

# First arrests in Occupy Detroit protest

By Shannon Jones  
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Wayne State University campus police arrested two Occupy Detroit protesters last week after they allegedly tried to interrupt the videotaping of a top Wall Street executive. The arrests were the first in the three weeks of protests by Occupy Detroit.

The protesters were part of a group opposing the appearance of Duncan Niederauer, CEO of the New York Stock Exchange. Niederauer was previously an executive at Goldman Sachs. A flier distributed by Occupy Detroit accused Niederauer of being “a chief culprit in the culture of greed and corruption on Wall Street that helped cause the financial crisis.”

The two arrested protesters face disorderly conduct charges.

About 150 people have joined the Occupy Detroit encampment at Grand Circus Park on Woodward Avenue in downtown Detroit. On Sunday, some 500 people participated in a labor solidarity march from Hart Plaza to the encampment. The event was backed by the United Auto Workers, the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees and other area unions, who are attempting to channel the occupy movement behind support for the Democratic Party.

Among those attending the rally was Democratic US Congressman Gary Peters, who in remarks to the press sought to portray the toothless bank regulation bill enacted by Congress last year as an example of the Democratic Party’s anti-Wall Street credentials.

As for the United Auto Workers, its claim to oppose the 1 percent is equally fraudulent. Over the past weeks UAW officials have been busy ramming through sellout contracts at the Big Three Detroit auto companies over massive rank-and-file opposition. Wall Street has hailed the new agreements with the automakers for increasing labor costs by the smallest margin in four decades.

Visiting the Occupy Detroit encampment last week was the Reverend Jesse Jackson. The long-time

Democratic Party operator has traveled to a number of Occupy encampments across the United States as part of an effort to divert the anger of protesters from the Democratic Party city administrations in Oakland and other cities that have sent police to attack protesters.

In Detroit, Jackson said nothing about the police attacks on the Occupy movement. Instead he patronizingly compared the Wall Street protests with the civil rights protests of the 1960s. Ignoring the issue of the fight against social inequality that has been raised by the protests, he pointed to the recent decision by Bank of America to withdraw its proposed \$5 monthly debit card fee as a sign of the success of the Occupy movement.

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed a number of those involved in the Occupy Detroit encampment.

Caroline, a graduate student in ecology and biology at Wayne State University and a member of the Occupy Detroit media committee, explained what happened with the arrests last week. “The CEO of the New York Stock Exchange was taping an interview and two of my friends got in,” she said. “One stood up and asked why he [Niederauer] hadn’t been arrested because of his activities during the economic meltdown. A couple of minutes another stood up and tried to ask a question and she was arrested too. They were released after a group of 50 of us marched to the police station.”

Caroline explained how she got involved in the occupy movement: “My mom was a member of SDS; I was upset that my generation wasn’t doing anything. A month ago Occupy Wall Street started getting media attention. I was one of those who started an Occupy Detroit Facebook group. All of a sudden I had 900 people on it. So we decided to have it here.

“This is an American version of the Arab Spring. That is what inspired it. Now we have a lot of veterans supporting, especially after Oakland where that kid got hurt.”

Nate, age 21, who is currently unemployed, told the WSWS why he was supporting the occupy movement. “I was a stagehand,” he said, “I worked with the stagehands union in the area at the Detroit Opera House and other locations. When the movies came to town I started working in the movies. When (Michigan Governor) Snyder cut the tax breaks for the film industry, I lost my job.

“For me there was a lot of inspiration from Occupy Wall Street. I think we have been overdue for something like this. I have definitely gained a much deeper appreciation for politics.”

Jill Blair is a student at Oakland Community College. She told us, “I came down here and I haven’t left—I think I have left for six hours in total. There are so many issues. The main thing that brought me down here was the bus layoffs. I had to wait three or four hours for a bus to go to school. There were times I had to get up at three or four o’clock in the morning to get to school by noon. Then there is also the issue of student loans.

“I just want change. I think everyone wants change. Everyone is just fed up. I have never been happier in my life than I have been with Occupy Detroit. We are all doing something important. We’re a big family. It is worldwide.”

Colin Kitchen said, “I am a psychology student. This movement is bringing back my faith in people. If the system is broken you can only put duct tape on it so long before it collapses. This system is designed around greed. It will never be fair. I don’t have all the answers, I just know that it is wrong.”

He added, “Politics is about money. It will always be about my wallet is bigger than yours. It is part of capitalism.”

Brittany, a nurse, came down for the afternoon to show her support. “I was an ardent supporter of Obama,” she said. “I learned my lesson on that one. He said during the debates that he would close Guantanamo. As commander in chief all he had to do was say it to make it happen.

“Withdrawing from Iraq feels like a hollow victory because in the process we are going in to so many other countries. We are drone bombing four or five countries now. They are completely ignoring the War Powers Act.

“We do a shoddy job of taking care of the poor in this

country. It is shameful. Our health care system is in a state of crisis. We spend a much larger share of our GDP on health care than any other country; at the same time we have a poor life expectancy. We are the only country to deny health care based on employment.

“What we have now is that those making health care decisions are not health care providers. They are the ones in insurance companies and large health care companies. They make a better profit when people are sick.

“The pharmaceutical companies are murdering people. I have seen people die. There are people in there who should be prosecuted for premeditated murder.

“I don’t mind being the voice of socialized medicine. Education and health care are human rights.

“It has been the working people who have pushed things forward—the eight hour day, child labor laws—labor pushed for it through protests and strikes. And I have to say it was the socialist movement that pushed us leaps and bounds ahead.”

Ramon Martinez, a student at Grosse Pointe South High School, said, “I know it’s going to be hard going to college. My mom’s not going to help me; my dad’s not going to help me. I am going to end up taking out some loans from the bank. I will be in serious debt. Quite frankly, I am scared.”

His friend Lindsay, from Grosse Pointe North, said, “I think the wars are going to get worse. It is a big uproar with everyone being controlled. The gap between rich and poor is just getting bigger and bigger. The wealthy are in their own bracket and they just keep getting wealthier. There is really no middle class.”

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