

Growing anger over police attack on Wall Street protesters

A reporting team
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The arrests and police brutality unleashed against scores of peaceful “Occupy Wall Street” protesters last Saturday, after they had marched some two miles from their informal encampment in the financial district to Union Square in lower Manhattan, has provoked widespread anger.

There is particular outrage over the unprovoked use of pepper spray against a group of women protesters, an action captured on videotape and by still photography, posted on the Internet and witnessed around the world.

A number of different videos were taken of the incident. According to the *Guardian* newspaper in Britain, another eyewitness photographed the protest and posted a close-up image of the badge of the high-ranking police officer who used the pepper spray against the protesters. He was soon identified as Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna, a veteran NYPD commander.

It also turns out that Bologna is a defendant in lawsuits against the New York cops arising out of protests at the 2004 Republican National Convention, which was held in New York. 1,800 people were arrested at that time, many of them held incommunicado and under appalling conditions. A suit was filed against Bologna and another officer in 2007, and is expected to come to trial next year.

The *Guardian* also reports that activists have posted Bologna’s home address and telephone number online. An unnamed police official confirmed that he had been correctly identified, claiming, “he did his job and now he’s concerned for the safety of his family.” The chief spokesman for the New York police, Paul J. Browne, defended the use of the pepper spray. An account in the *New York Times*, however, quotes the NYPD’s patrol guide as allowing the use of the spray only under certain conditions, including “when a member reasonably believes it is necessary to effect an arrest of a resisting suspect,” and that it should “not be used in situations that do not require the use of physical force.”

The video clips of the incident clearly demonstrate that the senior police officer used the pepper spray not to overcome resistance or to effect an arrest, but rather to punish his victims. Bologna carried out an unprovoked attack—unless the expression of political views and verbal protest over police brutality is considered justification—and simply walked away. As *New York Times* columnist Jim Dwyer put it, he “looked as if he were spraying cockroaches.”

The eyewitness who shot one of the videos of the incident, Jeanne Mansfield, wrote an account for the Boston Review: “A white-shirt, now known to be NYPD Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna, comes from the left, walks straight up to the three young girls at the front of the crowd, and pepper-sprays them in the face for a few seconds, continuing as they scream, ‘No! Why are you doing that?!’ The rest of us in the crowd turn away from the spray, but it’s unavoidable. My left eye burns and goes blind and tears start streaming down my face.”

Another video, posted on the web site Daily Kos Wednesday, appeared to show a second incident in which Bologna used his canister of pepper spray against someone videoing the protest. As in the first instance, he is

seen pushing his way through the crowd, spraying his intended victim and then quickly retreating back into the police ranks.

Outrage over Bologna’s actions prompted Police Commissioner Ray Kelly to announce Wednesday that the incidents were being referred to the Civilian Complaints Review Board and the NYPD’s Internal Affairs unit, both of which routinely whitewash police brutality. Kelly said that he did not know what “precipitated that specific incident”, but cited what he termed the “tumultuous conduct” of the demonstrators.

The city’s billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, has said nothing about the incidents or the other arrests.

The Mayor hired retired CIA official David Cohen to be the top police counterintelligence official nearly ten years ago, and the police have, under Cohen’s tutelage, brought back the methods of the Red Squad of the early and mid-20th century.

Along with the stepped-up spying being conducted against political dissidents and Muslim immigrants who are tarred with the “anti-terror” brush, the New York City Police Department has steadily encroached on the right of assembly and peaceful protest. When protesters have secured permits for their activities, they have found themselves “kettled” behind barricades, virtually imprisoned, unable to come and go as they please and to speak to bystanders or passersby.

Then again, as New York Civil Liberties Union spokesman Christopher Dunn told the press, some groups may not want to negotiate with the police before exercising their right of assembly, and “that’s certainly their prerogative.” In these cases, however, as in the case of the Wall Street protesters on September 24, they are treated as lawbreakers, subject to immediate arrest when the police unilaterally decide that it is warranted.

The latest actions of the police, including the deployment of dozens of high-ranking officers, identified by their white shirts, are an expression of the escalating tensions in the city and indeed around the world, especially in the context of the deepening crisis of joblessness and the austerity that is impoverishing many millions of families.

Bloomberg himself warned less than two weeks ago that there would be “riots” in the streets if something is not done about chronic unemployment. New York’s financial elite and their servants in City Hall and One Police Plaza are worried not so much about the relatively small number of Wall Street protesters, but about the possibility that millions may find the road to political struggle against the bankrupt system that is producing little but misery for the vast majority.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to a number of those gathered at Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan, the center of the “occupy Wall Street” protest.

Karly, 24, a college graduate, lives in Bergen County, New Jersey. Her father is an electrician at Verizon who was recently on strike. She came out to the protest for the day with a friend.

“I’ve been looking for a full-time job for a year and not able to find one. I’m living with my parents and just got hired part-time/seasonal at Barnes and Noble. I’m over my head with mounting student loans and not able to

even start paying them back.

"I'm really pleased to see so many people from all over coming together to start to fight back. I graduated with a degree in foreign languages and would like to find a job as a teacher. Our governor, Chris Christie, has gone on the attack against education and teachers, and foreign language departments have been especially hard hit. Who needs to speak a foreign language right? That's their attitude toward education. I speak three languages - I have degrees and skills and can't even find a real job.

"At Barnes and Noble there are many others like me who are college grads who've had to settle for part time work at wages that we were all making as high school students. Many of the people who lost their jobs when Borders closed down are now coming over to our stores to take whatever they can get. We're even competing with older retirees coming in for work because they can't afford to actually retire.

"My father's job as an electrician at Verizon is in danger. They went on strike but nothing was really resolved. We're a household of five and we all have to do whatever we can to work and contribute—he knows his job is not secure. He's working a lot of overtime right now, they're actually being forced to by the company, but he feels like he has to work as much overtime as possible right now because tomorrow he might not have a job. It upsets me so much because I see how much he needs to work just to make ends meet.

"It makes me so angry that these corporations behave like they have absolute power over the workers. It's okay for Verizon to pay nothing in corporate taxes and turn around and cut jobs, healthcare and pensions for working families. Who are you at the top that you think this is okay? They still have their corporate jets and go anywhere they want for weekends—I can't even remember the last time my parents went on vacation.

"I was never on the Obama bandwagon myself. I remember I was in Williamsburg (Brooklyn) the day he was elected and everyone was sitting around with their "Hope" t-shirts like he was God. I was very skeptical that he was really going to be any different. You don't really see those t-shirts around much anymore do you? They're probably all at Goodwill.

"I think all student loan debts should be wiped off the books in this country. If the wealthiest people don't want to pay taxes then why should we have to be held to massive student loans?

Lejla, 18, a college student in Boston, came down to the protest with her mother.

"I'm aware of the economic crisis from my parents who have been involved in fighting against the fraudulent foreclosures by the big banks—they've been speaking out—trying to make people aware of these massive crimes that they are getting away with and driving people from their homes.

"Two-thirds of corporations don't pay any corporate taxes in this country. Can you imagine if me or my parents didn't pay their taxes? They'd end up in jail. It's the law. And multi-billionaires get away scot-free.

"I've heard of people getting arrested here for writing on the sidewalk with chalk. And this while Wall Street bankers who have driven people to ruin and even suicide are sitting up there with champagne looking down through their windows and laughing at us. There's actually youtube videos of it.

"I'm so angry that so many people's lives are being ruined unnecessarily in this country. There doesn't have to be problems like homelessness, unemployment and the uninsured. It could be fixed—there's plenty of money. It's just all being hoarded at the top."

Senka Huskic works as an administrator at Boston University Law School. She had come from Boston and was returning to help set up a bank protest there. "For me, we don't have a government, we just have corporations that run the government," she said. "We have elections, but the people who win the elections don't represent us because they are

bought by the rich.

"Early in American history there was a struggle against the banks. Now they are taking away everything. All the foreclosures are continuing. Do you know how many people have committed suicide as a result of these foreclosures?

"They audited my mortgage, and it is a total fraud. The banks have been using 75,000 fraudulent documents to foreclose on the homes of people like me. One part of my mortgage was in a mortgage securities tranche that is now owned by a French corporation. Hundreds of other pieces were sold elsewhere by the banks. They made money hand over fist until the housing market collapsed, and the banks brought on an economic crash. None of the banks can prove they own the mortgage of people like me, but unless you have the money to hire a lawyer, they will foreclose on you anyway.

"Obama is with them I hate to say. Look how he picked all his advisors from Wall Street. Why didn't he pick any middle class advisors? The Wall Street advisors advised him to bail out the banks, and he did. They have so many tax loopholes, they don't pay taxes.

"I was angry at Obama first when the information about all the fraudulent papers the banks were using to foreclose people out of their homes came out a year ago, and then he refused to institute a moratorium on foreclosures. But now I realize the politicians are against us, and we have to do it ourselves. I don't want a mortgage modification anymore. I have stopped paying, and I want to see these criminal bankers in jail.

"I am terribly afraid of war. I came from the former Yugoslavia, and I don't want to see any more wars. But I think there will be more."

Gillian Cipriano came to Liberty Plaza Park with a sign that identified her as a college graduate who was unemployed. She explained: "I am a nurse. I have graduated with my RN certificate in March, and I've been looking for a job ever since. This has to do with the financial crisis. And maybe if the corporations weren't making huge contributions to deliver the politicians, things might be different.

"My Mom is a nurse, and she has helped me try to get a job. I have been to the HR (Human Resources) offices of over 100 hospitals and other medical facilities like nursing homes. None of them would even give me their phone numbers to call. They say when they find something, they will call me. I haven't gotten one single call since March.

"I think it is really sad what is happening to health care. I have already had trouble myself with the insurance companies. The insurance companies run the health care industry. When you spend three hours waiting in a doctor's office, it is because the doctor has to see more and more people to have enough patients to make a living salary because what the insurance companies are paying doctors to treat a patient is disgraceful.

"It is a sin that Medicare and Medicaid are being cut. The whole thing is shameful. People should be getting free quality health care because it has to do with the welfare of the people. It should be paid for by taxes. If the politicians weren't giving tax breaks to the corporations and banks, and weren't funding so many wars, they would have the money to put into healthcare and public services."

Alan Rosenberg, a self-employed art historian, said that he had come to the park to protest against growing inequality.

"I write about art," he said, "but it is hard to make a living on that. I feel that people like me should be able to make a decent living, instead of just hardly getting by. There is something wrong with the fact that there are people who have billions, and make millions every year to add to their billions, while there are people like me who make a contribution and can't get decently remunerated.

"One percent of the population controls billions of dollars while working people like factory workers, office workers, and small businessmen are lucky to be getting by."



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