

Resolution in Support of Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Albany

Submitted by: Professional Staff Congress

Whereas, NYSUT, the union representing more than 600,000 teachers, school-related professionals, academic and professional faculty in higher education, professionals in education and health care and retirees, strongly opposes the imposition of further economic austerity on New York's schools and colleges and on the working-class and middle-class populations they serve and continues to campaign for equitable distribution of wealth and progressive taxation; and

Whereas, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) has brilliantly focused national and world attention on economic inequality by naming Wall Street as the source of the economic injustice and challenging limits on the use of public space through an occupation; and

Whereas, Occupy Wall Street organized at a moment at which income inequality in the U.S. is greater than at any time since the eve of the Depression, in the state with the greatest income inequality in the country and the city with the greatest income inequality within that state—has dared to question the primacy of the finance industry in American political and economic life, and, in doing so, OWS has shown how the political imagination can be expanded and social vision renewed; and

Whereas, in little more than a month, OWS and the larger “Occupy” movement changed public discourse and have begun to change public policy, and, largely because of OWS, political officials, the corporate media and the class whose interests they represent have been forced to address the radical inequality in this country, creating an opening for unions, community groups and others to press with new urgency for long-standing economic justice demands; and

Whereas, Occupy Wall Street's refocusing of political discourse has made a material difference in labor struggles in New York City and beyond, helping to sustain a pivotal strike of Teamsters Local 814 at the Sotheby's auction house, and contributing to the successful resolution of the recent contract negotiations on behalf of commercial building staff represented by SEIU 32BJ; and

Whereas, by claiming public space for a public purpose, OWS has increased our freedom to take political action, and, by remaining confrontational but non-violent, OWS has exposed the criminalization of peaceful protest in New York City and in the United States more broadly, and has created a space for all of us to exercise our right to speak up and act up; and

Whereas, by reimagining the public square, OWS has also highlighted the importance of education; education was everywhere at Zuccotti Park, with protesters educating each other, creating a free lending-library, developing working-groups to examine political questions, and initiating a free “nomadic university” to bring college to the people of New York, in the boroughs and streets where they live; and

Whereas, OWS has inspired similar movements across the nation, including Occupy Albany, whose participants courageously occupied public space next to the Capitol and refused to back down from their demand that New York State continue the “millionaire’s tax,” resulting in a first step toward tax reform in New York State, taken in December 2011, which, though it falls far short of being comprehensive and does little to shift economic inequality, has opened the door for continued pressure for reform and would never have happened without Occupy Albany’s rewriting of the political script; and

Whereas, while it is too soon to know what political movements will grow from the “Occupy” movement, it is already clear that these movements have changed the political landscape, not least because of their ability to find common cause between progressive activists and organized labor and to recognize contributions of students as essential to political change; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that NYSUT commends Occupy Wall Street—together with Occupy Albany and the Occupy movement—for its nerve and imagination, for its refusal to accept the unacceptable and for its willingness to explore new forms of political organization and protest.