

New York City: Dozens of Occupy Wall Street protesters going to trial for arrests

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Most of those arrested on September 24 near Union Square in New York City at a demonstration in support of the anti-Wall Street occupation in the city's Financial District have decided to reject a plea bargain offered by prosecutors and fight the charges brought against them.

Over 50 of the 78 who appeared in court on Thursday have declined to accept an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal and will go to trial. The judge set a court date of January 9th.

While the New York Police Department (NYPD) harassed the anti-Wall Street protesters from the September 17 start of the occupation, the September 24 march was the occasion when the police began a policy of mass-arrests and the use of excessive force against the protesters.

One woman was gratuitously pepper-sprayed by an NYPD Deputy Inspector, Anthony Bologna. The incident was caught on a video and viewed widely on the Internet and provoked outrage among New Yorkers and a broader public that propelled the protests into the limelight.

Bologna was docked ten vacation days for his action, a penalty, as one young occupier observed to the WSWs that will allow him to accumulate overtime and retire with a fatter pension.

Nearly a thousand protesters have been arrested since the occupation began, mostly on trumped-up misdemeanor charges of blocking traffic or disorderly conduct. Of these, over 700 were arrested on October 1, when, as witnesses allege, the NYPD redirected a peaceable march across the walkway of the Brooklyn Bridge, which is legal according to city ordinances and requires no permit, onto the roadway of the bridge, where they were surrounded by police and arrested after they were told to disperse. Many demonstrators said that they did not hear the dispersal order.

Most of the 700 are also expected to reject the prosecutors' deal and elect to go to trial.

City harassment against the protesters continues on a daily basis. Last week, before a major cold spell and inclement weather were due to hit New York, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg ordered the New York Fire Department to remove a number of electrical generators from the camp, although the occupiers claim they were used only to power Internet connections and not unsafe heaters.

Over the last few days, it has been reported by local media sources that the NYPD is encouraging habitual public drinkers from other parts of the city to go to Liberty Plaza, the site of the occupation. Some media have reported that occupiers are ejecting

troublesome and law-breaking elements from the encampment.

In a fit of hypocrisy at a conference organized by Columbia University and the World Bank, the mayor condemned such self-disciplinary actions: "You just don't have a right, and it's not fair to everybody else," he said, "to not report a crime when it occurs." With police harassment and intimidation a staple of the occupation, occupiers undoubtedly feel that the NYPD cannot be trusted.

Mistrust and outright hostility to the NYPD is quite common in New York City, where hundreds of thousands of mostly minority, working-class young people are "stopped-and-frisked"—temporarily detained and searched—for committing no crime at all by the police each year.

When he was asked if he would evict the protesters from Liberty Plaza, the mayor made a veiled threat to "allow people to protest but at the same time enforce public safety—provide public safety and quality of life issues, and we will continue to do that."

"No one should think that we won't take actions that we think are appropriate when we think they are appropriate," he warned.

A letter sent to Bloomberg this week by a group of state Democratic officials, including such well-known liberals as Congressman Jerrold Nadler and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, may provide the mayor the political pretext he wants for launching the kind of police raid on Liberty Plaza that was prepared and then aborted last month.

While hypocritically voicing sympathy for "the movement's message," the letter pointedly called upon the city to "enforce laws prohibiting the excessive noise from drumming, which has disturbed neighbors day and night, as well as those prohibiting public urination on our streets, buildings and sidewalks." Rupert Murdoch's right-wing tabloid, the *New York Post*, summed up the implications of the letter in an editorial Tuesday, writing that Nadler and Silver, "two of the most liberal pols on Earth, are urging Mayor Bloomberg to crack down on the Wall Street protest."

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, 17 more protesters were arrested outside the headquarters of the investment bank, Goldman Sachs, a splendid glass-encased building a few blocks from Liberty Plaza. Police had demanded that the demonstrators move from what the finance house claimed was its private pavement. Those arrested were charged with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest.

Former US President George Bush was visiting the bank, and when protesters caught wind of his presence they began chanting

“Arrest George Bush.” Bush is widely regarded among the anti-Wall Street occupiers—and among millions of other Americans—as a war criminal for his role in invading Iraq in 2003 and the use of illegal detention and torture.

The WSWs spoke to people who had come to Washington Square Park to protest in support of the goals of the Wall Street occupation two miles downtown.

Nathan Bett, a graduate student at the New School for Social Research studying photography and art, told the WSWs:

“I have a lot of student loans. It will amount to \$80,000 by the time I graduate. This is the price of education. A bachelor’s degree just does not make it on the job market as much as it used to. To make a serious commitment to the job market, it is necessary to have a higher degree, and it costs a lot of money. I need to do this if I am going to get a job teaching in a university or working in a museum.

“I love the education that I am getting. I just wish that it was not so expensive. Nobody gets rich teaching. I am not in this for the money. It just would be nice if it didn’t place me in so much debt.

“I support the Occupy Wall Street movement. I am against the complete control that all the corporations, banks, retailers, and insurers have over the representative government.

“I do not think that the Democrats are any better than the Republicans. Whoever gets elected is under the palm of corporate money. Obama gets money from the same sources that the Republicans do.

“The corporations give money to the politicians, and they have to make sure that they control the politicians whether they agree with them philosophically or not. This is true for everything including the environment.

“When I was in China, the air was so bad that you could not see a mile away on a clear day. The politicians are moving to end the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as all the environmental controls in the interests of big business. The companies do not like these regulations because it is expensive and hurts their profits.

“For the sake of profits, the companies hide their money in countries with no tax rates so they do not have to pay taxes.

“Finance capital has brought down the system, but nobody is in jail. The government does go after insider traders, but this is really only petty stuff.

“When the Tea Party held a demonstration last year in Washington DC carrying hand guns and assault rifles, there were very few police. At our demonstrations of a bunch of college youth who are very peaceful and are only carrying cardboard signs, there is a ton of police.

“I like the idea of a general strike. Workers produce everything. No employer can make money without workers who are educated and skilled in their jobs.”

Amal Maseer is an artist from Iraq who has been living in New Paltz, New York since 2009. For 20 years she worked as a high-school economics teacher in Baghdad.

“In 1993, Clinton destroyed my house in an airplane attack,” she said. “I was wounded and my three-year-old child was wounded.

Five of my neighbors were killed in the attack including two 16-month-old twins, their mother and grandmother. Clinton did this because he wanted to show that he could kill. We stayed outside the house to see if we could find shelter. We froze that night.

“This was the time of the economic sanctions. Clinton’s excuse was that he was fighting Saddam Hussein’s men, but in reality he was attacking civilians.

“The war in Iraq is for Wall Street so they can sell their weapons. Iraq is in a central geographical place in between Europe, Africa and Asia. The US wants power in this area.

“My country is occupied. Millions have been killed in Iraq. I lost many of my relatives. My child was attacked by a car bomb and lost some of his teeth.

“In the US, the companies control the government. Congress is just the puppets.

“The government now in Iraq is worse than Saddam Hussein. At least with Hussein, we had food stamps, Medicaid, and free public education all the way to a Ph.D.

“Obama promised many changes, but all he did was change his promises. The war has continued under Obama. He looks for an excuse to stay in Iraq. The people do not want the American troops, and they do not want the government created by the USA. They are all a bunch of thieves and criminals.”

Pete has been a medic in the National Guard for four years, having been stationed in Korea but spared a tour in Iraq or Afghanistan. He told the WSWs why he was visiting the Occupy Wall Street encampment in Liberty Plaza:

“I feel capitalism is inherently built to fail but the government does not let anyone else come up. The people who were on top since the 1920’s are still on top. I feel Obama failed the country with an idea that was never possible. He was never a factor; motivating, but not a possibility. His plan to end the war in Iraq was already dictated, already in motion, in the Bush era. He could have closed Guantanamo Bay, which did not occur. His health reform bill was only processing a third option, which also did not occur either. That was a massive failure in my book. I have been to China and Europe on my own time. You can receive health care with no financial burden. In France, there is even a charity to provide transportation home from the hospital, which we don’t have.

“The end goal of this movement for me would be those things. For me, they could start by getting rid of the Federal Reserve. Now they have an automatic growing debt just to get money. None of this will change with our current government policy.”



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