

# Mass arrests of protesters at Republican National Convention

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Authorities have carried out a massive mobilization of federal, state and local police and military forces to cordon off the Republican National Convention from protesters opposed to the party's program of militarism and social reaction.

Over the last few days, nearly 300 people have been arrested near and around the Xcel Energy Center and downtown St. Paul, Minnesota has been transformed into a virtual armed camp to intimidate demonstrators and silence dissent.

The police reported Wednesday that they had arrested 11 more people Tuesday, including three at an anti-poverty demonstration, but would not give any more details. As the march of an estimated 3,000 people ended near the convention center police fired tear gas and lobbed concussion or "flash-bang" grenades to disperse protesters, who police claimed were trying to get past security fences.

A total of 295 people have been arrested, including 137 charged with felonies such as "conspiracy to commit riot." Many continued to be detained. The bulk of those arrested were seized during an antiwar march of 10,000 people on the Monday, the opening day of the convention. Demonstrators were forced to run the gauntlet of hundreds of riot-equipped and black-uniformed police, FBI agents and 150 National Guard troops carrying shields.

The police fired tear gas, beanbags and used tasers to arrest hundreds of protesters. Also targeted were independent journalists and photographers and groups that monitor police abuse against protesters. Among those seized by the police were an Associated Press photographer, a group of University of Kentucky student journalists and Amy Goodman, the host of the liberal radio show "Democracy Now!" Goodman was arrested for "interfering with peace officers" when she

questioned police about the arrest and bloodying of her show's two producers.

WSWS reporter Ron Jorgenson described the scene:

"A helicopter hovered over downtown St. Paul all day long. There were police and sheriff's deputies from St. Paul, Minneapolis and other cities in Minnesota, as well as across the nation, including a large number from Arlington, Texas that I saw. The largest number were riot police with no identification who wore dark blue or black. They were armed with clubs and other weapons. There were also armored black trucks, filled with an assortment darting through the streets and police on bicycles and horseback.

"I honestly believed as I watched groups of riot police line up and rows of mounted police moved into position that there was a good chance that I might get caught up if I didn't move. It appeared there were embedded press. I got the impression that established media could move in and out of police lines. I did that once and was sharply warned by a cop. Had I chosen the wrong moment to do that while taking a picture, I could have been thrown to the ground."

Authorities later justified this disproportionate show of force and the mass arrests that followed by citing incidents of rock throwing and window-breaking by a small group—numbering no more than 150—of self-described "anarchists." It is very likely this group included police agents and provocateurs whose job was to encourage violence in order to discredit political opposition and create conditions for a police repression.

According to the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, about a year ago the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office began "regular surveillance" of one group, called the Republican National Convention Welcoming Committee, which included the use of "three people who posed as members—two informants and an

undercover investigator. The informants monitored e-mails and conversations.”

The police produced affidavits from these informers accusing protesters of the most outlandish plans, including “kidnapping” delegates and throwing Molotov cocktails at the police. Geneva Finn of the National Lawyers Guild, which represents many of those arrested, said it was impossible to judge the veracity of the so-called evidence in the affidavit because “it’s all based on the testimony of people who are not identified, and that’s a real problem.”

Based on these claims, on the eve of the convention the police carried out raids at several protest headquarters—including I-Witness Video, a New York-based group that monitors police conduct during protests—detaining activists and seizing computers, political literature and other property. The raids, which produced no serious evidence to substantiate police claims of alleged violent plans, were aimed at preempting the planned demonstrations by intimidating and creating the pseudo-legal justification for mass arrests for “conspiracy to commit riot.”

Once again, as it did during the massive repression at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, the national news media has maintained a virtual silence about the police-state measures being employed against political opposition.

In many cases, the local media has enthusiastically praised the police crackdown. The Minneapolis *Star Tribune* published a September 2 editorial, entitled, “An appropriate show of police force.”

The editorial noted that many citizens were dismayed by the presence of police in riot gear in downtown streets, adding that one onlooker the editorial writer passed by was heard saying, “This can’t be happening in Minnesota.”

“Thankfully, it was,” the editorial flatly stated, denouncing “rogue protesters who traveled to the Twin Cities for no other reason than to damage property, abuse the police and disrupt the business of the Republican National Convention.”

Thanks to the “extensive planning” of St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, Police Chief John Harrington, Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher and other law enforcement officials, the editorial concluded, “public safety have won out, so far, over anarchism in the streets.”

Police chief John Harrington commended the media

for recognizing the “heroic efforts” of his officers. “I like the term that you in fact had coined, that what you saw today in the face of numbers and agitation and mass criminals, was a restrained use of force. And that I think is a very apt description of what the officers today did.”

Reacting to the police actions, Gina Berglund, an attorney and legal observer for the Minnesota chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, said, “We think it’s unconscionable. We think it’s out of control. The response by the police was completely out of proportion with what they were faced with.”

Both the Democratic and Republican conventions—designated as “National Security Events” under the jurisdiction of the Homeland Security Department—have been used to test out methods of widespread political repression. This must be taken as a somber warning of the way mass opposition to war, social inequality and attacks on democratic rights will be treated by the state, whoever wins the election in November.



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