

Mass march backs anti-Wall Street protest

Bill Van Auken
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Tens of thousands of people joined Wednesday in a mass march that wound its way through lower Manhattan before pouring into a tightly packed crowd in Foley Square, which was ringed on three sides by metal police barricades and ranks of New York City cops.

It was the largest demonstration seen since the Occupy Wall Street protests began nearly three weeks ago, and one of the biggest protests to take the streets of the city in several years.

Many students swelled the ranks of the demonstration. Several hundred walked out of classes at the New School, marching south to Washington Square where they joined over thousand students and other New Yorkers for a march down to the occupation site in Zuccotti Park.

There were student walkouts at other city schools as well as at State University of New York campuses upstate and at University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where students left their classrooms at noon, some carrying signs reading “Eat the elite” and “We can do better than capitalism.”

Anti-Wall Street demonstrations also took place Wednesday in San Francisco’s financial district as well as in Boston, Hartford and a number of other cities.

In Manhattan, the demonstrators marched up Broadway, filling the sidewalk for many blocks and picking up more and more people as it headed north to Foley Square. More than a few joined the demonstration by leaving work, still dressed in their business clothes.

“A lot of people are really hurting right now, and nothing is being done about it,” said Sean Charls, 24, who left his job at a bank in lower Manhattan to join the protest. “Instead they are being stabbed in the back by the people who are in charge.”

Many of those who marched carried hand-lettered signs with slogans expressing anger at the financial

elite that runs America. “Wall Street Bankers Madoff Well” read one. Others said “Banks got bailed out, we got sold out,” “Turn Wall Street into Tahrir Square” and “No Bulls, No Bears—Just Pigs.”

They chanted, “All day, all week, occupy Wall Street,” and “We are the 99 percent, and so are you.”

What predominated were younger people, angry over social inequality and a social system that leaves many of them with little prospect for finding a decent job and paying off tens of thousands of dollars in loans they are saddled with as the price of their education.

When the marchers turned off of Broadway and made their way to Foley Square, they were met by a far smaller crowd much of which had been assembled by New York City’s unions, which controlled a speakers platform at the southern end of the plaza.

Assembled on the platform and around it were top union officials and local Democratic Party officials.

John Samuelsen, president of Transport Workers Union Local 100 representing the city’s bus and subway workers, made clear before the rally began that the bureaucracy’s main agenda was to steer the anti-Wall Street protests behind the Democrats and President Barack Obama.

“There may be some criticism of Obama,” he said, “but I think when you look at the Republicans, there’s really no choice.”

Asked if he thought that the young people who have mounted the Occupy Wall Street protests should get behind the Obama reelection campaign, Samuelsen responded, “Yes I do. The alternative spells disaster for the United States of America.”

Speaking from the platform was a parade of union bureaucrats, as well as announcers reading the names of Democratic elected officials who had put in an appearance at the rally.

Leaders of the TWU, the United Federation of Teachers, SEIU-1199 hospital workers and District

Council 37, representing municipal workers, got up before the crowd and chanted slogans such as “They say cut back, We say fight back,” “Enough is enough” and “Yes we can.” This was combined with verbal threats to “shut it down,” something that none of them has any intention of doing, unless it refers to a strike by their own members.

Among those mouthing left rhetoric were 1199 president George Gresham, who was part of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Medical Redesign Team, which recommended sweeping cuts in health care funding, and Bob Masters, a spokesman for the Communications Workers of America, which recently called off a strike against Verizon, sending its members back to work without a contract and without forcing the company to rescind any of its takeaway demands.

The empty demagoguery coming from the platform found few listeners in the crowd, where tuba bands and African drummers played.

As with all of the anti-Wall Street protests, Wednesday’s action saw a massive deployment of police, with cops at the demonstration wearing bunches of plastic zip-tie handcuffs on their belts. Motorcycle units as well as buses for prisoners were deployed on side streets.

A number of people were arrested after the march back to the financial district, when a section of the demonstration sought to push through police barricades surrounding the Wall Street stock exchange. Protesters were attacked with pepper spray and police used their billy clubs.

Last Saturday saw the jailing of over 700 demonstrators after they were led by the police half way across the Brooklyn Bridge before being penned in and subjected to mass arrests. The previous weekend, scores of protesters were arrested, while some were subjected to pepper-spraying and other forms of police brutality.



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