

Occupy Pittsburgh protesters oppose police repression in California

Samuel Davidson
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On November 2, about 500 members of Occupy Pittsburgh and supporters marched through the Oakland area of Pittsburgh, the site of the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie-Mellon University. They were expressing their solidarity with protesters who were attacked and arrested by police in Oakland, California.

About 150 workers, students, and unemployed have begun the fourth week of their tent city, known as Occupy Pittsburgh, as part of the nationwide Occupy Wall Street protesters around the country.

The camp, in a park called Mellon Green in downtown Pittsburgh, has attracted supporters from throughout the region. Many people on their way to or from work and during lunch hours stop by the camp, reading the signs and talking with protesters.

Patrick Hilko, a young worker who is also attending graduate school, explained on Wednesday that he has been taking part in Occupy Pittsburgh since it began. He said, "I work on commission, sometimes I make the minimum wage, and sometimes I don't. I am in grad school at the same time. There is no way that I can pay for school and afford a place to live on what I am making.

"I went to the University of Pittsburgh for four years. It is a really good school, and I am glad I went, but the amount of money I owe in loans is unbelievable. I am training to be a teacher. There is so much development that takes place in just the first few years of a child's life, yet look how little we pay early childhood workers. What does that say about us?

"I don't think it is right for a few people to have everything and the vast majority of people to have to

struggle just to live.

"I have had three jobs since I graduated college, and I have never made more than \$18,000 in a year."

Patrick lived in Utah during the 2008 elections and voted for Obama. "I didn't think he would really be different, but I wanted to give him a chance. I don't think either party represents the people, just the rich.

"There is enough wealth in this country, in this world for everyone to have a decent living. I mean, look at all that we make. The world is richer now than ever, yet more and more people are in poverty. That is not right."

Stephanie had been working for a community-based organization as an advocate for victims of domestic violence for three years. She lost her job in 2010 when the state didn't pass its budget and stopped funding community-based organizations.

"It was not just me. Most community-based organizations lost their funding for over three months.

"I haven't had health care since I left college," she added. "I have a good friend who is a single mom. She is about to lose her home. She is an Iraq War vet, yet she can't find a job to support herself and her baby. That is not right.

"Nothing has changed since Obama has been elected. Both parties are for the wealthy."

Jack, who recently retired from the Navy, came downtown to the Occupy Pittsburgh camp to show his support for the protesters. He said, "The only way to show you are winning is how rich you are, and that isn't right.

"Good people are trampled underfoot. They have billions for war but nothing for health care. I grew up in Pittsburgh, my father was an auto worker, I never thought of health care as a luxury."

Speaking on the betrayal of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the contracts they signed with the auto makers to cut wages and benefits for new workers, Jack said, “The two-tier wage system is a strategy to divide and conquer. It is a betrayal by the UAW. They destroyed their roots 15-20 years ago. The defeat of the PATCO strike was a green light.”

Jack remembered how shocked he was when he first returned to Pittsburgh to see that the steel mills had been closed. “I worked at a steel mill before the Navy and grew up seeing their lights on the horizon, until I came home on leave and all of a sudden the lights were no longer there.”



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