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Reports from Occupy Boston

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy | Oct. 18, 2011 NCR Today

Wednesday, Oct. 5

Approximately 40 domed tents are tucked into the green space of Dewey Square, located in the heart of Boston's Financial District.

Two boardwalks made of wooden pallets intersect through the middle of the tents, giving an air of permanency to the arrangement. An American flag flaps above one entryway. Nearby, a sign reads "Capitalism is slavery." This is propped in front of a placard touting Ron Paul for 2012.

Although only six days old, the Occupy Boston encampment appears fairly well established. There is a medical tent, a logistical tent, an information tent, a media tent, a food tent and a meditation tent with "sacred space guidelines." At the food tent where I get a free cup of coffee, a young man tells me food and medical donations for the camp are "pouring in."

It's mid-morning, and the campers are preparing for the day's events: a march to nearby Northeastern University to join a student walk-out and then a return to Dewey Square for a rally with members of the Massachusetts Nurses Association.

That afternoon, dozens of students attempt to block Atlantic Avenue, a main thoroughfare running alongside Dewey Square, but retreat after conversations with the police.

An hour later, several hundred nurses turn out in support of Occupy Boston. The nurses hope the rally will raise awareness of their Main Street Contract for America [1], an initiative launched last spring that calls for increasing corporate taxes to help cover the cost of ensuring Americans a living wage, adequate retirement funds, good health care that is not based on ability to pay and decent public education.

Brendan Curran, a 27-year-old divinity student who is studying to be a minister, says he is at the encampment because he thinks the country "is in need of a genuine social revolution. If we allow this structure to continue, we will be training our children to live in a destructive way. We have to start choosing to live in a more loving, participatory way. We have to realize that we are the democracy we want. I am not interested in making a narrow demand. I am more interested in something new being created."

And what is this "something new"?

"Direct democracy. Community building. Union building," Curran says.

Like the other occupiers, 25-year-old Eric Schow, who is pursuing a major in English, emphasizes he can only speak for himself when I question him about the camp. He is here, he says, to encourage the activists "to focus on peace as well as helping each other out."

Schow thinks the basic message of the Occupy movement is "the same message that spiritual leaders have been telling us for thousands of years: General greed and anger is not the solution."

Wednesday, Oct. 12

The number of tents at the encampment has increased since my visit a week ago. There are now about 65 tents squeezed into Dewey Square.

"Students keep showing up with their tents, but we are turning them away," one of the organizers says.

Early Tuesday morning, the Boston police arrested 141 demonstrators after they tried to expand the camp to a large swath of the Rose Kennedy Greenway across the street from the square.

"Civil disobedience will not be tolerated," said Boston Mayor Thomas Menino.

It was an ironic statement for the municipal leader of a city that takes pride in its rebellious history. Menino has expressed sympathy for the Occupy movement's goals but said he had to preserve public order and the plants in the park.

The mass arrests, the largest in Boston's recent history, elicited an outpouring of monetary donations for the demonstrators and sympathetic editorials in Thursday's *Boston Globe*.

"Times surely have changed when a mayor cares more about the grass than grassroots activists," columnist Joan Vennochi wrote [2].

In an attempt to clearly mark the boundaries of the camp, Boston police have put up some metal barricades.

A 10-foot statue of Gandhi, donated by the Peace Abbey of Sherborn, Mass., stands amid the tents. Brightly colored scarves are draped around Gandhi's neck and in one hand, he holds a bouquet of shiny red helium balloons. An icon of Jesus and two statues of Buddha have been added to the meditation tent, which is now called the Faith and Spirituality Space.

Dozens of placards line the camp's periphery. Some of them read:

- Corporations are not people. If you stab them, they do not bleed. They bleed us. 99%
- End the Fed
- End the Prison Industrial Complex
- Please end the wars
- I served eight years in the USMC to protect people's rights not the banks
- I could have a car, a house, and some money in my pocket. Instead I decided to pay for school.
- 6 million children die of hunger each year. You can change this.
- Gloves and boots make this country work. Not suits.

A person named Kaufman, citing the Center for Responsive Politics as the source, has carefully written out stats about the monetary influence of Washington, D.C., lobbyists. More than 11,000 lobbyists spent $1.6 billion on 100 senators and 435 representatives, Kaufman's sign declares.

And then there is my favorite, scrawled in red marker on a piece of cardboard: *Who put the Slytherins in charge?*

How Boston bankers and financiers perceive their local "occupation" is the subject of an article in Oct. 14's *Boston Globe* [3].

The *Globe* also reports that hundreds union leaders and rank-and-file members including teachers, steelworkers, nurses and electricians have joined Occupy Boston for marches and rallies.

Read more
Occupy Wall Street: New generation, new kind of leadership [4]

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