

Anti-Wall Street protesters rally in Norfolk, Virginia

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Around 100 supporters of the Occupy Wall Street movement demonstrated on Saturday in downtown Norfolk, just outside of the local Bank of America headquarters. The organizers of Occupy Norfolk started a Facebook group two weeks ago that now has over 4,200 members.

The demonstration consisted of a rally that was followed by a march through downtown, ending with a general assembly, or planning meeting. The organizers have been in discussions with the city and police about where they might be allowed to set up an indefinite occupation of a public space, in the style of other demonstrations around the US.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with organizers and participants. For many of the younger demonstrators, this was their first protest. The WSWS distributed the statement “Occupy Wall Street and the Democratic Party.”

Nate Burkheimer, a student at Tidewater Community College, had never previously participated in a protest. He said, “Why am I here today? I am a student working three jobs to keep up with my student loan debt. I am in debt right now for \$40,000. I am upset about this and the fact that there are no job prospects.”

Maria Hotson, also a student at Tidewater Community College, told the WSWS she wanted the big banks to get out of politics. “I am worried that there will be no jobs in my field of study, which is paleoanthropology. I have no future for a career.”

Chris Sershon, one of the organizers, told this reporter, “There are a thousand and one reasons I am out here today. We need to get money out of politics. I do not believe that a corporation donating unlimited money to a political campaign constitutes free speech.

That just means that whoever has more money has more of a right to free speech, which is unfair.”

He expressed concern about fiscal responsibility. When asked about cuts to social services such as Medicare, he said these cuts were unacceptable and irresponsible.

Mandi, an EKG technician at a local hospital, told the WSWS: “Inequality runs rampant in our country. I lost my son’s father recently to suicide. We tried for 10 years to get him whatever health care was available. He had bipolar disorder.

“The medicine he needed cost \$600 per month without insurance. I learned about the Wall Street protest from the news. I had been waiting for something like this because we are making less and less money even though we work more and more hours. I followed the events in Egypt and was very proud of them.

“I am also disgusted with the courts. For a middle class person, legal representation costs about twice what they make per hour. The middle class can’t get a fair chance in the courts.”

The WSWS also spoke to Karen Brown, a political science major. “Bank of America paid zero dollars in taxes last year but they got a \$1 billion tax refund,” she said. “The CEO got a bonus of \$3.4 million, even as he slashed 30,000 jobs. How’s that for a ‘job creator?’ I am here because of the jobs situation and the influence of corporate money. How can their unlimited campaign contributions be free speech?”

This writer addressed the rally, saying:

“No one can deny the international nature of the

current uprising. It reaches from Cairo to the Chinese provinces, from Madrid to London, from New York to LA. The international nature of these struggles is anything but a coincidence. Rather, they represent an embryonic but powerful upsurge in working class militancy and resistance to the efforts of the capitalist class to make them pay for the economic crisis through austerity measures.

“These protests express hostility to a social system that generates ten percent unemployment, unparalleled poverty and social inequality, not to mention a never-ending series of imperialist wars.

“It is becoming crystal clear to millions of people that the entire political system serves only the narrow interests of the wealthiest one percent of the population.

“What is the way forward for working people in the fight against Wall Street?

“The banks, finance houses and huge multinational corporations must be expropriated and nationalized and placed under the democratic control of the working population. Instead of being run for the purpose of creating massive profits for one percent of the population, the productive assets of society should be directed to address social need.

“The global economy must be reconstructed in order to guarantee the social rights of all, including the right to free public education through graduate school, including the immediate cancellation of all student loan debt; the right to quality health care; the right to a good-paying job. There is plenty of work to be done, including in rebuilding this country’s infrastructure.

“These rights also include the right to safe and affordable housing; the right to utilities and transportation; the right to a healthy, sustainable environment; the right to leisure and culture; the right to a secure retirement.

“None of these basic social rights can be achieved within the framework of the two big business parties.

“May this movement remain independent of their

corrupt influences, cultivate its own leadership, reach out to workers and to protestors worldwide, and organize mass political and industrial action in a conscious struggle to end capitalism around the world and to bring about the revolutionary socialist transformation of society.”

There was cheering and applause at the assertion of specific social rights. After the speech, many in the crowd approached the WSWS literature table to discuss the perspective of international socialism and sign up for more information. Several people bought copies of the Socialist Equality Party program and classics of Marxist literature.



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