all out.

“The most recent example of this is in Austin, Texas where this happened last night. I don’t know exactly what happened, but they issued the same papers in Austin last night.”

Brigitte Taylor, an unemployed worker, said, “I’m here to give support because I was laid off from working for a giant casino, Caesar’s Entertainment, which has made \$26 million on a good day. If they are making this much money, which they are, why are they laying me off for no other reason than their bottom line when I was making only \$36,000 a year? This wage is actually peanuts, and I was living from paycheck to paycheck.

“I’m in my ninth month of unemployment and by January I may lose this. I want to keep working in my industry and my pay range but this doesn’t seem to be possible. I lived in Philadelphia. The casino was in Chester, Pennsylvania but now I have had to move to New York. What I was told about being laid off is that the general manager called in all the casino managers. He demanded a list of 75 to 100 people to be laid off, and he didn’t care who they were.

“I was laid off January 13. I tried to apply for other jobs. Now, no other job is hiring because they don’t hire people who are laid off. They only will hire you if you already have a job someplace else. I have been on zero interviews in nine months. I have applied to about 75 jobs. Every email I have gotten back says they have decided to go in another direction.

“I see cleaning the park out tomorrow morning is a trick to drive the protestors out of the park. I think they should stay here. They have been peaceful. They have the right to be here like you have the right to vote. You have a right to dissent. But I don’t trust Bloomberg. They may come in to drive people out tonight.”

Tom, a construction worker from New Jersey, said: “The attitude that the Democratic Party is the lesser of two evils needs to change. We need a third political party in this country. These corporations clearly don’t care too much about ordinary people. I’m not totally against capitalism, but I am against capitalism gone wild. And that’s what happened. The spending has got out of hand. These people are hoarding millions of dollars and funding all these wars while so many ordinary people in this country can’t even afford health care.”

Lucas Fontoura, a university graduate from Brooklyn, described himself as an actor who was working in a restaurant and is now unemployed. “I just heard about the cleaning operation tomorrow,” he said. “Bloomberg likes to play tricks. I think it is scary because he could use this trick to force people out and put up barricades to keep us out. I think it is a shame. We know that Bloomberg embodies the big corporations himself. The richest New Yorker is the head of politics in the city. This is the dream of

Wall Street. If he really comes in and raids this park tomorrow, everyone will be here, and it will make this be their worst day around the world.

“If people see the NYPD cracking down here, they will be enraged just as we were when we saw the Egyptian police and then the military crackdown and the police in Tunisia and Lebanon. The chance of the police coming in like this has happened many times in history. The NYPD just made 700 arrests on the Brooklyn Bridge. If this happens, it will just clarify the mayor’s stand with Wall Street. But this movement is not going to go away. If they do something to it tomorrow it will come back stronger.

“If they do something tomorrow, I think it will have been cleared with the Obama administration. Obama hasn’t said much about what is going on here. By being silent, he is supporting the people around him who are Wall Street CEOs. Obama is a disappointment. Who is Obama really? We all thought he was someone else but he has authorized more drone attacks than George Bush, and you know who gets killed in the drone attacks, it is the civilians. And he didn’t say a word about the death penalty execution of Troy Davis.

“If Bloomberg, with clearance from above, does try to trick people and drive them out of the park it will not destroy this movement. We have become too big, too strong, for this to just peter out. If they do this with the whole world watching they will give more power to the movement and they will expose themselves. The politicians who do this will sign a confession that they are the politicians of Wall Street.”

Tom, a truck driver told us, “To say that the Democrats have behaved hypocritically is an understatement. They have given themselves over to Wall Street. The capitalist system has proven that it does not provide equality for all. I think it’s great that these young people are fighting the greedy corporate bosses. It’s a necessity. These corporations have a criminal mindset. There is no doubt in my mind about that.

“This country has sacrificed a republic for an empire. It’s disgusting how the media are portraying these protests. But these kids are smart. They will not allow this movement to be dispersed by the police or to be co-opted by the Democrats.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact