

Occupy Los Angeles: “Obama promised us hope and change, and we got war and poverty instead.”

Our reporters
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The Occupy Los Angeles movement has entered its second month. Several hundred protesters remain encamped next to city hall.

While the protest remains centered around concerns over economic injustice and rising levels of inequality both in the US and internationally, the lack of politics and demands has allowed the movement to be infiltrated by various Democratic party elements.

Members of the Los Angeles City Council along with Democratic Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, have freely mingled among the protesters encouraging them, in the words of City Council Eric Garcetti, to “stay as long as you like.”

The move was hailed by the leadership of Occupy LA along with an attendant promise by the city council to institute a banking reform bill which was nearly dead on arrival. Soon after the bill was announced, the city treasurer announced that enacting the bill would result in tens of millions of dollars in breach of contract penalties with the banks.

Soon after, the city council reneged on its promise to allow protesters to stay “as long as they liked,” citing concerns that the cost of resodding city property would cost tens of thousands of dollars.

During the past several weeks, the United Teachers of Los Angeles union has held a fraudulent “Occupy LAUSD” action in parallel with Occupy LA, which has drawn a contingent of the latter around the union’s bankrupt perspective of holding only the Los Angeles Unified School District accountable for school cutbacks and layoffs. The union’s aim is to exonerate the Democratic Party, which in recent years has launched

the largest attack on public education in US history, of any responsibility.

Last Saturday, a bank transfer march and rally was held by the Good Jobs LA coalition, a group led by the Service Employees International Union and other pro-Democratic party outfits. The group describes itself as “a grassroots organization of neighbors coming together, block-by-block to reclaim the American Dream for working families by holding wealthy corporations accountable to pay their fair share, create good jobs, and invest in the future of our communities.”

The aim of the event was to persuade protesters and passersby to close accounts at large banks and transfer their funds to smaller lending institutions and credit unions. At the close of the march, several prominent Democratic and pro-Democratic party functionaries spoke at city hall. Among them were Robert Reich, the former Secretary of Labor under Clinton, and Robert Scheer, the prominent ex-radical journalist who recently supported the candidacy of reactionary Kentucky “Tea Party” congressman Rand Paul.

Remarks made by Reich, now professor of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley, centered around denunciations of the large banks while making no mention of the billions in public funds made available to them with no strings attached under the Obama administration. Scheer cynically advised protesters to make appeals to more progressive layers within the Democratic Party. At one point, he claimed that the problem with the presidency of Clinton was that in the “Battle of the Bobs,” Reich and former Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin, it was Rubin

who won out in the end.

The aim of all these speakers and organizations is to channel protesters back into the Democratic Party fold by fostering the illusion that through contained protest actions, the ruling elite can somehow be pressured to change course, enact better legislation, select more socially-minded individuals to do its bidding, etc. Workers and students must reject all attempts by the Democratic Party to make such inroads, whether they are made directly or indirectly through the trade unions and ex-left organizations which support them.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several protesters encamped at Los Angeles City Hall last Saturday.

“Corporations own everything,” commented Thaddeus Ressler, a writer and Army veteran. “There’s nobody to lobby for the people, but there are plenty of lobbyists for the corporations and the banks.”

Juan Cortes spoke about his reasons for attending the Occupy LA protest. “I am here because I am one of the victims of the banks. They took my house and I want to see how we can unite with those who have lost their jobs so we can take actions against the banks. I want us to take back what they stole from us.

“Congress is corrupt. I am on board 100 percent with the fact that there’s not going to be any justice via the election of this or that Republican or Democrat.”

Rose Contreras, a hot dog vendor, said, “The truth is that a lot of us small business people along with working people are facing a critical situation. We have to fight for everyone’s welfare. And this fight is a world fight.

“The rich aren’t thinking about the plight of the poor. It’s as if we didn’t exist. If it wasn’t for the poor, they wouldn’t have any wealth at all. We’re the ones who do the work for them.”

Sander Hicks, a carpenter and independent publisher, has also been to the Occupy Oakland encampment where more than 50 protesters were brutally arrested by police less than two weeks ago. “I’ve researched Obama,” Sander said. “His ties to Wall Street are easier to understand when you realize that he’s a progressive in name only. He represents mainstream politics as usual.”

Jay is a journalism student at the University of

Southern California and a former veteran. “I’m here doing research for my class. I’m definitely in favor of the Occupy Wall Street protests because I know that it stands for a re-evaluation of the social system.”

“I’m also a veteran,” Jay added. “I fought in Iraq. The war was obviously made up—it was all about markets. I felt exploited and still do. I take loans and I use the GI Bill, but tuition is a big concern nonetheless. The thing that concerns me the most is that I have to go into debt to get an education only to find afterwards that there are no opportunities.”

JC works as a web designer and entrepreneur. “I’m here to add my support for the movement. The fact that he hasn’t come out to address the people and our concerns should prove to everyone that political faith in him is a fallacy. George Bush promised us war and we got war. Obama promised us hope and change, and we got war and poverty instead.”

The Socialist Equality Party and International Students for Social Equality will be holding a public meeting this coming Sunday, November 13 to discuss the Occupy Wall Street and the way forward for workers and youth. For more information on the Los Angeles meeting, click here. Details on other meetings across the country can be found here.



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