

Occupy Albany protests outside New York state capitol building

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The Occupy Wall Street movement, which originated in New York City, has now spread to the capital of New York State, Albany. On Friday several hundred protestors rallied at a park diagonally across from the state capitol building to initiate an occupation modeled after the one at Liberty Plaza in New York City. The decision to undertake the occupation of Lafayette and Academy parks was reached the previous Sunday at a General Assembly of the Occupy Albany movement. That followed a rally of several hundred in front of the capitol building on Saturday which was part of the Occupy demonstrations held around the world.

The location of the occupation, which encompasses adjacent city- and state-owned parks illustrates the tactically nuanced response of the Democratic Party to the Occupy movement. Governor Andrew Cuomo, who since taking office last January has pushed through massive budget cuts and attacked state worker unions with the threat of thousands of layoffs, has taken a hard line against the protestors. He has insisted that the occupation could not continue beyond Lafayette Park's 11 P.M. curfew. On the other hand, Albany Mayor Jerry Jennings, like Cuomo a Democrat, has allowed tents to be set up and protestors to remain overnight in the adjacent, city-owned Academy Park, at least for now. He has made no definitive statement regarding whether this will be allowed to continue. Cuomo is reportedly exerting increasing pressure on Jennings to reverse his decision and expel the campers.

As in the rest of the country, Occupy Albany encompasses sharp contradictions due to the desire of the main organizers to put forth an all-encompassing message in which political differences are muted and "consensus" is maintained. Establishment figures including trade union representatives from the Communications Workers of America and local Democratic politicians such as Congressman Paul Tonko, have made appearances at the rallies and meetings seeking to keep the movement within the bounds of the existing political structure.

At the same time, discussions with many participants reveal the deep level of anger and frustration over their personal situations and conditions more generally and a profound skepticism and distrust of existing political organizations and unions. However, the supposedly "ultra-democratic" and consensus-seeking formal

structure of the assemblies lead to its opposite—the neutralization of anything more than the most muted discussion of political issues. At Friday's General Assembly which began the occupation a weak statement was proposed that criticized "Wall Street capitalism" as responsible for the economic crisis. However, even this received objections from the crowd.

The WSWS spoke with numerous participants at the Friday rally who expressed anger and frustration at loss of jobs, low wages, and mountains of student loan debt.

Bob Rosinsky described the change in his views regarding the economic system and the Democrats based on his personal experience.

"I'm participating because I'm pissed off about everything that's going on in this country. I worked for a company for a week short of 30 years when they called me in on a Tuesday and said—'get your things, don't even get your things, you've got to leave now'. And I was—'no, I'm not going to leave now'. I have people that I've worked side by side with for 30 years and you tell me that you're just going to push me out the door? I didn't do anything wrong but they treated by like I was a criminal. That was back in November of '09 and I haven't worked since."

Bob works with musicians in the Albany area and had done a benefit for Democratic Representative Paul Tonko when he was running for congress some years ago. Recently, Bob ran into Tonko. "He recognized me. He knew who I was. And I said to him, 'I've been unemployed since October of '09. And, I got from him not 'I understand what's going on'. I got a stump speech. I got a stump speech! I couldn't believe it. If this is a guy that I believed in to donate my time to try to help him out, he don't give a shit about me. That's the beginning of my upset with everything that's going on. And this 'corporations are people' is an absolute joke."

Asked whether he thought that Democrats represent working people, he said, "I'm beginning to think more and more every day that that's not really the case. If that was the case, we wouldn't have Timothy Geithner. If that's not Wall Street, what is? And that was the first day. We should have known then."

Bob had great hopes in Obama which have now been dashed. "I'm very disappointed. He doesn't stand up for anything," he said.

"It's very hard when you were brought up in a labor family and

been a Democrat for all my life. It looks like we need an independent party. We need a third party that's going to go out there and stand up for the rights of the working people and get jobs for the people."

Jasmine Shea spoke about the frustration of having studied and worked hard only to be left struggling to survive.

"I'm a worker. I'm 26. I went to school. I'm still paying off my student loans. I got a job in radio broadcasting. That's what my career was. Due to the economy, the station that I was at went under and they changed their format. So I had to find a minimum wage job working at Dunkin Donuts. I finally found a part-time job working as a waitress to try to pay off my medical bills. I'm here because I make so little that if they keep on taxing me more I won't be able to survive. I think it's time that the rich and the corporations had to start paying their fair share of taxes. Because if I'm living off ramen noodles and dollar menus what else am I going to live off of if you're going to take more money from me? It's hard struggling."

"I'm here also to fight for people like my aunt who has worked at Key Bank for 15 years and is a top person in her field. Her job just got sent overseas. And she works from home because she has MS [multiple sclerosis]. It just baffles my mind that her job was taken away so easily."

"It's sad to see my friends who went to school and had their jobs and are now stuck working minimum wage and are now trying to figure out how they can go back to school to find another job that's not there. The Republicans keep on saying you can't tax the job creators. Well they're not creating anything."

"I don't think the people in Washington are thinking about the future. They're thinking about themselves. We are the future. I am the future. If I have kids, my kids are the future. And I want them to know that they are going to have jobs when they [grow up]. My mom always said 'go to school, go to college, get a job'. I did, now there aren't any jobs. So what am I going to do?"

Education was a central concern of many participants. Jeff Maynard said, "Money should be going to education, school books, roads, the buses, everything to do for kids because kids are the future. What they're doing right now, I don't know if they've really got a soul because they're ruining our kids' lives. Without our kids' future we're not going to have a future."

A young woman student at the State University of New York at Albany, who asked to remain anonymous, described the difficulties of trying to get a college education.

"As a college student it is extremely, extremely hard to find a job. And, on top of that I'm in so much student loan debt. I want to see in the future that there are opportunities for college students to get a job to pay off our student loans. And if there is no job opportunities then you can forgive our student loans."

"I do believe in socialist democracy where you can have both democracy and socialist economic policies where everyone is equal under the law."

"The whole system of this government needs to change from the root. If you're going to change a certain aspect of the policies then the problem is still going to exist."

Tim Fake is a law student at Union Graduate College.

"I'm here because I'm tired of capitalism to be honest with you. I'm tired of corporations basically being able to take as much profit as they want at the expense of the workers. There's a whole collection of issues. There is an umbrella. The umbrella is capitalism, the problems with capitalism."

With regard to the Democrats Tim said, "I think they're far too right for me. I think they are just as guilty as the Republicans."

"The system is broken. There's no reforming it. It's just too corrupt. Coming from the inside of actually seeing some of the stuff at law school and I also work at the AG's [Attorney General] office in consumer frauds and just seeing the internal problems, constantly seeing the corporations being able to get away with hurting innocent people. And the laws are ok with that."

Bill Preston is a state worker and member of the Public Employees Federation (PEF) which is currently engaged in voting on a slightly revised contract offer which includes significant cuts in wages and benefits (See, "New York governor says layoffs will follow rank-and-file contract rejection").

"I don't think the cuts would have been necessary if governor 'one percent' would have extended the billionaires [millionaires] tax. He wanted \$450 million from us. The billionaires tax cost him \$4 billion. So that would have taken care of state workers and it would have taken care of education and it would have taken care of a lot of other things. But governor one percent is for the one percent." He believes that although PEF members rejected the first contract offer, the minimally revised second offer will pass in order to avoid the threatened 3,500 layoffs.

With respect to democratic governor Cuomo, Preston said, "He got gay marriage through so that he could have something on his resume that people would think was liberal. Other than that he's the Rupert Murdoch, David Koch puppet."



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