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Occupiers focus on financial fraud, infrastructure repair

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November 17, dubbed N17 by activist organizers, was a nationwide day of action for Occupy Wall Street, marking two months since the original Occupy Wall Street protest began in New York City's financial district.

In Portland, the turn was toward civil disobedience, blocking downtown banks and a Willamette River bridge to protest financial fraud and call for infrastructure investment. The day's first protest began at 8 a.m. on the east end of the Steel Bridge, where a crowd of 200 to 300 union members and supporters gathered. The action — "Get On The Bridge: We Declare a State of Economic Emergency for the 99%" — was called by the labor-backed community outreach group We Are Oregon and publicized by the national AFL-CIO and local groups, including Portland Jobs with Justice.

The plan was for a subgroup to block the car lanes on the bridge and be arrested. But at the event, it was Portland police who blocked traffic, shutting down the street before protesters moved on the bridge. So the civil disobedients moved to the front of the



Wall Street's bull has made quite a mess in Main Street's china shop.

crowd, sat down in the road, and were arrested one by one.

Police reported 25 arrests on the bridge. Communications Workers of America Local 7901 President Madelyn Elder was arrested. So was Service Employees International Union Local

503 Executive Director Heather Conroy, along with six SEIU staff: Joye Camacho, Samuel Davila, Aaron Giesa, Bob Rossi, Lorene Scheer, and Maro Sevastopoulos. Also arrested: Jamie Partridge (National Association of Let-

ter Carriers Branch 82); Peter Parks (International Longshore and Warehouse Union); Tim Flanagan (retired American Federation of Teachers-Oregon); Kent Sprang (retired Portland Association of Teachers); Bill Magorian (United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555); Steven Gilliam (Oregon Action staff organizer); and 11 others.

The Steel Bridge was chosen because it's an example of a bridge that has structural deficiencies and a need for repair: 25 million Americans are looking for work, protest organizers said, but Congress won't pass a jobs bill.

About a dozen members of Laborers Local 483 attended the bridge event bearing orange picket signs to make a parallel point: Portland, with a massive backlog in road repair, is planning to cut its budget for street maintenance next year, and lay off as many as 100 workers. (See article below.)

After the arrests, the crowd crossed the river on the below-deck pedestrian part of the Steel Bridge, and gathered in Tom McCall Waterfront Park for a rally where Occupy Portland first assembled Oct. 6. From there, the crowd — joined by participants in Occupy Portland —

marched to several downtown banks, where smaller groups of protesters planned to commit civil disobedience.

Security guards prevented protesters from entering a Bank of America branch at Southwest Second and Morrison.

At a Wells Fargo branch across from Pioneer Square, members of the Portland Central America Solidarity Committee protested, and nine were arrested. Kari Koch, a former union organizer who was one of those arrested, says Wells Fargo was targeted because it is a primary investor in GEO Group, the world's second largest private prison company.

Meanwhile, at a Chase bank branch, also across from Pioneer Courthouse Square, another group of activists with We Are Oregon entered to serve an "eviction" notice, then marched on the sidewalk. Mounted police and police in riot gear arrived, and shoved protesters and used pepper spray.

The bridge arrestees were charged with disorderly conduct, given different court dates, and are being defended by SEIU Local 503's in-house legal counsel. The Wells Fargo arrestees were charged with criminal trespass and are being defended pro bono by members of the National Lawyers Guild. Both groups were released almost immediately.

Laborers Local 483 warns City of fiscal emergency

Union members went before Portland City Council Nov. 16 ... and got the usual response

Members of Laborers Local 483 showed up en masse at City Hall Nov. 16, filling Portland City Council's ground-floor chamber for the public comment period before the Council's regular business. Most wore union T-shirts and hats, and carried signs that said, "Mr. Mayor, this is an emergency."

"You're welcome to have signs as long as you keep them down by your chest, at the request of folks providing security here," said Mayor Sam Adams. "There's no hooting. There's no hollering."

Local 483 Staff Rep Erica Askin was the first of three to speak for the union, which represents City employ-

ees in several bureaus, and read a statement that was approved the previous evening by the union's general membership: "We are the 900-member public employee union who maintain your infrastructure, including your gold-medal parks ... your clean roads and bridges, your safe water, and the vibrant community centers where your children learn and play. We support the public through our daily labor."

Askin said Adams is proposing a \$16.2 million cut in infrastructure spending in the Bureau of Transportation, which could lead to 100 layoffs. That's in addition to Parks and Recreation, where up to 49 layoffs are projected, Askin said.

"We ... ask you to consider how massive layoffs will increase wealth inequality and depress labor standards in a community already struggling with a lack of family-wage jobs."

The statement also took aim at the

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Early start to 2012 political season

The Northwest Oregon Labor Council sponsored the first Portland mayoral forum of the 2012 political season Nov. 15 at its new headquarters in Southeast Portland. Candidates participating were from left: businesswoman Eileen Brady, former city commissioner Charlie Hales, and State Rep. Jefferson Smith. Prior to the forum, candidates for Portland City Council answered questions before an audience of some 150 union members. Candidates included Steve Novick, incumbent City Commissioner Amanda Fritz, and her challenger, State Rep. Mary Nolan. To see the entire forum, go to www.orafclcio.org/.

Oregon home care workers protest wage, benefit cuts

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 organized rallies in seven Oregon cities Nov. 21 to protest service, wage, and benefit cuts in Oregon's in-home care program for the elderly and disabled. The union reports that over 400 home care workers, clients and supporters turned out.

Local 503 represents about 12,000 workers who are paid by the state to care for seniors and the disabled, plus another 7,500 who care for adults with developmental and mental illnesses. Contract bargaining has reached impasse, and the two sides are entering mediation.

Local 503 spokesperson Ed Hershey said the state is proposing to cut the number of home care workers who get

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