

Anti-Wall Street protests spread across the US

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With anti-Wall Street protests spreading to over 100 US cities and towns, President Barack Obama at a White House press conference Thursday cynically sought to exploit the outpouring of spontaneous anger at the banks and big business as a vehicle for his reelection bid.

On Thursday, new Occupy Wall Street protests sprang up in a number of major cities, including Philadelphia, New Orleans, Washington, Tampa, Dallas, Houston and Austin. They came on the heels of the largest demonstration so far in New York City, where an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 marched through lower Manhattan Wednesday night.

The demonstrations are driven by a profound anger over unprecedented levels of social inequality as, three years after the financial meltdown on Wall Street, unemployment and declining wages persist and deepen alongside record profits and increasing wealth for the top one percent.

The first White House reporter who asked Obama about the anti-Wall Street protests stated the obvious about the demonstrators: “They clearly don’t think that you or Republicans have done enough, that you’re in fact part of the problem.”

Obama responded that he had “heard about” the protest movement and “seen it on TV.” He went on to acknowledge that “people are frustrated, and the protestors are giving voice to a more broad-based frustration about how our financial system works.”

He followed this indication that he “felt the pain” of those who are demonstrating with an immediate affirmation of his support for “a strong, effective financial sector in order for us to grow.” Referring to his unqualified support for the \$750 billion TARP bailout of the banks, he added: “I used up a lot of political capital, and I’ve got the dings and bruises to prove it, in order to make sure that we prevented a financial meltdown, and that banks stayed afloat.”

In New York, Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo issued a similar statement on Thursday, defending Wall Street against the protests. “Wall Street is a major economic engine for the state,” he said at a press conference. “When all is said and told, 20 to 25 percent of the state’s income comes from Wall Street.”

In response to a reporter who noted that no Wall Street

executives “have gone to jail despite the rampant corruption and malfeasance that did take place,” Obama defended the failure to prosecute any of those responsible for triggering the deepest crisis since the Great Depression. He said that “a lot of that stuff wasn’t necessarily illegal, it was just immoral or inappropriate or reckless,” and insisted in relation to prosecutions, “that’s not my job, that’s the Attorney General’s job.”

Obama’s feigned sympathy for the protests is part of concerted attempt to channel the movement behind the Democratic Party, which, no less than the Republicans, serves and is financed by the banks and finance houses responsible for the unemployment crisis.

This effort to hijack the protest movement has been spearheaded by the trade unions, which participated in Wednesday’s mass march in New York City. The rally featured a speakers platform packed with bureaucrats who have led no fight of their own against Wall Street and are responsible for betraying the interests of the workers they purport to represent.

The presence of a number of Democratic politicians, none of whom dared to address the rally, was announced from the platform with great enthusiasm, and some of the union bureaucrats present made no bones of the fact that they want to see the Occupy Wall Street movement exploited as a vehicle for the Obama re-election campaign.

The speed with which the anti-Wall Street protests have spread from coast to coast is all the more extraordinary given the persistent refusal of the mass media to give them significant coverage and the attempt in many of the reports that have appeared to mock and belittle them.

“Meetups” had been established in 761 cities by Thursday night, according to the web site Occupy Together [<http://www.occupytogether.org>], which describes itself as “an unofficial hub for all of the events springing up across the country in solidarity with Occupy Wall St.”

On Thursday, thousands of people initiated an occupation of Freedom Plaza in Washington before staging a march past the US Treasury and the White House. The demonstrators chanted, “We Got Sold Out.”

The march ended in front of the US Chamber of Commerce,

where marchers shouted, “We Want Jobs! We Want Jobs!” While the protesters have National Park permits allowing them to occupy the plaza only through Sunday, they have vowed to stay indefinitely.

Several hundred demonstrators marched down Tulane Avenue through the financial district of New Orleans on Thursday, rallying in Lafayette Square near the New Orleans branch of the Federal Reserve Bank. WWL radio described the crowd as “racially mixed and mostly young.”

“Most people are not getting a fair shake,” Daniel Brook, one of the marchers, told WWL. “It’s a country where the top one percent controls 90 percent of the wealth, and that’s outrageous. This is supposed to be a democracy. We’re all supposed to be in this together.”

Marches also took place across Texas. Several hundred marched on the Federal Reserve Bank in Dallas, which was ringed with police barricades. In Houston, hundreds more marched from the JPMorgan Chase building to City Hall chanting, “Banks Got Bailed Out! We Got Sold Out!” A demonstration was also held outside City Hall in the state capital of Austin.

David Larrick Smith, 40, from the Dallas suburb of Rowlett, told the Associated Press that he was protesting “all these billionaires who have bought our government.” He added, “I voted for Obama and he punked out. He had the opportunity to stand for the American people, and he’s become a political puppet.”

Several hundred people began an Occupy Philadelphia demonstration Thursday morning outside City Hall. May Chan, 32, a science researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, told the Associated Press, “I’m outraged by the whole bailout. I think someone should go to jail.”

In a number of areas, anti-Wall Street protests have met with arrests, brutality and harassment from the police.

In New York City, toward the end of Wednesday’s mass march through lower Manhattan, police used truncheons and pepper spray against unresisting protesters and arrested 28 people after a section of the demonstration tried to march on Wall Street.

Mounted police were brought in to intimidate demonstrators and a number of people suffered injuries as cops threw them to the pavement. The New York City Police Department has met the protests with excessive force over the course of the last several weeks, including last Saturday, when some 700 demonstrators were arrested after they had been led onto the Brooklyn Bridge and then trapped there by police on either side.

In Seattle, more than two-dozen demonstrators were arrested Wednesday after refusing police orders to take down tents in Westlake Park. The protesters have vowed to stay in the park.

In St. Louis, 11 people were arrested shortly after midnight on Thursday morning after police attempted to enforce a ban on demonstrations in Kiener Plaza after 10 pm. Some 100

members of the occupation group were in the plaza at midnight when two dozen squad cars raided the area.

In San Francisco, police in riot gear raided the Occupy SF camp on Market Street Wednesday night.

Occupy SF issued a statement saying that police had warned them to “pack up our tents” or face arrest. While the demonstrators moved to comply by taking down the tents and beginning to move out supplies, “still, the police, wearing helmets and carrying batons, formed a perimeter around our goods and prevented us from saving anything while they supervised Public Works employees as they stole everything. The police stole food, water, shelter and other necessities of life from the 99 percent at Occupy SF.”

Similarly, in Chicago, harassment from the police has become a major concern of protesters. As part of a thoroughly anti-democratic attempt to stamp out and disperse the protest centered around the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, the Chicago Board of Trade and the local headquarters of several major banks, police officials have used a local ordinance to demand that protesters’ personal possessions be kept off of sidewalks and prevent the protesters from sleeping at the site, or even sitting down or standing still.

In response, the demonstrators have become mobile, making sure to keep moving in order to avoid arrest or ticketing, and shifted their supplies to a nearby church. They have also taken to marching around different parts of the downtown area to avoid confrontation and to publicize the protest to more city residents.

In Los Angeles Thursday, eleven protesters were arrested for the “crime” of entering a downtown Bank of America branch carrying a giant check for \$673 billion made out to the “People of California.” They were seeking to present the check to the bank when they were detained by security guards and turned over to the Los Angeles police.

The police arrested the six men and five women, part of a crowd of 500 who marched through the downtown area Thursday, and led them to prison in handcuffs. Bail was set at \$5,000 per person.



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