

Mayor steps up intimidation of Occupy Atlanta protesters

Kranti Kumara
25 October 2011

In a palpable display of hostility towards Occupy Atlanta protesters, Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed has started to get more aggressive towards protesters. Over the last several days, the Democratic mayor has taken several steps to signal his intention to eventually evict the protesters who are camped out in a downtown park in Atlanta, Georgia.

On the morning of Saturday, October 22, Reed abruptly cancelled the sound permit for a previously scheduled weekend hip-hop concert organized by Occupy Atlanta. Reed's office had worked with the organizers until Friday, giving the impression that the city government was agreeable to the protesters' desire to stage the concert after living in tents through rain and cold for over two weeks.

Reed sent both his appointed spokesperson, Director of Communications Sonji Jacobs, along with a phalanx of police to impose the cancellation. This was a deliberate intimidation tactic, as the police presence up until that point had been either nonexistent or out of sight in the vicinity of the occupied park.

Jacobs, who came to "explain" the transparently bogus reasons for the cancellation, was essentially driven out the park after the protesters began chanting the slogan "Whose park? Our Park!" in unison.

Mayor Reed, who is well known for his political duplicity and unrefined persona, later claimed that the organizers had neither filed a security plan, nor had they paid the draconian \$2,500 fee the city levies for outdoor concerts.

Meanwhile, the police walked in, handing out leaflets to concert attendees and passersby indicating that the permit for the concert had been cancelled and that no one should enter the park from the street.

Many small food vendors who had arrived that morning in the hope of earning some money were also

prevented from setting up food stalls due to the mayor's move to cancel the permission for the concert at the last minute.

"These are scare tactics," said Tim Franzen, one of the organizers of Occupy Atlanta. "This is sneaky, this is dirty and we know it's coming right from the mayor's office and it's an outrage."

In another move against the protesters the city has removed the portable toilets that were placed right beside the park on the sidewalk, now forcing the tent-dwellers to walk several blocks to use a toilet.

Police presence around the renamed Troy Davis Park (formally called Woodruff Park) has increased noticeably, with a number of police officers and vehicles deployed in the surrounding sidewalks and within the vicinity of the park. A police mobile command center van has also been parked prominently right next to the park, with a number of police motorcycles parked next to it.

After the cancellation of the Saturday concert, the protesters vowed to hold the concert on Sunday. But given the danger of a police attack they decided to cancel the Sunday concert as well.

Late Saturday afternoon, Franzen held a meeting with Reed at the police mobile command center. Franzen described his meeting with Reed this way: "He was very angry, very upset," he said, referring to Reed, adding that the mayor began to "yell right away" as soon as Franzen entered the mobile unit.

During the meeting, Reed also demanded that the protesters vacate the park, warning that they would get their "wish" to get arrested. While Occupy Atlanta was not given a specific ultimatum by Reed, his words were interpreted by the protesters as a threat that could result in an unannounced police attack.

Reed had previously given an ultimatum to the

protesters to vacate the park by Monday, October 17. Lacking a consensus within the city's political establishment for the eviction, Reed then postponed the deadline to November 7, when the city council is next scheduled to meet.

Given Reed's words, the protesters stayed up late into Saturday night, anxious that they might be set upon by police during the night. The mayor's spokesperson Jacobs denied that any order had been given by Reed to the police to clear the park on Saturday. "There has been no such order," Jacobs commented to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the local daily.

The mayor has also complained that it would be "more costly to arrest them [Occupy Atlanta protesters] than to have them occupying the park."

Reed has repeatedly publicized through the local media the supposed \$30,000 expense the city has incurred from the protests. Reed did not mention the \$120,000 the city has just spent for two new SUV's to scoot him around town. Reed claimed that he was entitled to these expensive vehicles since this befits his "stature" as a big-city mayor.



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