

New York: “At this point a social revolution is necessary”

A reporting team
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The anti-Wall Street occupation in lower Manhattan has now entered its fourth week. This past weekend saw an increasing number of visitors and sympathizers filling Liberty Park to capacity as the protests spread to scores of other cities around the country and internationally. The WSWS spoke with protestors who described the lack of jobs, crippling debt, attacks on vital social services, and the dismal prospects for the future driving them to join the protests.

Trevor Roulstin, who is currently unemployed, came to the occupation in lower Manhattan from Colorado. “What is happening here is that everyone has their own list of grievances,” he said. “Mine is that when I work, I work 50 hours a week and get two paychecks a month. The first paycheck goes to rent, and the second paycheck goes for food. I am lucky if I have \$10 or \$15 left at the end of the month.” He explained that he saw no difference between his situation and indentured servitude.

Amanda DeBisschop arrived in New York with a group of a half dozen from her graduate school in Brattleboro, Vermont. “There is no way I couldn’t come here,” she stated. “I recognize and participate in this frustration, and seeing this embodied in a group of people, I felt I had to be here.”

Amanda continued, “I have been jobless since I graduated two years ago from Marlboro College. My degree is in language and literature. I got very little response from anybody when I applied for jobs in teaching and in research. There are so many people looking for work in these fields that I felt like I was being drowned in a sea of applicants. So I’ve gone back to graduate school. I haven’t had health insurance since I’ve been out of school. It is impossible to drag yourself into even a comfortable position to live under

these circumstances. But it could end up being futile the way things are going. A Masters degree may be as useless as a BA.”

This sentiment is not confined to students and youth, who early on predominated among the protesters. As Occupy Wall Street has expanded, a growing mix of generations has descended upon Liberty Park. Retired educator Diallo Acey told the WSWS, “Today is the second day I have been here. I came to see what is going on and if I could help people. We are living in tough economic times with widespread unemployment and poverty.”

Diallo stressed his disgust with the bipartisan attacks on Social Security. “They shouldn’t touch it. It is the people’s money. We made it. The government is supposed to protect it,” he said. “If Social Security is gone, what are these people going to do? There will be a revolution. All I have Social Security. I need this. It is my means of survival.”

Jesse Zayas, who graduated eight months ago from Nyack College and has been unable to land work since, explained his motivation for joining the anti-Wall Street protest march last week. “I am here for solidarity of the workers. There is a wealth gap. We don’t get benefits, and we work endless hours for minimum wages. I think most people coming out of college face this. I am in debt \$35,000, and I cannot get a job.”

Jesse expressed outrage at the bankers and financial swindlers who dominate Wall Street, whom he sees as responsible for the economic crisis. He added, “I think Wall Street is bigger than just New York. It is the business of Wall Street to employ workers for little money and no benefits. We are given crappy jobs. Last week I was working for 60 hours with no benefits or health care, and I cannot pay my rent. I graduated summa cum laude at my school, and I still can’t get a

job.”

The lessons being drawn from conditions of growing economic insecurity, joblessness and destitution side-by-side with the extraordinary levels of wealth includes the recognition that both political parties represent the interests of the elite against the majority. Josh from Massachusetts expressed precisely this sentiment. “Obama’s the problem. Bush is the problem. Virtually every president we had is the problem,” he said. “The two party system serves only the rich. It should be gone. It has been politically funded by the corporations for far too long. Obama has sold out to the pharmaceuticals, sold out to the banks, sold out to everything.”

Anger at extreme levels of inequality, with the financial elite at one end, and masses of unemployed workers at the other, was also expressed by Robert, a former American Airlines flight attendant, who was let go after 35 years of service. He stated, “I came down here because we are all in the same boat. And right now we are all getting shafted, while these corporate bosses make up to eleven billion dollars in profit each year. They’re making that kind of money while ordinary workers cannot even get vacation pay. It’s ridiculous. It has to change.”

Several protestors spoke of the need to resist attempts by Democratic politicians to contain the protests and channel them back into established political forms.

“I fear that this movement can be absorbed back into the Democratic party and marginalized,” John Ashley explained. “You saw this happen with the anti-war movement. Obama was elected as an anti-war candidate to end both of the wars by 2011, I believe. The wars are still going on, and it costs \$1 million per soldier per year to fund them. Not that the soldiers are making that money.”

He continued, “Even with the Tea Party it has happened. Once the Koch brothers and Dick Arney got involved, they absorbed them into the right wing of the Republican Party. So I am worried that this will be absorbed by the Democrats, and there would be no fundamental change, just more of the same.”

“The best that could come out of this is how we view ourselves as a collective and get things done,” Trevor Roulstin said. “This is beyond the politics of today; that this, is beyond the Democrats and Republicans. A lot of people are here because the government is working

against them. I don’t believe the Democrats, Republicans or Greens are representing us.”

Among the occupiers who previously held illusions in the Obama Administration, many now have reached a turning point. “I had thought Obama was for the people. I had thought he was sincere about health care reform,” Nick told the WSWS. “I’m fed up with the whole system. A giant movement is necessary. In fact, an oppositional party is necessary. The change needs to come from the bottom up. Obama’s just a great manipulator.”

This sentiment was echoed by Cat, a young woman who was at the protests for the first time on Saturday. “Right off the bat Obama did state that he would withdraw troops from Iraq and Afghanistan,” she said. Instead he’s just putting more money into wars, money that should be put into education in this country. A lot of Democrats consider socialism a dirty word. But what’s dirty about fulfilling basic democratic needs? Occupy Wall Street is just the beginning of the protesting. We are constantly misinformed by the mass media. We need awareness. We need education. A shift in perspective. At this point a social revolution is necessary.”



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