

Occupy Albany action enters second week

Philip Guelpa**1 November 2011**

On Saturday October 29, Occupy Albany protestors, who have been encamped in downtown Albany's Academy Park across from the State Capitol for over a week, held a number of activities, including a "People's Speak Out," during which anyone who wished to could address the gathering. The tone of the affair was set by the "invited speakers" who led off the event. These included half a dozen Democratic Party politicians, beginning with Congressman Paul Tonko.

All put forth standard liberal Democratic rhetoric, including support for President Obama's fraudulent jobs plan and urging more 'fairness' in tax policy. There was no mention of attacks on working people via massive cuts in the state budget for education, health care, and other social services imposed by Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo. Nor was there any reference to the use by Cuomo of the threat of massive layoffs to intimidate state workers into accepting contracts with substantial cuts in wages and benefits.

A Green Party representative asked rhetorically, "When did this turn into a Democratic Party rally?" While criticizing the Democrats' complicity in the economic crisis, he proposed nothing more than minimal reforms.

A Socialist Equality Party supporter spoke to the gathering. He emphasized that the Democrats are just as responsible as the Republicans for the economic disaster and the attacks on the working class, and that the recent attack on protestors in Oakland and others across the country are the real face of the capitalist system. The SEP supporter warned that without a perspective and program the Occupy movement, while reflecting the outrage of millions, would not be able to advance.

He stated that the economic crisis of capitalism, which is still only in its initial stages, will plunge the world back into the conditions that characterized the first half of the twentieth century—two world wars and

the Great Depression. What is happening in Greece now is the future for the working class unless it builds its own political party based on socialist principles to overthrow the capitalist system, he explained. These remarks drew a positive response from a broad section of the audience.

The Occupy Albany protestors have engaged in a series of marches and demonstrations over the past week. On Thursday they held a demonstration inside the State Capitol building calling on Governor Cuomo to renew the state's so-called millionaires' tax, imposed on those who make more than \$200,000 a year. This tax has generated roughly one billion dollars annually in revenue for the state, but is set to expire at the end of this year.

Cuomo, with the support of Republicans and many Democrats in the state legislature, has vehemently insisted that the tax will not be extended. This is despite the fact that current projections indicate that the state faces a multibillion-dollar deficit in the coming fiscal year. This will inevitably lead the legislature to enact even further cuts in jobs and social services. Several recent public opinion polls indicate that a significant majority of the state's population supports continuation of the tax. Cuomo has said that he doesn't care about the will of the majority: "The fact that everyone wants it . . . it doesn't mean that much." The protesters have named Cuomo "Governor One Percent" for his policies in support of the financial and corporate elite.

The WSWS spoke with a number of participants in the Saturday rally.

Kyle Holbrook's sign reads, "Corporations are not people, money is not speech, and we are the 99 percent." He is opposed to the Supreme Court's recent Citizens United decision in which it "ruled that corporations are people and that their money is equal speech to your money and my money, even though of course they can amass so much more of it than we can."

Corporations control our system of government.”

Regarding the Occupy movement, he said, “I’m 50 years old and I’ve been thinking that something like this should happen for my entire adult life.” His family were workers and small business owners in Schenectady during the early and middle twentieth century, at a time when that city was booming, with major corporations such as General Electric and American Locomotive. He contrasted the relative prosperity and upward mobility of that period to conditions now in which such opportunities have vanished.

Earl Dunckel, 71, spoke about his political transformation under the pressure of the crisis. Once a Republican, he is now disenchanted with both capitalist parties due to their control by the rich.

Summing up his view of the Occupy movement, he said, “They see that our leaders are purchased. They’re either purchased or you could say they’re rented. So they do things that people can’t understand why our leaders do that. Sooner or later they have to understand that big money bought them so they will not do what is best for us. Until I saw this movement start, I didn’t understand how many people felt the same.”

“As long as big money can buy politicians and people don’t do anything about it then the rich are going to get much, much, much richer and we’re going to get really dumped on. You can see the trends are not good.”

Wendy Brown said, “I’m here because I’m really distressed about the future of the country. I believe it’s time for people to speak out because things can’t continue like they are. People are not only out of work but having to work hours and hours of overtime just to pay their bills. Our salaries haven’t gone up in the past 30 years, but the cost of living has constantly increased. There are people without health care. There are new restrictive laws on voting registration. I’m fearful of what this country will look like. As a citizen I have to stand up and say that this is not right. I can’t sit back and relax and think things are going to correct themselves.”

Anna Eyre is a Ph.D. candidate at SUNY Albany in the English Department and also works as a graduate teaching assistant. “I’m here because I think there needs to be significant changes made to the monetary system. I think that our current system is unsustainable and shouldn’t be based on debt any longer. I’m also

here because I want all student debt to be forgiven and education to be free. And also an end to the wars.”

She said that the Democrats and the Republicans “are two arms of the same wing. There’s not like two parties. It’s all the same thing. I’m hoping that from this movement a genuine third party will rise.”

Elliot Luscombe received a Masters in social work at the University at Albany. He expressed concern regarding the need for the Occupy movement to develop politically. “A lot of people view this [the Occupy movement] not as the first step. A lot of people view this as the only step. At least my generation, we’re not used to seeing a next step. That’s been the apprehension of a lot of people. The levels of political activism in this country are abysmally low.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact