

City threatens to clear Occupy Albany encampment

Philip Guelpa
9 December 2011

The City of Albany announced last Friday that the Occupy Albany encampment, which has been in place in Academy Park for about a month and a half, is in violation of a number of city safety and health codes. The city demanded that the protesters clear the violations and apply for a permit by December 6 to continue their encampment; otherwise, they would be evicted.

The city had inspected the camp several times since it was established, but had not previously threatened eviction. The order from the city stated that even if the occupiers were granted a permit, it would only be valid until December 22, after which they must all vacate the park.

With this move, the city is falling into line with many other municipalities across the country that have moved against Occupy encampments, often using police forces to brutally attack and remove protesters under the pretext of health and safety issues.

In advance of the Tuesday deadline, the occupiers made great efforts to clean up the encampment and reduced the number of tents from nearly 80, many of which were not continuously in use, to about 30. With the clear intention of making continuation of the encampment increasingly difficult under winter conditions, the city limited it to one generator, two heaters, and no cooking devices.

In an obvious contradiction, however, a spokesman for the mayor stated that the city was concerned for the protesters because they would soon be facing sub-freezing temperatures. Despite the feigned concern for the occupiers, the change in attitude on the part of Democratic mayor Jerry Jennings has likely been prompted by the growing state budget crisis.

Governor Cuomo, also a Democrat, recently announced that the state faces a deficit of \$350 million

in the current budget and at least \$3.5 billion for the coming budget year, which begins on April 1, 2012. It is no secret that the governor has been furious at the city administration for allowing the Occupy Albany encampment to be established on city-owned property in plain sight of the state capitol building.

Now, with the Democrats and Republicans looking for new ways to cut the budget via further attacks on jobs and social services, the political establishment has decided that having such a visible group of protesters who could provide the nucleus for a much larger struggle against such attacks cannot be tolerated.

Following the protesters' strenuous efforts to comply with the city's requirements and several meetings with government representatives, a permit was issued on Wednesday to allow continuation of the encampment for the next 15 days. Representatives of Occupy Albany say they hope to negotiate an extension of the permit beyond the December 22 deadline. They are also considering renting an indoor space nearby, but do not want to completely evacuate the park.

The WSWWS spoke with a number of the occupiers on Monday. Many expressed a growing understanding that it is necessary to move beyond simple protest.

Murray Hall is an electronic technician who has been out of work for six months. He's been at Occupy Albany since the encampment began and had one of the city's "Cease and Desist" stickers pasted on his sweater. Regarding why the city was moving to evict them now, he said, "I think the ultimatum is a cover-up to quiet our protest. I think it's because we're starting to get the message through to the public now, and they're starting to shake in their boots, so they're trying to shut everything down."

Murray is determined to stay regardless of what the city does. "Me, regardless, I'm staying. I already let

my father know—get the bail money.” He said he would come back. He doesn’t expect the politicians to get the message, but thinks people will. “I think protest by itself won’t do any good, but protest with action will do good.”

Ashley Luther is a laid-off child care worker. She too has been at Occupy Albany since the beginning. “We’re not doing anything wrong. They’re trying to do everything to get us out of here. They’re cutting down our tents. I think that if they let us stay, we might get something done.

“I grew up in a bad household. I didn’t have anything. I want to give my family what I didn’t have. I got laid off of my job, and I can’t even pay to go to school anymore because it’s so expensive. I want to go to college for psychology.” She said that Cuomo is not going to listen to protests. “We have to make a better plan to get our point across.”

Brendan Kelly is a substitute teacher. He’s spent 17 nights and many days at the encampment since it began. “What is clear is that the extraction of wealth from the lower 80 percent income earners to the top 1 percent income earners shows that it’s not so much that America is poor as that the wealth is transferred from the masses to a select few. You can’t have a functioning democracy as disparity rises, as levels of education and literacy drop. It’s not only an economic problem. It’s an attack on America itself.”

Regarding capitalism, he said, “I’m very concerned about the larger idea that it’s the only solution...the sacred idea that the free market almost is democracy, that they’re inseparable.” He said that the idea that there are no legitimate alternatives to capitalism is simply not true.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact