

New York City: “We are looking for equality”

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Thousands of people demonstrated in Times Square, the heart of New York City, Saturday as part of the worldwide protests against social inequality and Wall Street.

The demonstrators, most of them young and many from the working class, assembled at Liberty Plaza, the park in the city’s financial district that has been occupied by anti-Wall Street protesters for a month. Thousands of others assembled in Washington Square Park, two miles north.

Smaller marches from Liberty Plaza protested outside the financial titan JPMorgan Chase in the afternoon and other locations. In the evening, about 5,000 marched from Washington Square park to 46th Street near Times Square, where police segregated them into separate fenced-in “kettles” in the area.

Over 80 protesters were arrested throughout the day, including about 40 in Times Square and 23 at a Citibank branch in Greenwich Village as they attempted to close their bank accounts. Bank staff locked them inside and summoned police to arrest them.

Police in riot gear cleared protesters from Washington Square Park at midnight and arrested several people for violating the park’s midnight curfew. Roughly 2,500 people, most of them students and young people, had marched back to the park and held an assembly there. Police had fenced in the entire park, while deploying mounted cops at two entrances to intimidate the demonstrators.

Protesters carried homemade signs and placards that read, “We are the 99%. We will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%!” and chanted, “Banks got bailed out, we got sold out!”

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed thousands of copies of the WSWs perspective “The Way Forward in the Struggle against Wall Street.” Many of the demonstrators gathered around an SEP literature table in Liberty Plaza to discuss the need for socialist policies and a turn to the working class in the struggle against Wall Street and capitalism. Scores of people purchased copies of the SEP’s program “The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States” as well as other socialist literature.

Bryan, who lives in the New York City borough of Queens, graduated one year ago from St. Johns University, where he studied English, but only has just found a job doing marketing for a small business. Like many students and graduates, his position is precarious. “I have at least \$50,000 of student debt. The current education system is set up so only the wealthy can afford to learn. Education should be a right.

“I have been wanting to be here at Occupy Wall Street but was too afraid. But the fact that it was almost ended yesterday and that I had not contributed made me come down here. I want to help, to change the future. And I want to thank the people in the Middle East who inspired us.

“We have been given false hope that there would be all these opportunities around and that we would be able to feed our families.

My family lost our apartment, couldn’t afford it. Luckily the landlord was a nice one and let us stay but then my parents had to go back to Peru. My father works in advertising and when the economy goes down so does advertising work.”

We asked Bryan what he thought of President Obama. He said, “Right now we have two parties in government that do pretty much the same but have only superficial differences. There is no choice when we vote besides the millionaire on one side and the millionaire on the other side. Look at what Obama is doing. He said we should have hope and change but we don’t have any of that, just more of the same. I want a system where the people have power, jobs, jobs that pay a good wage, where people don’t have to be afraid of where they can’t put food on the table. And I want my tax dollars to go to schools, firefighters, teachers and infrastructure. I don’t want my taxes to go to blowing things up so we can power SUVs.”

Alfred Cain, an older worker from Brooklyn, explained his reason for being at the OWS. “When I was 17 I was influenced by Malcolm X. I was drafted and sent to Vietnam. Shortly after, I joined the Black Panther Party. I think we mobilized a lot but not enough. We were young and did not accept the need for long-term organizing. You learn by doing and it is good that conditions have forced so many to start doing. A lot of the people will learn this is a commitment that goes on and on until there are enough people to revolutionize society. I want to see the broad masses in control of their lives and the rich gone, peace and prosperity. What brought me out now was when the police sprayed those girls with pepper spray. I needed to show solidarity and I should have been out sooner.”

Coming from Tenafly, New Jersey, Benjamin Porter is a construction worker in carpentry and working a second job at a grocery store while also going to school at Bergen County Community College. “There is great economic injustice with the banks being bailed out and nobody else getting any of it,” he said, “I like Obama personally but the two-party system is insane. I can see what you are saying about needing an alternative. I used to live in Madison, Wisconsin where there is a more socialist way of life out there, the public transportation, care for the homeless. I am more a Democrat but getting sick of the two-party system. I am up for heavily changing the system.”

Devin Graham is an unemployed 18-year-old from Flint, Michigan, the former auto center that now has the second highest poverty rate of any city in the US. We spoke to him as he was sitting on the ledge of a wall at the back of Liberty Plaza, calling out chants that people marching to protest JPMorganChase took up.

“I came here from Flint because I think that the corporations are what’s wrong with this country. It’s like we’re in a maze. They have us trapped, and they only do what’s good for them. My dad worked in manufacturing to the day he died. Every year he expected a pay raise and every year he was disappointed.”

Jacquel Ward, 28, said, “The police want to intimidate the movement. They are using Gestapo tactics to suppress free speech. This movement is very grassroots. We are looking for equality.

“I live in the Bronx, which is like a wasteland. In some places, people are so disenfranchised, they feel that there is no hope. There has been no change as promised by the Obama administration.

“The laws are for the rich who want to keep the Democrats and the Republicans in power. The two parties are in cahoots with each other. They act like there are big differences, but it is a big game, a charade.

“The politicians from both parties do whatever keeps them in power, which means representing the interests of big business. It is the corporations that fund their campaigns. Lobbying is a big business. I do not know too many people that can afford to sponsor an event that donates \$13,000 for a plate of food.

“I work two jobs, one in catering and one in maintenance. While I am still struggling, I know a lot of people who are struggling a lot harder than me. They do not have a home, and some people have lost theirs due to foreclosures and evictions. A lot of people I know do not have enough money to feed their kids. Some people have found part-time jobs and as a result lost their social programs like food stamps and Medicaid.

“Workers are losing social programs that they need. The life for the 99 percent is getting worse. For the 1 percent, things are looking good—if they lose money; they know that they can always get bailed out by the government.”

Ketti, a New York City schoolteacher brought her children Francine, Melanie and Matt to Liberty Park Plaza and spoke to the WWS, “I’m here because we wanted to support and help. The girls made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and we dropped them off. I wanted to show them that coming together and unifying for a cause makes a difference.

“Today education is being poorly defended. There is too much emphasis on test scores, on teacher evaluations, and the individuality of the teacher is being stripped away. We have to say things the way the DOE demands. There is a business end to all of this. The charter schools are designed to attack teachers and force us to work for less with no rights.

“There is a charter school in this neighborhood around Wall Street where teachers work from 8:00 in the morning to 8:00 at night with no additional pay. Bush put in ‘No Child Left Behind,’ Obama has put in ‘Race to the Top.’ This means teachers will teach to the test. There is no art, no music, no love of literature. There is no thinking out of the box.

Drew Bertelsen is a student at Hofstra University. He explained, “Obama has accepted more corporate funds in his election campaign than any candidate in history. He supported the bank bailout. He has continued the same spending on the military. We are still in Iraq. Afghanistan is still going on, and he has started more wars in Libya, Pakistan and Yemen. We are sending drones into Pakistan. They are not smart bombs. Civilians are being killed.

“These are wars for oil. You need fuel to run the military industrial complex. This is oil. They continue to justify these wars with humanitarian rhetoric or as the war against terror.

“The policy of preemptive war goes against international law. Because if you give one country the right to declare war at will, it violates all international principles.

“The government only cares about the interests of big business. It is not about defending people, but listening to the corporations. I think that we need a new party. The problems today are class problems. The

Civil War was about sectional differences. Today it is about class differences.”

Eric, 24 told us, “After the police brutality at Brooklyn Bridge, I had to get involved. In general the protestors have been extremely peaceful and they have to deal with this aggressive treatment from the cops daily. The police are part of that one per cent.

“I work as a contractor and am pursuing a career as a dancer and actor. Being an artist in New York City is extremely difficult, difficult to do it full-time. You have to work a day job and then I am often very tired when I’m dancing or when I’m trying to audition for something. The current system does not really support artists, as of course all money is going to that 1 per cent. As an artist I feel silenced.”

Kareem Youssef, a student, said, “Initially I thought these protests were just a bunch of hipsters trying to be cool. But that is not the case. I came down to protest because I don’t know if there’s a future for me the way things are right now. I work 36 hours a week at American Apparel, which gives me little time to study.

“The two parties in this country are a puppet system. There needs to be an entire revolution and entirely new party.”

Michael Peery: “I was involved in the OWS in Memphis. That movement is growing also. I’m a musician. While studying in college I had a really good teacher who turned us on to the *World Socialist Web Site* and was trying to teach us art through Marxism. This did not go down too well with the dean. He would say things like: ‘Are you teaching them to be artists or activists?’ It’s sad this attitude pervades in schools and colleges. It’s like everything is geared towards individualism and to negate political awareness. In the early 1900s in Russia the arts were more progressive and objective, reflecting the world around us. And obviously the political awareness was a lot stronger. We need to get back to that level.

“To support myself I have been working two jobs, as a caterer and in a Chinese restaurant. I find it ridiculously unfair that the dishwashers in my catering gig are paid far less money for working far more hours than I do. And one security guard who has been there for over 20 years is paid far less, also. This imbalance and inequality is crazy.”



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