

City government in Duluth, Minnesota prepares to evict Occupy protesters

Our reporter
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Supporters of the Occupy Wall Street movement in Duluth, Minnesota rallied over the weekend in the wake of last week's call by a city official for the removal of protesters encamped in front of city hall.

David Montgomery, chief administrative officer, wants the Occupy Duluth movement removed by the end of this week. Montgomery, who is an appointee of Mayor Don Ness, a Democrat, is using the pretext of falling temperatures and the coming snowfall as the basis for evicting protesters.

Many Occupy Duluth supporters voiced their opposition to the backhanded attempt to shut down the occupation and saw it as an attack on first amendment rights. The WSWS spoke to Blake Romenesko, a student at the University of Minnesota Duluth: "We don't have a television here, so we didn't know anything about Montgomery's announcement. Then people started coming down here and were asking us for more information, and we had to say we knew nothing about it.

"The situation here is similar to Minneapolis, where the city is raising concerns over safety. Montgomery's statement was pretty vague and there are no details. But the fact is, we're on the grounds right in front of city hall and it probably makes them uncomfortable.

"The turnout at the GA (General Assembly) on Saturday was the biggest we've ever had. There were a lot of newcomers, and there was a lot of support for continuing the occupation. We are planning on staying here as long as we can. Our communication with the people of this city is the most important thing we need to do now. There's also been talk of the possibility of filing a law suit."

Romenesko explained to the WSWS what had motivated him to help organize Occupy Duluth. "Over the past couple of years, I became informed about how

corporations have taken over our food system. Then, last winter I saw how corporations directly influenced our government in Wisconsin, which is where I'm from.

"It first started with Republican Governor Scott Walker's 'budget repair bill', which gave tax breaks to corporations and put huge restrictions on the unions. His budget went further beyond that and cut education and took a lot of power away from local government. He came out with the voter ID bill, which can be traced back to ALEC [the right-wing policy organization American Legislative Exchange Council]. He has these little things that just give him more and more power."

Robert Lillegard, another occupier, told the WSWS, "To begin with, I am a conservative Christian and I believe that the Bible is literally true. I think Occupy Wall Street is a fundamentally a moral issue. That one percent of the population controls 43 percent of the wealth, that they got it unjustly, and that they have to keep the Third World down to maintain their wealth, is immoral.

"It's not that everybody in the one percent is immoral. But the sweatshops and labor abuses in the Third World, the outsourcing, the ridiculous cost of healthcare that doesn't need to cost as much as it does, these are problems. These are bad things. For us, it is necessary to stand together and make a strong statement that we're fed up with that. The rich have an obligation to give back, and they're doing whatever they can to avoid that."

Another Occupy Duluth participant told the WSWS, "People often ask what our purpose is here. And the essential problem is that people are looking for a protest and not a movement. There's an expectation that we have a single issue, and that we will abandon our efforts once this issue is resolved.

“However, we're here due to enumerable aspects that have arisen out of fundamental problems in society—institutional flaws. By gathering here we create a forum for new ideas. And we express ourselves as a community that is in opposition to capitalist society.”



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