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Occupy Chicago fills the jail with inspiration and solidarity

By John Bachtell

On Saturday Oct. 15, I was one of the 200 occupiers who were arrested standing up for free speech and assembly and against corporate greed, after Occupy Chicago attempted to establish an encampment at the edge of Grant Park.

For nearly a month this movement has been occupying the corner of Jackson and LaSalle streets in the heart of the city's financial district. However, city ordinances make it impossible to stay overnight there so protesters sleep in a nearby church.

Under a crisp cool night sky a spirited march of 4,000 strong marched from the financial district to Grant Park. As waves streamed into the pavilion at the corner of Michigan and Congress, a giant American flag was lofted and passed over the heads of protesters.

The Chicago Police Department surrounded the protest with officers and, at 11 p.m., announced we were in violation of a city ordinance that prohibits being in the park after hours.

Awaiting arrest, the mood among the overwhelmingly young protesters was defiant and festive. Protesters linked arms and ringed the tents. At 1:30 a.m., after repeated warnings, the police began to arrest us and tear down the hastily constructed tent village. Everyone remained calm, strengthened by the understanding we were going to jail for a worthy cause.



While the arrests were taking place we began singing the National Anthem. It reminded me of the Madison, Wis., protests earlier this year where I witnessed 5000 people sing the National Anthem in the capitol rotunda.

The police separated men and women and filled a Chicago transit bus with men. We were all taken to the police station at 18th and State.

As I was being processed, an officer asked why a "boomer" like me was protesting. I told him, "I'm here to end corporate greed and make the country better."

"You're going to have to end capitalism to do that," he said. I nodded and replied, "If that's what

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it takes."

We were led past holding cells crammed with protesters. A loud cheer and raised fists greeted

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everyone who passed.

I was placed in Holding Cell C and welcomed by the 25 others there. At 55 years old I was by far the old man of the cell. Most were in their twenties and thirties.

After a short while we settled in for the rest of the night and got talking. Someone began by giving the clearest explanation I have heard of what a "derivative" is, how Wall Street "gambling" crashed the economy and then how the victims were blamed. Sometimes the best education takes place in a jail cell!

Then we got to introductions. Everyone listened respectfully as we told our stories of what we did and what brought us to Occupy Chicago. There were young factory workers, students, a professor, an aspiring comic and union members from Unite Here, SEIU and the Teamsters.

This was the first civil disobedience arrest for most and for some it was their first participation

in an Occupy Chicago protest. All spoke eloquently about how corporate greed had impacted their lives.

Our discussions were far ranging. Toward morning we discussed how to diversify the movement and debated whether the Occupy Chicago movement should consider police part of the 99% or just an arm of the state.

Finally, after being fingerprinted, issued I-bonds and assigned a court date, we gathered our belongings and were released. We exited the police station into a dreary Sunday morning rain only to be warmed by a cheering crowd who had waited all night for our release.

There's not one of us who wouldn't do it again, and most likely we will, to end corporate greed and make our country right.



John Bachtell writes for the People's World.

Occupy Wall Street is the voice of America

By PW Editorial Board

It's no surprise that Republicans, right-wing think tanks, corporate moguls and, of course, Wall Street execs and CEO's are worried sick about Occupy Wall Street.

First, the occupy movement shines a light on the real culprits behind the economic disaster that has engulfed our country. Second, and probably more worrisome for the "1 percent," is the fact that the majority of Americans agree with and support the Occupy Wall Street movement, which has spread across the nation, capturing the hearts and imaginations of millions.

There are two lines of attack against the protesters we see daily in the corporate media.

One is that they are essentially a bunch of misguided youth who lack any focus whatsoever.

The other is that they are, essentially, left-wing extremists opposed to capitalism, in favor of stealing money from the rich, and in favor of regulating private business out of existence.

The truth the opponents of Occupy Wall Street are trying to hide is that Occupy Wall Street is a movement that speaks for all of America.

A Wall Street Journal editorial this week, in an attempt to prove the "left wing" orientation of the occupy movement, said two thirds of protesters it polled believe government should guarantee health care for all people. The recent Rasmussen poll on this matter showed 64 percent of Ameri-

can voters say the same thing.

The same editorial gave as further "proof" of the movement's left wing orientation, its finding that 77 percent of the demonstrators want to raise taxes on the wealthy. According to the latest Marist poll on this matter, 68 percent of all voters, including 68 percent of independents, agree with the protesters on this issue too.

65 percent of the protesters believe the government should guarantee a secure retirement. On this issue, the American public is even more "radical" than the occupy protesters who were polled. 70 percent of all voters, including 73 percent of independents, said the government should guarantee a secure requirement.

In deep contrast, the public emphatically disagrees with the right-wing tea party.

53 percent of Americans disapprove of the tea party movement and only 28 percent approve.

The big broad "center" in American politics is not really in support of any part of the corporate agenda. Broad majorities turned out for defending the right to organize unions and the right to collective bargaining. Occupy Wall Street shows, once again, that the real "center" holds progressive, forward-thinking positions.

Occupy Wall Street, the movement spreading across this nation like a prairie fire, speaks for the people of the United States.

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Verizon workers say “We are the 99% too,” join with Occupy Wall Street

By Teresa Albano

After several service problems with Verizon, customer Julia Gruberg gladly joined the picket line in front of the corporate giant's headquarters in New York City Oct. 15. Gruberg had gone to Occupy Wall Street and heard about the protest there.

Carrying a sign saying, “We Are the 99%,” Gruberg joined with hundreds of others marching from Zuccotti Park to tie issues of corporate greed with workers' rights.

“I just had a problem with Verizon. My charger broke,” she said and described the run around that led to the pitch for a new more expensive phone.

The union that represents many of the Verizon workers, the Communications of America, also found common cause with the Occupy movement. Verizon workers, along with other union members, marched from the picket line to Zuccotti Park, chanting “All day, all week, Occupy Wall Street!”

This is the most recent example of the labor movement finding ways to work with the fast growing, mass and youthful Occupy movement. “We are the 99%,” a cornerstone concept of the movement, encompasses workers and their unions alongside small business people, students, the unemployed, professionals and a host of other, some unexpected, allies.

Wearing a “Ban Fracking” sticker, Martin Michaels, of Shandaken, N.Y., showed up at Zuccotti Park and then the picket line said for a lot of reasons he identifies with the new movement.

“I’m a recent college graduate, unemployed,” he said.

After the corporation promised to bargain in good faith, the workers returned to work, and the negotiating table, Aug. 22. That was just days be-



fore Hurricane Irene was due to hit the East Coast, and the corporation would never have been able to deal with its aftermath without its full staff of highly trained union workers.

However, after the crisis passed, Verizon returned to its previous mega-giveback positions.

“The community support during the strike was great. People brought food and water to the picket line,” said Tony Martinez, union steward for CWA 1101 and 31-year Verizon technician.

Martinez is not a stranger to union-community work. He has advocated on behalf of the disabled, working on a company committee. Martinez is in a wheelchair.

Debra Williams, whose been at Verizon for 32 years, said she thought the Occupy Wall Street movement is “great.”

Michael Neggie, a Verizon field technician in Westchester County for 15 years, said the picket line and march were all about supporting Occupy Wall Street along with bringing attention to a specific example of corporate greed.

“They want everything back that we gained in the last 50 years,” he said.

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Occupy Oakland wakes the town

By Marilyn Bechtel

On the morning of Oct. 22, Occupy Oakland's two-week-old camp in front of City Hall - now said to number 150 tents - thronged with visitors. They viewed displays of artwork by the occupiers, including the children in the camp. A small garden bloomed in the center of an open space.

A covering of straw protected the ground, and walkways of pallets covered by plywood and cardboard wound through the clustered tents. A neat-looking kitchen was serving breakfast to campers as they prepared for Occupy Oakland's first rally and march. Organizers said 300 to 500 meals are served there each day.

The area has been renamed Oscar Grant Plaza by the occupiers to honor a young black man killed by Bay Area Rapid Transit police nearly three years ago.

In the last few days the encampment has received eviction notices from the city, citing health and safety problems, none of which were visible on march day. At their daily general assemblies, occupiers themselves have talked about the need to overcome some problems that have arisen in the camp.

The question on many visitors' minds was, what brings people - mostly but not entirely young - to leave the comfort of their own beds and come, for a few nights or weeks, to join other campers in the broad and ever-growing Occupy Together movement.

Ayessa, 25, a young black single mother who's had to move back in with her own mother, put it this way: "Everything in this country is moving backward. Homes are being repossessed, jobs are hard to find. How can one live on \$8 an hour?"

"If everyone in the working class gets organized on this, like the 48 hour strike in Greece, we can change things!" she said.

Estudiantes chilenos muestran camino a movimiento internacional

Por W. T. Whitney Jr.

Una ola de indignación contra el dominio del mercado y de los banqueros está dando la vuelta al mundo. Protestan manifestantes contra recortes a salarios y pensiones en Europa, el poder del dinero en EEUU, y el abandono a los jóvenes por todas partes. En Europa el desempleo entre los de menos de 25 años de edad anda por el 25 por ciento, y en España, 43,6 por ciento. El año pasado aumentos a colegiaturas fueron recibidas con inmensas protestas estudiantiles en Bretaña e Italia. Egresados universitarios recientes en EEUU que se unen al movimiento para Ocupar a Wall Street nos cuentan de sus malas perspectivas para encontrar trabajo e pesadas cargas de deuda.

Los estudiantes chilenos están dando lecciones al movimiento global. Trabajando desde hace cinco meses y dependiendo de decisiones colectivas, los estudiantes allí han movido de las demandas inmediatas a una crítica global al sistema politicoeconómico dominante chileno, herencia de la dictadura Pinochetista. Han creado alianzas con sindicatos laborales, con grupos indígenas y con movimientos sociales.

Cientos de miles se han manifestado una y otra vez tras el curso de las semanas, y con las escuelas ocupadas y el ausentismo en aumento, realizaban los estudiantes una huelga general el 25 de agosto en colaboración con los trabajadores. El gobierno del presidente derechista Sebastian Piñera comenzó negociaciones con dirigentes estudiantiles. Entre las cuestiones en la mesa son una educación gratuita y de alta calidad para todos, un control nacional en vez de local sobre las escuelas, y la educación como

derecho, no como algo que se compra con dinero.

La educación universitaria en Chile es la más privatizada en toda América Latina. Las familias y los estudiantes tienen que cubrir casi el 85 por ciento de las colegiaturas que se cobran por asistir a las universidades chilenas. Los niveles de deuda para las colegiaturas y cuotas estudiantiles están por las nubes.

Fracasaban las negociaciones, que servían solo para provocar mayores críticas a los dirigentes estudiantiles como irresueltos y para ofrecerles una breve esperanza a los estudiantes preocupados por perder becas y un año de créditos académicos. Respondió el movimiento estudiantil con volver a las calles a nivel nacional el 7 de octubre para encontrar la represión policíaca. Fueron arrestados 205 en Santiago.

Desde hace meses han estado exigiendo cambios constitucionales y el fin de un sistema electoral "binomial" que empuje los partidos políticos a dos coaliciones. En el curso de las pláticas regresaban los negociadores estudiantiles a cuestiones mayores que afectan a toda la sociedad. La educación universal sería pagada con reformas tributarias y nacionalización de la industria del cobre. En esto se reunían con la Asociación de Maestros Chilenos para organizar un plebiscito nacional extraoficial.

Subraya el dirigente estudiantil Giorgio Jackson al nuevo papel de los estudiantes como protagonistas. Escribiendo para Le Monde Diplomatique, declara Jackson que el "eje central es la desigualdad dominantes en Chile que nos permitió despertar al descontento latente".

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523

Email: contact@peoplesworld.org