

Repression in Denver highlights assault on democratic rights in US

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On Wednesday, police raided the headquarters of a group—Unconventional Denver—protesting at the Democratic National Convention, arresting several people, destroying, and seizing property. The calculated effort to intimidate the protesters and suppress dissent has gone unnoted by the national media, let alone the Democratic Party politicians assembled in the Pepsi Center in Denver.

The police acted illegally, producing no warrant before raiding the small building and the area around it. A bulldozer plowed up sign-making material and deposited it in a dump truck. Two organizers were arrested and charged with disobeying a lawful order. Police claim one had a knife; a protester countered that it was a small pocketknife.

Police also claim to have found bricks and rocks around the building leased by the organization. The protest groups said the material was being used to hold down banners and posters that were being painted so they did not blow away in the wind. Video footage taken by the independent *Rocky Mountain News* shows the debris is a typical part of the rundown industrial area, which is located adjacent to railroad tracks.

The Denver police say that they responded to a phone call from “two suspicious parties” near the site. However, the constant surveillance of the group and presence of the bulldozer and the dump truck suggest that the raid was planned out well in advance.

Also on Wednesday, an ABC News Producer, Asa Eslocker, was arrested for attempting to videotape leading Democratic Party politicians and major party donors leaving a hotel near the Pepsi Center. In a rare episode of investigative journalism by the network media, Eslocker and his crew were investigating the role of corporate lobbyists in the political process for a series called “Money Trail” for ABC World News.

Eslocker was charged with trespass, interference, and failure to follow a lawful order. A video of the arrest can be viewed on ABC’s web site: <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/Conventions/story?id=5668622&page=1>

Before the arrest a Boulder County sheriff is seen ordering Eslocker off the sidewalk in front of the hotel, to a side entrance. The sheriff’s officer says the sidewalk is owned by the hotel. Later, he is seen pushing Eslocker—who asserts his right to be on public property—off the sidewalk into oncoming traffic. The cop remarks, “Now you’re impeding traffic,” before forcing the reporter to the other side of the street.

Two hours later Denver police arrived to place Eslocker under arrest, apparently based on a complaint from the Brown Palace Hotel. A cigar-smoking officer can be seen placing his hands around Eslocker’s neck and then twisting his arm, even though Eslocker showed no resistance. One of the officers can be heard saying to Eslocker, “You’re lucky I didn’t knock the f..k out of you.”

Wednesday evening, a march of about 5,000 led by Iraq Veterans Against the War was stopped by a police barricade from approaching the site of the convention.

The squashing of basic democratic rights at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Denver has been extensive. It has included:

- * The formation of a new quasi-legal and multi-level police apparatus under the control of the executive branch of the federal government, made possible by the DNC’s status as a “National Security Event,” a designation established in 1997 by “executive order,” i.e., presidential fiat, by Bill Clinton.

- * The militarization of a major US city. The size of the police force has been doubled by the recruitment of law enforcement personnel from the surrounding areas.

Police in riot gear armed with machine guns, police dogs, watchtowers, helicopters, and armored personnel carriers are ubiquitous sights in Denver.

* The creation of a prison camp (dubbed “Gitmo on the Platte” by protesters, referring to the Platte River in Denver) designed to imprison thousands.

* The implementation of a separate assembly-line court system (“DNC courts”) designed to furtively and rapidly process thousands of prisoners.

* The building of a special “free speech zone” in a parking lot near the convention to limit all demonstrations. The zone resembles nothing so much as a prison camp. It is a small area surrounded by a steel security fence mounted on concrete barriers, all topped by razor wire.

* Police provocation, harassment, and intimidation of protesters.

* The suppression of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly through police barricades and arbitrary demands for dispersal from public sidewalks.

* Police violence against peaceful protesters. This has included the use of pepper spray and truncheons.

* The mass arrest of nearly 100 protesters, most of whom were charged with the catch-all “failure to obey a lawful order.”

* An attempt to process prisoners without providing the option for legal defense.

* Arbitrary and warrantless search and seizure of property.

* Police toleration of right-wing intimidation of protesters.

* Police harassment and arrest of the media.

If events such as these were unfolding in a foreign country targeted by the US, for example Russia or Venezuela, one can be sure that the media and politicians would be apoplectic in their denunciations of the suppression of political opposition. But this repression is instead taking place in an important US city under the auspices of one of the two parties of America’s ruling elite.

The national media has deliberately suppressed any coverage of the police state atmosphere in Denver going along whole-heartedly with the pretense that the convention—a stage-managed affair largely paid for by corporate America and protected by the police and armed forces from the people—is an expression of America’s democratic process at work. No significant

representative of the Democratic Party—which purports to defend democratic rights—has denounced the political repression.

What is taking place in Denver should serve as a blunt warning to the working class. The vast numbers of police and military personnel is way out of proportion for the small number of peaceful demonstrations. The only explanation for this mobilization is that it is a dry run for measures to come. It is a military exercise in the repression of the civilian population through a new combination of federal, state and municipal police and military agencies and bureaucracies. Indeed, though the Denver Police appear to be responsible for most of the heavy-handed actions, they are in fact operating under the Secret Service and at the behest of the Department of Homeland Security.

The consensus policies of the ruling elite—imperialist war abroad and class war at home—are thoroughly unpopular and will eventually drive millions into active defiance. The police methods being practiced in Denver will be the ready response to the coming mass struggles of the working class.



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