

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2333>



USA

Massive occupation targets Wall Street

- IV Online magazine - 2011 - IV441 - October 2011 -

Publication date: Monday 17 October 2011

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

The following article appears in the October edition of Socialist Action newspaper.

Worldwide economic misery, inequality, and war have sparked an explosion of protests against Wall Street's super crooks. The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, which began in New York City, has spread like a wildfire across the United States. Protesters, led mainly by young people, have built encampments in numerous cities, with accompanying marches and rallies that have brought out thousands.

Their chants strike out at the injustices of capitalism: "Banks got bailed out, we got sold out!" "They say cut back, we say fight back!"

The original call for the Wall Street protests was made on July 13 on a website owned by Adbusters, a Canadian anti-corporate cultural magazine. The protest was set for Sept. 17. Many activists didn't know what to make of it, but on that date about 1000 demonstrators arrived. Within a couple of weeks, the actions went viral, with protests erupting in every major U.S. city. As we go to press on Oct. 8, the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement has spread to over 250 U.S. cities and towns, and is helping to define a new generation of rebels.

Reasons for anger at Wall Street aren't hard to find. Anger has erupted in the context of unpopular wars for oil and resources in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the U.S.-backed war in Libya. The racist execution of Troy Davis in Georgia on Sept. 21 brought many activists to a boiling point. Capitalism is showing its true face to ever more millions, especially the youth who are confronted with bleak job prospects and lack the means to further their education.

The stark economic inequality of the United States has produced a backdrop for their rage. Between the 1970s and today, the inflation-adjusted income of working people stagnated. In contrast, the income of the richest 1% from 1979 to 2005 rose an incredible 480%. The average annual salary of the top 1% went from \$4.2 million in 1979 to \$24.3 million in 2005.

OWS is loosely modeled on the "Arab Spring" symbol of mass protest, Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt—where the movement toppled the pro-Israel, U.S. puppet dictator Hosni Mubarak earlier this year. The OWS also drew inspiration from the occupation of the Capitol building and mass rallies in Madison, Wis., by militant trade unionists and their supporters last February.

“Festival of the oppressed”

The New York City Occupation is centered in Zuccotti Park, a block-sized privately owned space a short walk from Wall Street. Political discussions go on at all hours. Protesters on the Broadway side display to passersby signs and banners denouncing inequality and mocking greed. Each day there are protests at the opening and closing bells of the stock market. Twice a day the movement has a General Assembly in which hundreds participate, and anyone can speak. On Oct. 8, a Washington Square meeting gathered 3000 people. An Egyptian revolutionary addressed the crowd, to rave applause.

Lenin used the phrase “a festival of the oppressed” to describe revolutions, and while OWS is not a revolution in any sense, it shares with every other genuinely mass movement or strike a family-like camaraderie and feeling of

tolerance and mutual support” with the unleashing of creativity and collective decision making.

The number of working groups is continually growing, and includes medics, direct action, food, comfort, facilitation (for chairing the General Assemblies), and media. Although from the beginning the majority of the facilitators (who are also central political leaders of OWS) were people of color, a People of Color Committee has been established to rectify the balance of what had initially been a disproportionately white assemblage. Their efforts overlap with the national Occupy the Hood effort. A production team has published a newspaper, The Occupied Wall Street Journal.

At the same time, Zuccotti Park is lined with plenty of well-armed police. Video footage of New York cops pepper spraying and savagely beating peaceful protesters on Sept. 24 shocked millions across the globe (see occupywallstreet.org). Over 1000 OWS protesters have been arrested.

Arrests of more than 700 peaceful protesters on the Brooklyn Bridge on Oct. 1 revealed the depravity and fear felt by the profit-driven U.S. ruling class of an issue that has resulted in giant worker-led protests and general strikes in Europe. A class-action lawsuit was filed on Oct 4 against New York City for the Brooklyn Bridge arrests. “We believe the NYPD engaged in a premeditated, planned, scripted and calculated effort to get protesters off the street,” said the Partnership for Civil Justice, which represents protesters.

A Youtube video reveals one cop saying to another on Oct. 5, before police savagely attacked protesters, “My little nightstick’s gonna get some” a workout tonight, hopefully.” But the police violence backfired for the ruling class since the outrage that it provoked served subsequently to bring out many more protesters.

Labor support for protesters

Organized labor’s initial response to OWS was slow. But, on Oct. 2, John Samuelson, president of Transport Workers Union Local 100, the 35,000-member New York City subway and bus worker’s union, filed an injunction against the NYPD for commandeering from their regular routes five TWU drivers and their buses to have them haul Brooklyn Bridge protesters to jail. Unfortunately, the injunction request failed, but the TWU’s bold action won recognition for its defense of civil liberties and the rights of its members.

The previous week the Local 100 Executive Board voted unanimously to support OWS. Local 100’s contract expires on Jan. 15. It is threatened with three zeros and health-care cuts. If it doesn’t accept the rotten deal, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority “deeply in debt to Wall Street crooks and rich owners of tax-free MTA bonds” says it will impose another round of mass layoffs. Last year, some 900 members were laid off, mostly African American, Hispanic, and immigrant workers. Most have returned to work.

Said TWU organizer Marvin Holland, “We endorsed Occupy Wall St. because we agreed with 99% of what the protesters were saying. They’re 100% right that banks caused this problem. We’ve had rank-and-file members there since day one.”

TWU Local 100 began organizing other unions for what would be an historic Oct. 5 march in support of OWS. It began at Foley Square near City Hall and marched down to Zuccotti Park, a distance of about one mile. Signing on were the United Federation of Teachers, the 1199 Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Professional Staff Congress, the Amalgamated Transit Union, SEIU 32BJ, and others.

Julie Fry, a lawyer at the Legal Aid Society and union member there, put it this way, “We’re so fed up and getting

nowhere through the old political structures that there needs to be old-fashioned rage in the streets.”

The rally attracted around 20,000 demonstrators, which filled Zuccotti Park to overflowing. The call had clearly electrified working-class activists, eclipsing in size recent city union contract rallies. Marchers took up the now famous chants of the OWS, “We are the 99%” and “Banks got bailed out, we got sold out!” “All day, all week, occupy Wall Street!” The Oct. 5 rally was a relief from the more perfunctory and politically conservative affairs organized by official labor.

Later that evening, some 200 protesters left Zuccotti Park for a march on Wall St., but were met with savage club-wielding NYPD goons armed with pepper spray. Twenty-eight protesters were arrested.

What it takes to win

Capitalism is in an economic and political crisis from which there is no genuine solution but socialism, the democratic rule of the working-class majority over the wealth that we’ve created. A mere 20 years ago, with the fall of the authoritarian Stalinist governments in Eastern Europe, capitalism’s pundits proclaimed the “end of history” and an eternity of capitalist rule. No more. Pro-U.S. dictatorships have fallen or are being seriously challenged by rebellion. Major strikes and rebellions are breaking out in Europe over severe government cuts demanded by banks and international financial institutions.

More and more people are beginning to view the capitalist system as corrupt and unreformable. In the U.S., millions who had expected change with the election of Barack Obama have had their hopes dashed on virtually every issue, from health care to warfare.

Taking the worldview of this trend, a Sept. 27 New York Times article observed, “Complaints range from corruption to lack of affordable housing and joblessness, common grievances the world over. From South Asia to the heartland of Europe and now even to Wall Street, these protesters share something else: wariness, even contempt, toward traditional politicians and the democratic political process they preside over. They are taking to the streets, in part, because they have little faith in the ballot box.”

It is no surprise to Socialist Action readers that President Barack Obama received more Wall Street campaign contributions in 2008 than John McCain, his right-wing, pro-war Republican rival. Obama’s largest donors on Wall Street were the mega-crooks at Goldman Sachs, the largest brokerage outfit.

Both parties gave trillions to bail out the mortgage racket, the auto industry bosses, and Wall Street crooks like Bernie Madoff. Meanwhile, these corporate thieves are raping our environment, creating an unparalleled disaster that threatens life on earth. Both parties, from New York state to California, are slashing public services and jobs, wrecking lives, in order to make working people pay for a crisis that they had no part in. Both parties support war and death, from Haiti to Palestine to Afghanistan.

The twin parties of big business know that their options are few within the ever-shrinking prospects of capitalism. The official U.S. unemployment rate in September was unchanged at 9.1%. Economists put the true figure as high as 16%. Unemployment is twice as devastating in the African American community and worst amongst African American, Hispanic, and immigrant youth.

Capitalism is a system born of misery that has been made immeasurably worse by this crisis. Humanity says enough

Massive occupation targets Wall Street

is enough! It will take mass protests and strikes based on millions of organized working people—and ultimately revolution—to stop Wall Street’s assault on working people, the unemployed, and immigrants. But wherever the OWS movement goes from here, it has already taught us powerful lessons on the need to organize democratically and independently of the ruling class. OWS has lifted many people from their bitter disappointments in Obama’s betrayals and presented a way to fight against greed and inequality.

Socialist Action calls on working people to support the Occupation protests. Deepen the links to workers’ struggles. We propose turning our union halls into giant congresses of labor, the unemployed, and the oppressed, for an ongoing democratic discussion on how to defeat Wall Street’s attacks. Break with the two big business parties, the parties of war and racism; they cannot be changed or reformed. We need a party of our own; a truly democratic party built on a militant labor movement—a labor party!”

Labor needs to raise the demand to nationalize the banks and Wall St. firms—that is, to seize the wealth of those institutions for public uses like education, health care, and mass transportation. Taxing and tweaking Wall St. practices will never control these criminals, nor recover the vast wealth stolen from working people by fraud. The money in their banks belongs to us!

Socialists say, “Cancel all home mortgage debt and all government debt to Wall Street crooks! No cuts to public services, no to layoffs! Make the rich pay for their crisis! Nationalize the petroleum industry and replace fossil fuels to save the planet! Fund human needs, not war! Tuition-free education now! Jail N.Y. top cop Ray Kelly and his club-wielding thugs!”

To struggle to achieve these goals, a revolutionary party is needed; one with experience in organizing and educating the working class against economic exploitation, war, racism, sexism, and homophobia. A party is needed that engages in day-to-day struggles without forgetting the necessity of revolution. We invite you to join such a party—Socialist Action (see socialistaction.org).

Let us all deepen our solidarity with this growing movement. Occupy Wall Street!

Socialist Action, October 2011