

Occupy Pittsburgh: “Transportation shouldn’t be a privilege, it is a right”

A reporter
21 October 2011

Since last Saturday, more than 150 people from the Occupy Pittsburgh protest have set up camp in Mellon Square in downtown Pittsburgh. They have been receiving strong support from workers, students and other people who have donated food and money to support the protest.

The weather was good for the first few nights, but Wednesday evening brought a rainstorm and temperatures dropped into the low 40s.

Each morning the protesters have been picketing on the sidewalk, holding up their banners and signs for commuters on their way to work. During the lunch hour, they have been joined by hundreds of others as they march around the downtown area with office workers watching, some even lowering signs from their windows.

Jim Bonner and Rusty Burns were two of the 160 bus drivers laid off in March from Port Authority Transit, which operates bus and trolley service in Pittsburgh and the surrounding county.

Jim said, “I am taking part in this because we need a dedicated funding for mass transit. They laid us off in March and already they are talking about another service cut in the spring. If they go through with those cuts you are talking almost the complete elimination of night and weekend service.

“It is not only the 160 bus drivers and mechanics who lost their jobs, but the thousands of other people who lost their jobs, because they depend upon bus service to get to work. Not everyone can afford a car when you are making just the minimum wage. These are the people working the nights and weekends that need transportation that was cut.”

Jim added, “I drove in Braddock. Someone would get on and say, ‘Can you take me to the hospital?’ [UPMC shut down the hospital in Braddock last year and

residents have to travel to Pittsburgh for health care] I said, ‘I’ll call you an ambulance,’ and he told me not to because he didn’t have health insurance.

“People need public transportation to get to hospitals and see their doctors, to go shopping and visit friends. Transportation shouldn’t be a privilege, it is a right.”

Rusty said, “What does it tell the rest of the country, when you don’t even have good public transportation?

“I get real angry—they are taking food out of my family’s mouths. I am still getting unemployment, but that is not enough. After our bills are paid, I am left with \$41 a week to pay for gas and food. We are not living high off the hog here.

“All the politicians lie. Mr. Green, Al Gore, flies around in a private jet. The CEO of UPMC, makes \$3 million a year, yet it is called a non-profit, while half the people go around without health insurance. They close hospitals in the poor neighborhoods and open them in the wealthy ones.

“Private health care should not be allowed—this is something that everyone needs. Everybody’s civil rights are being violated. The top 1 percent have all the marbles and they don’t want to allow anyone else to get any.

“I think the Democrats are just as much a part of the problem as the Republicans. They are both just working for those with the money and they don’t care about you and me.”



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