

Los Angeles police attack protesters outside LAPD headquarters

John Andrews
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Squads of riot-clad Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers attacked a crowd of over 1,000 people who were peacefully demonstrating against police abuse and the death penalty outside LAPD headquarters last Sunday. The scene was reminiscent of the actions taken against protestors at the Democratic National Convention last August.

After marching from downtown to the Parker Center police headquarters, a group of young demonstrators split off to go around the rear of the building to continue protesting. As they were about halfway around the block, police on foot and on horseback moved in, beating people with batons. As the protesters retreated, police fired several salvos of painful and dangerous “non-lethal” plastic bullets at them. Police officers claimed they were responding to protesters who threw refuse at them.

After the assault more than 200 police officers, including many on horseback, surrounded those who gathered to listen to speakers whose loved ones were killed or injured by police. The demonstration was part of a national day of protests against police brutality.

Just as they did during the Democratic National Convention, police officers carried out counter-demonstrations of their own. In one incident a police officer rammed his bicycle into a group of protesters, yelling, “Go back to your country if you don't like it.” Two other officers drove their motorcycles into observers from the National Lawyers Guild, including former Santa Monica City Attorney Bob Myers.

A group of Native American dancers led the protest, followed by a truck with loudspeakers and pictures of people killed by police, including Tyisha Miller, the teenage girl gunned down by Riverside, California police last year. Another group was marching from San Diego to San Francisco to call for abolishing the death

penalty. Some marchers carried signs protesting against the frame-up of former Black Panther and death row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Afterwards, several people displayed welts and bruises for the media. Two were bleeding. Among those hit with rubber bullets was a reporter covering the demonstration for the Spanish language newspaper *La Opinion*. “I could see them coming and then suddenly, bang, bang, bang, bang, and I was hit,” said the reporter, Edwin Tamara, showing a small bruise on his left shoulder.

“All we were doing was walking and chanting when the cops shot us,” Gonzalo Islas told reporters, displaying a rubber bullet injury on his right calf.

Police arrested two men and a woman on suspicion of felony assault with a deadly weapon for throwing things at the police. John King, 27, who was arrested with his wife Therese Garcia, said he was struck with batons and kicked by an officer on horseback before being seized on suspicion of resisting a police officer—a misdemeanor. After their arrest King and his wife said they were subjected to further abuse. Garcia said her wrists were bound so tightly by plastic restraints that her fingers turned blue. When they tried to get an officer's help, he responded: “Life is tough,” they told the *Los Angeles Times*.

After the attack the American Civil Liberties Union condemned the LAPD for intervening “with a heavy hand and without warning on horseback and in riot gear, dispersing the crowd by indiscriminately using batons and shooting rubber bullets.”

One of the topics of the demonstration was the ongoing revelations from the trial of LAPD officers from the Rampart Division who were involved in drug dealing, brutality, murder and the planting of evidence to frame up victims. On the same day as the protest the

Times reported the results of its investigation, showing that Los Angeles County prosecutors have routinely covered up criminal activity by police and refused to bring charges in hundreds of cases, despite having substantial evidence of guilt.

The authorities' effort to suppress the freedom of expression, moreover, is part of a national pattern. Just three days before the Los Angeles incident, New York City police officers broke into an apartment in the Bronx and arrested political activists and the neighborhood residents they were speaking to about the national day of protest against police brutality. According to a statement by attorney Stacey Gray, officers from the 43rd Precinct used excessive force and guns before they arrested all the occupants of the apartment. The attorney said police have carried out ongoing surveillance against political groups and residents of the Soundview neighborhood, where West African immigrant Amadou Diallo was gunned down by police in February 1999.



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