

From Occupy Wall Street – Day 17

by Pat Fry, 10/4/11

New York City is alive with mobilizing for an historic march on Wall Street tomorrow. It will begin at 4:30 pm at City Hall and weave down Broadway to Wall Street. The protest is planned in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street protest that began September 17th. Trade unions, labor and community groups, environmental and civil rights organizations are joining in support. City schools and universities will see mass walkouts.

I am on the OWS labor outreach list and responded to the call yesterday to insure OWS participation in a Teamster rally in front of Southeby's – this is an example of conscious unity-building efforts with organized labor by the OWS movement.

It was pouring down rain on 5th Avenue as one union leader after another expressed solidarity with the Teamster art handlers who were suddenly locked out by Southeby's in a surprise action during contract negotiations. Southeby's made record breaking profits last quarter while the CEO, Bill Ruprecht, doubled his salary to nearly \$6 million annually. The same wealth-grabbing, union-busting drive is confronting every other union in the city. A leader from AFSCME District Council 37 urged all to join a rally at City Hall today to protest the layoffs of hundreds of Board of Education support staff who make no more than \$20,000 a year. The President of the UAW local that recently fought a hard won contract battle with the Museum of Modern Art and CWA leaders who continue to battle Verizon in contract negotiations spoke about the common front of struggle facing working people. Speakers urged everyone to join the Wall Street march tomorrow.

I left the rally and made my way down to the OWS General Assembly – held every day at 1:00 PM and evenings from 7 – 9:00 PM. It was the 17th day of the occupation of “Liberty Park” couched between skyscraper Wall Street buildings. There was discussion underway about spending some of the donated funds on badly needed sleeping bags. The human microphone system was working well. In place of electronic amplification every word said by participants is echoed in two successive repetitions so that even someone like yours-truly standing in the back with difficulty hearing could hear. Another proposal discussed was to send representatives to the area's Community Board to propose that the “quiet time” at the OWS space begin at 10:00 PM every night rather than 11:00 PM in exchange for their permission to use amplification. Everyone raised their hands up and wiggled their fingers in approval. There was discussion about the news that Wall Streeter JP Morgan just gave an unprecedented \$4.6 million gift to the NYPD, an obvious payoff for the aggressive police tactics on display over the last several days. There was a report on the Transit Workers Union's court action earlier in the day seeking an injunction against the city to stop forcing transit workers into driving city buses used for making arrests as was done on Saturday at the Brooklyn Bridge mass arrests.

I joined a group of co-workers from my job – two are African American women who are part of the OWS Community of Color Outreach committee. They said that NAACP national president, Ben Jealous, will be at the OWS space on Friday. Concluding the night's GA agenda were working committee reports. The Labor Outreach committee reported on the growing number of unions supporting Wednesday's OWS protest*. A young Native American woman reported from the Communities of Color outreach committee on efforts to connect with people of color who may not be so open to sleeping over night in public space, she said, and noted that in terms of occupation, Native American

lands have been occupied for over 400 years.

New York's unrelenting daily rain had stopped by the time the GA had begun. Many of those exhausted by the round-the-clock occupation were sleeping on the ground under layers of tarps and blankets. I talked to one of the young people holding a sign calling for a ban on plastic handcuffs. She was one of the 700 arrested Saturday and she showed me her wrists sore from the plastic hand cuffs she suffered during 7 long hours sitting in a bus waiting to be processed at a police precinct.

How long the OWS space can be held – rumor is that the Department of Health is being mobilized to shut it down – or what the next steps will be following tomorrow's protest – remains to be seen.

One thing appears to be a sure bet – we are witnessing an historic new phase in the building of the progressive majority coalition that is essential in challenging corporate power and winning advances for democracy.

*Unions that are organizing contingents for tomorrow are: UAW Region 9A, Teachers' Federation of Puerto Rico, TWU Local 100, 1199 SEIU, NNU, Laborers International Union of America, United Federation of College Teachers - Pratt Institute, National Writers Guild USW, United Steel Workers of America, 32BJ SEIU, Committee of Interns and Residents/SEIU, Professional Staff Congress CUNY , UFT United Federation of Teachers, CWA 1109 Communication Workers of America, RSDWU Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, NYC Labor Against the War. The list keeps growing.