

Stepped-up repression against anti-Wall Street protesters

Barry Grey**25 October 2011**

The response of the US government to the spread of anti-Wall Street protests in the US and internationally has been a marked increase in police repression and intimidation. Just last weekend, police attacked protest encampments in Chicago, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Phoenix, Dallas, Orlando and Tampa, arresting more than 200 people in all.

Similar attacks have taken place internationally, including the tearing down of protest encampments and mass arrests in Sydney and Melbourne.

Since the protests against social inequality and corporate power began more than five weeks ago in New York City, hundreds have been arrested in cities across the US, including more than 900 in New York alone.

In recent days, particularly since the global protests on October 15, police mobilizations to break up occupations have increased. The presence of police at protest sites has also been augmented, and various tactics have been employed to harass youth and workers expressing the anger of masses of people over the destruction of living standards and social conditions.

These attacks show that the struggle for social equality and against the domination of the banks and corporations is a political struggle against the state. It requires the industrial and political mobilization of the working class in opposition to the ruling class and all of its official institutions and political parties.

The stepped-up repression reflects the real attitude of the Obama administration and the Democratic Party to the demand for social equality being raised by the protests. While expressing sympathy for the demonstrators, in an attempt to co-opt the movement and channel it harmlessly behind Obama's reelection bid, Obama and company are tacitly backing the ratcheting up of police attacks.

Some of the most savage of these have been carried out in Chicago, whose Democratic mayor, Rahm Emanuel, was Obama's White House chief of staff before leaving the administration to run for mayor last year. Emanuel, a multi-millionaire former investment banker, ordered the breakup of an occupation in a section of Grant Park early Sunday

morning, resulting in the arrest of 130 people. The previous weekend, Chicago police arrested over 175 protesters.

Emanuel is typical of the Wall Street personnel who occupy top posts in the Obama administration. His replacement as White House chief of staff, William Daley, was a leading executive at JPMorgan Chase before entering the Obama administration. Obama's treasury secretary, Timothy Geithner, was president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York during the Bush administration and played a central role in organizing the bailout of the banks.

The anti-Wall Street protests are an initial expression of an emerging mass movement of the working class in the US and around the world. Of great significance is the fact, first, that they have focused on the basic social question of inequality and reflect a growth of anti-capitalist sentiment, and, second, that they express a growing awareness of the international character of the struggle.

Following the revolutionary upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt, the mass protests earlier this year in Wisconsin, and the escalating struggles of the working class in Greece and other European countries, the resistance of workers and youth to mass unemployment and austerity policies is increasingly informed by the understanding that they face a common enemy in the global banks and corporations.

The American ruling elite and both of its parties—the Democrats as well as the Republicans—fear that the anti-Wall Street protests could spark a much broader movement of the working class, emerging outside the control of the Democratic Party and the right-wing, pro-capitalist trade unions that back the Democrats. They have responded to the emergence of the protest first with repression—the arrest of 700 demonstrators October 1 in New York—and, when that only fueled the protest movement, the deployment of the trade union bureaucracy and its allies to bring the movement under control and channel it behind the Democrats.

That effort continues unabated, but has run up against the skepticism and distrust of the youth for the unions, which have helped impose all of the cuts in social programs, wages and jobs, as well as disillusionment with Obama and the

Democrats. Now the political offensive to strangle the protests is being combined with an escalation of police repression.

This poses urgent political issues before the anti-Wall Street movement. Unless the mantra of “no politics” imposed by the organizers is rejected and a program adopted that articulates the independent interests of the working class, the movement will inevitably be channeled behind the Democrats and aborted. The call for “no politics” is intended to appeal to the desire of the youth for unity and their justified disgust with bourgeois politics. However, it conceals its own political agenda—opposition to any fight against the corporate-controlled two-party system.

Historically, the Democratic Party has been the graveyard of social struggles of working people in the US, going all the way back to the Populist Movement of the late 19th century, to the industrial union movement of the 1930s, to the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s. All of them were channeled into the Democratic Party, and thereby not only rendered harmless to the corporate-financial elite, but ultimately turned into new props for capitalist rule.

The mass protests against the war in Iraq suffered the same fate, being channeled behind the election campaigns of Democrats and then wound down once Obama entered the White House.

The Obama administration, which came to power by appealing to mass hostility to Bush and the Republicans and their policies of social reaction, war and attacks on democratic rights, has demonstrated the futility of the perspective of pressuring the political establishment to carry out progressive change. Obama has continued and escalated the right-wing policies of Bush and faithfully carried out the dictates of Wall Street.

Indeed, the median income of Americans has fallen by 10 percent since 2007, and it has declined twice as rapidly under Obama as under Bush.

The most politically pernicious role is played by middle-class pseudo-left organizations such as the International Socialist Organization which work to derail the movement by promoting the trade union bureaucracy and its perspective of subordinating the working class to the Democrats. At the same time, they promote identity politics, elevating race, gender and sexual orientation into the fundamental social categories, which has been used for decades to block the development of an independent political movement of the working class.

The very fact that in every country the government, whether nominally “left” or “right,” is carrying out a policy of brutal austerity against the working class testifies to the international and systemic character of the economic crisis. It is a crisis of the world capitalist system.

The demand for social equality cannot be met within the framework of this historically bankrupt system. The program of the ruling class—bank bailouts, austerity, war and the destruction of democratic rights—must be opposed with a political program based on the independent interests of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party proposes that the working class adopt the concept that there exist social rights that are inalienable and non-negotiable. These rights include the right to a job and a livable income; the right to high-quality public education and health care, free of charge; the right to housing and utilities; the right to a secure retirement; and the right to a healthy environment and access to culture.

The fight to secure these rights requires a fundamental, revolutionary change in society—the replacement of capitalism with socialism. This entails the expropriation of the banks and major corporations and their transformation into public institutions under the democratic control of working people, so that production can be based on social need, not private profit.

The social force capable of carrying out this change is the working class. It is to this force that young people who want to fight for social equality must turn, fighting to mobilizing workers independently of the trade unions and the Democratic Party. This requires the building of a new party to provide leadership and arm the working class with a socialist and internationalist program.

We urge all youth and workers to read the program of the Socialist Equality Party, *The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States*, and make the decision to join our party.



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