

Union-dominated 99 Percent Spring holds protest stunt in Detroit

Andre Damon
26 April 2012

The 99 Percent Spring, a group set up by the trade unions and other pro-Democratic Party organizations, held a rally in Detroit, Michigan Wednesday morning to protest a shareholders meeting of General Electric, the multinational corporation.

The event was highly orchestrated and stage-managed. Hundreds of union officials were bussed in from dozens of states, including Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, to give the protest an air of popular support.

Jobs for Justice, a pro-union political group, was heavily represented at the protest and included many Detroit youth, a significant portion of whom were paid to attend the event. There was very little participation from broader sections of the working class in Detroit, a city suffering from a real unemployment rate of 50 percent.

Wednesday's event was part of a series of protests organized by 99 Percent Spring in the run-up to the November elections. The Occupy protests erupted in September of last year largely outside the control of the trade unions and the Democratic Party. There was in fact widespread distrust of the unions and opposition to the Democratic Party and Obama administration.

The trade unions responded to the emergence of these protests with a mixture of incredulity and hostility. But once they got their bearings, they have sought to take ever-firmer control, reorienting any opposition along nationalist, pro-Democratic Party, and anti-working class lines.

The organization of 99 Percent Spring in February was coordinated with Moveon.org and other Democratic Party front groups, with the ultimate aim of promoting the reelection of Obama. While the organization claims to be nonpartisan, even the most cursory look at its web site and publications makes

clear that it is essentially run by supporters of the Democratic Party. Even the organization's sign-up form is hosted on Moveon.org.

Earlier this month, the group conducted training sessions in "nonviolent resistance" throughout the country, including one at UAW Local 600 in Detroit, the former local of UAW President Bob King.

The training sessions, designed to integrate participants in the Occupy movement with the union officialdom, were the preparatory stages for a series of corporate campaigns, including a protest on April 24 at a Wells Fargo shareholders meeting, and further campaigns against Verizon, Bank of America, Sallie Mae, and Wal-Mart.

The signers of the organization's founding letter include Bob King of the United Auto Workers, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, and Justin Ruben of Moveon.org.

In its public presentation, the 99 Percent Spring campaign aims to obscure as much as possible its connections to the Democratic Party and its subservience to the trade unions. The organization claims, "elections are not discussed in our training program and the trainings are explicitly non-electoral in nature."

At Wednesday's protest, demonstrators marched and chanted outside Detroit's Renaissance Center, while several dozen protestors who owned GE stock chanted from inside the meeting and were led away by security.

The aim of the protest was to re-direct popular anger at GE, which paid no taxes last year, while simultaneously boosting the credibility of the trade unions and their support for Obama's reelection drive.

UAW president Bob King announced the UAW's support for the 99 Percent Spring campaign on February 11. King called for a program of "direct

action” against “right-wing Republicans” and “one-percenters,” led by the UAW and other unions.

“In April, we’re going to be part of a broad coalition that’s going to be training our membership and anybody who cares about justice in this society in nonviolent direct action,” King said. “It will take direct action. It will take us being willing to face arrest. It will take us being willing to be part of marches and demonstrations,” he added.

He added that the first target would be GE. “It is morally wrong—it is absolutely wrong—that (GE makes) billions and billions and billions of dollars and pay not a single penny in taxes. Enough is enough. We’re the 99 percent who want 100 percent fairness for everyone.”

The thoroughly cynical character of King’s campaign against GE, which he presented unequivocally as a union drive for the reelection of Obama, is exposed by the fact that GE’s CEO, Jeffrey Immelt, is the chair of Obama’s “Jobs and Competitiveness Council.” The aim of this council is to package Obama’s pro-corporate policies as measures to create jobs. The union apparatus is also represented on the council, which includes on its board none other than Trumka himself.

Wednesday’s shareholders meeting took place at Detroit’s Renaissance Center, the headquarters of General Motors. The UAW and King have done everything in their power to expand the profitability of GM, together with Ford and Chrysler. Between 2006 and 2010, the concessions granted by the UAW cut Chrysler’s labor costs by 35 percent. The unions are currently participating in a tour with the president, touting the administration’s rescue of the auto companies through the impoverishment of auto workers.

The ease with which the trade unions and Democratic Party officialdom have been able to take control of what is left of the Occupy movement points to the fundamental problems of the Occupy movement itself. While animated with the spirit of popular opposition to social inequality, it was never armed with a political orientation to the working class or a socialist perspective.

The struggle against social inequality requires above all a conscious and active break with the Democratic Party and trade unions, who are the most ferocious

defenders of capitalism, and do everything in their power to keep working people subjugated and powerless.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact