

Portland, Oregon: “A democracy run by the wealthy is a plutocracy”

Hector Cordon
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Several blocks of demonstrators marched through the downtown core of Portland, Oregon Saturday with Occupy Portland in opposition to Wall Street and the war in Afghanistan. Occupy Portland voted to join with the “10 Years in Afghanistan: End the Wars” rally and march that had been planned by another organization.

The setting at Shemansky Park, where the long-time anti-war pressure group Peace and Justice Works began its event, was remarkably subdued with only a few tens of people milling around even 15 minutes before the rally was to begin.

Suddenly the arrival of Occupy Portland (which began its march from the park it occupies), accompanied by the banging of drums and music from tubas and horns, transformed the mostly empty park into a sea of people energetically expressing an anti-capitalist outlook. The march stopped at Lownsdale Square, where supporters of Occupy Portland have stayed since the mass October 6 march in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street.

Estimates by the police, which notoriously lowball numbers at left events, said that 4,000 attended the rally and march. At the kickoff rally and march for Occupy Portland on October 6, the *Oregonian* reported 10,000 participants in that event, while police placed the size at 5,000. Other local protests organized under the Occupy banner drew 2,000 in Eugene, Oregon and 700 in Vancouver, Washington, according to police estimates.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Students for Social Equality found a huge interest in the SEP statement, “The way forward in the fight against Wall Street,” passing out nearly 800, with many people coming over to request the leaflet.

The WSWS spoke with Benny Santiago, a young worker, who had hitchhiked with a friend 120 miles from The Dalles, Oregon to participate in the Occupy Portland march. “I came here to support Occupy, and for everyone thinking for themselves instead of what is forced on them,” he said, “We need to take action for our own beliefs. I’m more Republican than Democrat, but there should be more freedom. Obama does what he wants to do; he hasn’t followed through on what he said he would do. With all honesty, I don’t see his movement going anywhere.”

Steve Beining and Jacqui Eliot, who both work for area community colleges, told us of their situation. Steve said, “I’m a teacher specializing in Internet education. The push is to do more and more work for less and less pay, meanwhile the top gets greater wealth.”

Jacqui, who works as a counselor, said, “The situations for students are horrific, they are in a crisis. They no longer have access to community resources. Rent, utilities and mental health, for which medication is a huge difficulty. Students have no employment and no resource to find employment. It is a set-up for disaster.”

Steve interjected, “I hope they get policymakers to get revenue by taxing the rich and stop the war on the working class.” Jacqui noted, “The trickle-down theory is not working.”

Alex Markey is a Portland area resident who goes to college in Tacoma. He said, “I’m here for a lot of reasons. A democracy run by the wealthy is a plutocracy. It’s impossible to have a participatory democracy if political power is determined by

economic power.

“That sign [Alex points to one held by a protester] says 49 percent of young adults cannot find jobs. I am not sure about that number, but I am extremely pessimistic about my job prospects. I am not worried so much by unemployment but by underemployment. My friends tend to be politically aware. We’re involved with Occupy Tacoma. I think that people should have jobs.”

Marcy Westerling stopped us to ask for some of our leaflets to pass out to her friends. She told us, “My current reality is that I am on a wait list for chemotherapy drugs, drugs which are available in Vietnam and just about anywhere but here. I don’t have time to wait; I’m in stage four ovarian cancer. I am here in hopes of opening up drug supplies for other people. The connection between big pharma and Wall Street equals crisis. The reason [for the shortage] is that they can’t charge more—most of the drugs in short supply are out of patent.”



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