

USA: Occupy Wall Street struggle spreads

Corporate greed and banks domination challenged

An anti-capitalist protest movement has sprung up in New York, occupying central plazas, inspired by the North African protests earlier in the year dubbed the 'Arab Spring' and similar actions in Spain, Portugal and Greece.

Significantly, sections of the organised working class have begun to link up with this movement - including the New York Transport Workers Union, the Teamsters union and members of the United Pilots Union who have been on the demonstrations in uniform. These actions must be developed into a challenge to the big business attack on living standards.

The protesters have been subjected to draconian policing by the authorities. On Saturday 1 October over 700 demonstrators, marching over Brooklyn Bridge, were 'kettled', arrested and charged with 'disorderly conduct.' Jesse Lessinger, Socialist Alternative (CWI, USA) reports.

On Saturday 24 September, the "Occupy Wall Street" struggle set out on a march through New York City. This was the eighth day that young people, workers and activists had been occupying a plaza in Manhattan's financial district two blocks away from Wall Street.

It started as a routine march. The usual slogans were chanted: "Banks got bailed out! We got sold out!" "Whose streets? Our streets!" "Tell me what democracy looks like? This is what democracy looks like!"

This ongoing occupation has drawn national and international attention, and is seen as an attempt to stand up to corporate greed and challenge the domination of the big banks over our economy, our government and our lives.

Many participants are long-time activists who have been organising for years. Others are completely new to organising and protesting, participating in a social struggle for the first time in their lives.

As we began to march north up Broadway avenue, our numbers gradually grew and the march started to move into the streets, blocking traffic. With no predetermined march route or official city permit, the police struggled to keep up, trying in vain to direct and control the march and push it back to the sidewalks.

"99% has no voice"

Unlike most demonstrations in New York City, we were not penned in like animals. Bystanders watched and waved and some joined in. We marched through Washington Square Park, where more young people joined. Our numbers were well over 1,000 marching freely through the streets of Manhattan, our voices heard loud and clear.

Since moving to New York about four years ago, I have never been on an action where we were able

to freely march through the streets. We covered about two and a half miles, arriving eventually at Union Square.

It was a tiny victory for the working people and the youth of this city, a victory that the police and city government were eager to snuff out. The ruling establishment is very afraid that this could spread and grow, and threaten "order" in the city.

But the only order which exists is an order in which the rich get richer and the rest of us are left behind, where the super-elite, the "top 1%", runs society while "the 99%" has no voice.

This is why Occupy Wall Street has raised the slogan "We are the 99%!"

in an attempt to fight back and be heard.

Violent cops

After rallying very briefly at Union Square, the march turned around to head back to the newly renamed Liberty Plaza. The police had amassed a bigger force behind us and unfurled large orange nets cast widely to catch as many people as possible.

The police turned aggressive, violently pushing protesters, grabbing them, throwing people to the ground and arresting them. We ran but they hemmed in dozens at a time, pinning them between nets

and buildings. I narrowly escaped a net and we chanted on the opposite side calling for the release of our brothers and sisters.

We were peaceful. They were violent. We were exercising our freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and they brutally violated these rights.

A small group of young women, who were trapped in a net, standing perfectly peacefully, were suddenly pepper-sprayed by a senior police officer for no reason.

The police had one aim - intimidation. Police violence may indeed make some people more fearful of protesting, but it also inspires wider outrage and solidarity. Overwhelmingly the core of the movement has stayed strong and continued the occupation.

This exposes the hypocritical role of the police force and the state. They brutally suppress attempts to peacefully speak out against corporate domination. Meanwhile the real criminals and crooks on Wall Street walk about freely. They are making billions off our work, demanding we pay for their crisis and are protected by an oppressive regime.

Expand the struggle

But I also began to think about where this movement was headed. There is constant discussion and debate about how it can become bigger.

Many people who are participating in political activity for the first time are excited by the energy and the strong sense of community within the occupation and are asking: "Why are there not more people here?"

There is also talk of spreading the occupation to other cities.

Occupy Wall Street reflects some of this anger and radicalisation that is developing. From Wisconsin to New York City we are experiencing the aftershocks of social earthquakes now rocking the planet.

These earthquakes are caused by the deep subterranean tensions of an enduring global economic crisis. The epicentres of these quakes have so far been seen across Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of the globe. But it may not be too long before the tremors in the US become full-blown social convulsions.

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The Committee for a Workers' International

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

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