

Over 450 arrested during Republican convention in Philadelphia

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Over 450 demonstrators are being held by the Philadelphia police after rallies, marches and acts of civil disobedience against the death penalty on Tuesday. As the Republican National Convention was celebrating "Prosperity with a Purpose" several miles away, those arrested were reportedly being held under harsh and brutal conditions.

Over 400 demonstrators are being held at Philadelphia's police headquarters known as the Roundhouse. According to the Independent Media Center (IMC), protesters have told their legal contacts harrowing stories of beatings, solitary confinement, refusal of bathroom privileges and denial of medication. Prisoners suffering from problems such as anxiety, asthma, hemophilia and injuries incurred during their arrests are not receiving the treatment they need. Seven witnesses reported seeing a woman dragged down the hallway, naked and bleeding.

Another 25 people were held at the city's Holmsburg Prison on Tuesday and Wednesday, a decrepit, turn-of-the-century prison several miles from their place of arrest. It was closed down in 1995 but reopened for the convention. Jay Hockburg, a legal observer from the ACLU, described Holmsburg as "really horrible, horrible conditions. I've heard that firsthand from lawyers, very bad conditions." The Holmsburg prisoners were moved to the Roundhouse on Thursday.

According to the R2K Network, the umbrella group for activists gathered for the week of convention-related actions, 22 prisoners are also being held in the 23rd District jail and are being denied food and medication, and there is no running water in their cells. They were told their lawyers were not coming when, in fact, their lawyers were never contacted. Their attorneys were not being allowed into arraignment hearings. Bails have been reported to range from \$100

to \$400,000.

According to IMC, on Wednesday evening police were sweeping areas of Center City, arresting suspected protesters on sight. There were multiple reports of unjustified car and pedestrian stops, often involving intimidation, searches, and occasionally violence. Police were seen in roving arrest squads in the area around 16th, 17th, Market and Chestnut in Center City. According to a report in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, roving patrols of bicycle police, made up of about 25 cops each, were chanting the protesters' chant as they were being arrested: "Who's streets? Our streets!"

Supporters of the jailed demonstrators, varying from dozens to hundreds at a time, have been holding a round the clock vigil at the Roundhouse despite adverse weather conditions from thunderstorms which have caused flooding. A demonstration is planned Friday to demand their release. Supporters are under constant surveillance and frequent harassment by police.

The IMC reported that police toilet-papered one of their own squad cars at the demonstration site, photographed it with the protesters in the background, and then moved into the park as if to break up the campsite. However, the stunt seemed designed simply to intimidate the group, as no arrests were made.

The arrests came on Tuesday during planned actions of civil disobedience to protest the death penalty and demand the release of jailed political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Protesters staged coordinated acts of civil disobedience by sitting down at six intersections and access ramps to city freeways. According to activists, the actions were carried out by isolated cells operating autonomously but under the coordination of a central, secretly located dispatch center, using a collection of cell phones and walkie-talkies. In at least two instances activists surrounded buses carrying RNC delegates,

delaying their trips considerably.

An atmosphere of panic was created before a rally in support of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal as the police swept the City Hall area telling store and restaurant owners to lock their doors and lower gates in preparation for riots in the streets. The attention of about one thousand participants at the City Hall rally was drawn to the surrounding streets as sirens wailed from all directions, helicopters hovered overhead, and several hundred police in full riot gear and on horseback or bicycles, and others running to the area in formation, then lined the streets where hundreds of protesters were sitting and chanting. Protesters were arrested one by one over several hours as spectators chanted, “The whole world is watching.”

According to R2K Network, at other sites police used pepper-spraying, beatings with batons—leaving at least one activist unconscious and hospitalized—and carried out arrests of people not committing civil disobedience who were perceived by police to be “leaders.” R2K reported that observers noted that police appeared to single out people of color for harsher treatment.

At each civil disobedience area, police used knives to cut through the street protesters' banners and ropes tying protesters together. One demonstrator, Jamie, who was carrying a 20-foot red banner reading, “Stop the Texas Killing Machine!” told the WWS: “I had wired the banner so that the police could not cut it. When they tried to they bounced back. One of the cops who had tried to cut the banner was angry and tried to grab it. But the way my hand was linked trying to hold it, I got twisted up in it as he tried to grab it... He ended up pulling me to the ground as he tried to get the banner. I was all twisted up in it and trapped. Then I was kicked and beaten by police and they managed to handcuff me with the banner twisted among the handcuffs.”

Jamie continued, “I was really upset by the next thing they said, ‘It's going limp, Where do you want to take it? Take its leg. Take its arm.’ I wasn't even a person to them. I was ‘it’... They threw me in the back of the van. As the van pulled off with me lying in the back, bottles of drinks fell on me. Then I had trouble breathing from the pepper spray earlier and my asthma. It was a tight space. When the officer driving the van got me to the police station and saw my condition, he decided not to arrest me and took me to the hospital. At the hospital

they told me I had deep contusions and bone bruising, a possible concussion, throwing up and breathing problems.” Jamie's face was swollen and discolored, and her arms had bruises and scratches.

An hour before Tuesday's protests began, police raided the “Ministry of Puppetganda,” a studio where puppets were being assembled, trapping over 70 activists inside for about four hours before arresting everyone. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, police claimed to have infiltrated the group and found information that the warehouse stored weapons and materials to block roads, although they “declined to elaborate” on the details. Protesters said they were doing nothing more than assembling large puppets for street theater. After obtaining a search warrant, police arrested the occupants who had been preparing to bring the large puppets to the demonstrations.

The IMC reported that during the police raid on the warehouse, neighbors in the area told police, “The only ones here breaking the law are you.” The demonstrations and arrests were widely reported by the Philadelphia news media. Invariably, the reports praised the police for their restraint and featured video of police cars with broken windows or overturned trash dumpsters.



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