

Pittsburgh, Penn.: “They don’t treat us as humans”

Our reporter
17 October 2011

About 150 people occupied Mellon Square in downtown Pittsburgh Saturday and spent the night setting up tents and bringing the Occupy Wall Street movement to Pittsburgh. The setting up of the tent city followed a march and demonstration of over 3,500 people through downtown Pittsburgh.

Chanting, “Banks get bailed out. We got sold out,” “Health care for all,” and “1 2 3 4 we declare class war,” the march stretched for more than half a mile as it wound its way through the downtown area, stopping in front of major financial institutions such as PNC Bank and Bank of New York Mellon, and corporate headquarters such as US Steel and UPMC, the giant health care provider and insurer in the region.

The marchers also made stops in front of City Hall and the Federal Building. Chanting slogans and carrying homemade signs, the march included a broad section of the population. In addition to many young people and college students there were entire families with their children, and elderly. Many people traveled from surrounding counties and one group drove down from Erie.

The march ended in Market Square, where people spoke and music played. Around 3:30 the marchers made their way up to Mellon Square, where those who planned to spend the night began setting up camp.

Bank of New York Mellon, which owns the park, stated that for now they would not request the city to evict the protesters. On the surface, police presence was minimal compared to the last major protests in Pittsburgh during the G20 summit in 2009. At the time, police carried out mass arrests of hundreds of protesters and used gas and pepper spray along with a new deafening sonic device.

At Saturday’s demonstration, police were seen mainly directing traffic. However, there were sizable

units kept in reserve and sharpshooters and cameramen on the rooftops.

Kevin, an International Students for Social Equality member from the University of Pittsburgh, addressed the rally before the beginning of the March. He stressed the international character of this movement: “It started with movements in Tunisia and Egypt, and came to America in the form of the struggle in Wisconsin.”

Kevin went on to point out the bankruptcy of relying upon the Democratic Party and stressed the need for the adoption of socialist policies by the group. “The fight for social equality is the fight for socialism,” he said. “The calls for a rejection of politics in leadership are bankrupt. They are in fact calls for the defeat of this movement, for the co-opting of the movement back into the safety of the current political establishment. What is necessary is an independent movement of the working class against capitalism. I urge all of you to take up the fight for social equality and the struggle for socialism.”

Mother and daughter Sue Dawson and Jordon Apodaca attended the rally from Butler, Pennsylvania. “We are pretty much tired of the Wall Street corruption,” said Sue. “We don’t believe in tax breaks for the wealthy while they are cutting everything for the little man.

Unemployment in Butler County, which is north of Pittsburgh, was 3.4 percent in 2007 before shooting up to nearly 9 percent in 2010. It has fallen a little to just over 7 percent, but tens of thousands of people who have given up looking for work are no longer counted.

“It is hard for people; there aren’t any good jobs,” Sue continued. She is especially upset with the continued push to privatize government services in Pennsylvania, including education, the highways and many social services. In particular she was outraged at the privatization of the juvenile justice system and the

abuses that this has lead to. “Last year a judge was found to have been receiving kickbacks for sending children to a privately run prison,” she said. “The justice system already has a lot of problems and now you add the corruption to it.”

Jordon, who graduated from high school this past spring, has her emergency medical technician and firefighters certifications, but has been unable to find work. “I have put in applications all over the place,” she told us, “and as soon as they find out I am a women, they don’t want to hire me. I have a high school diploma, I did well in school, scored well on my SATs, but I can’t get a job.”

“My friend who is 20 is working all the time,” she added, “but they never let her get 40 hours so they don’t have to pay her benefits.”

Jordon has been accepted to, and plans to attend, Slippery Rock University in January but is afraid of debt. She said, “I am trying to figure out what would be the best major. You spend all this money for college, go into all this debt and then you can’t get a job.

“The whole system is corrupt. With the corporations, lobbyists and politicians it turns into a greed fest. They said there is no class war, but there has been class war of the top 1 percent against the rest of us and we have been asleep.”

Julia Willis who took part in the march said she felt this movement was “amazing” and thought “this is a long-term movement.” She has been “very involved with many social activist movements such as labor and health care” and believes that the Occupy Wall Street movement will bring “changes to the way things are done in the US.”

She believes that politicians and the top 1 percent “don’t treat us as humans.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact