

# Bank of New York-Mellon seeks to evict Occupy Pittsburgh

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Lawyers for Bank of New York-Mellon were in court for the past two days seeking to have Occupy Pittsburgh protesters evicted from the park that they have been camping in for the past 90 days. Some 150 members of Occupy Pittsburgh having been camping on Mellon Green, a small park in downtown Pittsburgh next to the bank, since October 15.

Vincent Sands, chairman of BNY-Mellon of Pennsylvania, testified that the bank only allowed protesters to set up camp out of fear, and that the company is paying an additional \$24,000 a week for security on the property.

"We permitted the occupiers to utilize the green," he said. "We were frightened there could be confrontation. We thought the best thing for employees and clients was to let them use the area."

Members of Occupy Pittsburgh testified that they have been abiding by all the rules and regulations that the bank has set for them.

Last month, following the eviction of protesters in New York City, Oakland, California and many other cities, BNY-Mellon sought to have the protesters in Pittsburgh removed as well.

Lawyers for the Occupy Pittsburgh movement also point out that the space, while owned by the bank, is subsidized with public funds and is zoned as "urban open space," a term meaning that it is open to the public and that speech and assembly there are constitutionally protected rights.

Testimony ended Wednesday; Common Pleas Judge Christine Ward, who presided over the case, may issue a ruling at any time.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Occupy Pittsburgh protesters in the encampment. Helen Gerhardt, an Iraq war veteran, explained why she has been supporting the protest. "I am a veteran of the Iraq

war and I work with a lot of Iraqi veterans. I see the damage that the domination of the military-industrial complex over our democracy has done to people both domestically and internationally."

Gerhardt served in Iraq from June 2003 to July 2004 as a truck driver assigned to deliver water to the Abu Ghraib prison, where detainees were being tortured by American guards. She was outraged by the way in which security contractors were hired to torture people.

"I got to witness how contractors were used to torture and dominate the local populations. This was a policy which began under the Bush administration, but continued under Obama. While I was there the ratio of troops to contractors was 1 to 1. Today it is much more."

She explained that she had a friend who was tortured by the US and that this event compelled her to look into and question the relationship between these companies and the government. "That is what caused me to get involved to start exposing it," she explained.

Mel Barrett added that he expected that the bank would try and kick them out. "Especially when you see what is happening at all the Occupy protests around the country in other cities."

He said that he has been taking part in the Occupy movement because he agrees with a lot of the points of the movement. "I am especially here to show the corruption in the government and banking industry. They had a lot of hand in the economy and making things so bad for so many people."

"It is easy for them to say there is a 'recovery' when they are standing on their yachts. But for most of the people, they are still struggling to have a job and make a living."



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