

Occupy Detroit protesters determined, despite threats from city

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The standoff between Occupy Detroit participants and the city of Detroit continued Thursday, as authorities city ordered protestors to leave Grand Circus Park by Monday, when the protest's permit expires.

"We will be seeking to renew the permit in the next few days," said Lucianna Sabgash, a former Wayne State University student who is helping to organize the occupation. "We hope the city will let us stay," she said.

The city of Detroit put up signs Wednesday evening noting that the park closes at 10PM, prompting speculation that protestors would be removed Thursday morning. When morning rolled around however, the scene was quiet and without confrontation.

Participants worked to repair the dozens of tents arrayed around the plaza, half-destroyed by a recent bout of wind and rain, and to restart the food kitchen.

In a city with hundreds of thousands unemployed and tens of thousands homeless, the Occupation, which has been taking place since October 14, has been transformed as much into a homeless camp as a political movement.

Workers and the unemployed mixed together with students over the breakfast meal. Here and there, political discussions could be overheard.

Ron Hawthorne, a machinist who works the night shift at Reliable Forge in Fraser, Michigan, said he spends as much time as possible at the occupation between his shifts. "I work five days a week, and then I sleep down here when I can," he said.

"I'm lucky enough to still have a job, being a skilled tradesman in an industry that has picked up lately, but there are millions of people out of work, and why?"

"Everything in capitalism is set up for the enrichment of the wealthy; they run amuck," he said. "Why don't the people own the corporations? Then everybody would get a slice of the pie.

"I don't have faith in either of the two parties," he added. "Lobbyists dictate the laws. The Democrats have one big-business constituency, and the Republicans have another."

He said he grew up in the city, but works in the northern suburbs. "There's so much to be fixed in this city," he said. "I ride my bike to work, because the bus system is impossible. It takes an hour and a half to travel three miles to work on the bus; and besides that, they just raised the fares by \$2."

He added that Detroit used to have one of the best public transportation systems in the world, but it was allowed to deteriorate, "because even then the auto industry could dictate things like that."

Lucianna Sabgash, 30, was an engineering student at Wayne State University, who has participated in the occupation since it began.

"At this point I don't see the point of graduating with a degree in this economy," she said.

"Both political parties are the same," she said. "Both are bought out. Anybody who thinks otherwise at this point can only be described as naive."

Asked what her thoughts on the Obama Administration, she said, "I voted for change, but we got more of the same."

Derrick Nicholson-Bey, an unemployed cook who had has been staying at the occupation, said that

corporate profits should be used to help rebuild the city. “Ford and GM are making all this money now: why don’t they use it to help fund the schools? Our kids are using textbooks that are decades old; and half the schools are shutting down.”

Mr. Nicholson-Bey has been staying at the camp because he could no longer pay rent after losing his last steady job as a cook at the Marriot Courtyard hotel. “That was a year ago,” he said. “I’ve lost everything, and I’m living in a tent.”

He said he has been squeezing by doing various odd jobs including cooking and landscaping. “I’ve been working all my life; I’d gotten used to it; and it breaks me not to have a job,” he said.

“The unemployment rate in this city: when you really get down to it, must be like 60 percent,” he added. “The only way to get by is to lean on others when you need to, and to give back when you can,” he said.

“Look at all the buildings here,” he said, pointing to the abandoned and boarded-up high-rises that surround the park. “Why can’t these be used to teach people; to house people; to put people to work?”



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