

Chicago police arrest over 130 occupy protesters

Our reporting team
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Chicago police arrested over 130 anti-Wall Street protesters early Sunday morning after Occupy Chicago participants refused to leave the Congress Plaza area of Grant Park.

Less than 10 minutes after the park officially closed at 11 p.m., police began surrounding the Congress Plaza with metal barricades and warning protesters, estimated to number over 3,000 during the main rally earlier in the evening, to disperse or face arrest.

Arrests began at around 1a.m. Protesters were loaded onto police vans and white sheriff's department buses to be taken into custody. The previous weekend, Chicago police, under the direct order of Chicago Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel, arrested more than 175 protesters. Emanuel is the former White House chief of staff for president Barack Obama.

The arrests mark a significant escalation of the attempts by the state to disperse or intimidate protesters in Chicago and throughout the country. One protester who had witnessed the arrests noted that Chicago police were beginning to take harsher measures: "Last week they [the arrested protesters] were all let go after four hours. As of Sunday afternoon, more than 12 hours after the arrests, they haven't let anyone out yet." Those arrested were also reportedly denied sleep and allowed only one phone call for the entire group.

Tyler, who had also witnessed the arrests, told the WSWs, "It's a real failure of democracy if you ask me." Emanuel "is going to do whatever he can in order to maintain power. I absolutely love this city. At the same time, I am well aware of the historical and

political precedents regarding the suppression of protests in Chicago. I'm not surprised at all at what the police response was like last night, but at the same time disappointed... It's a complete disturbance of democratic rights"

Emanuel, a former investment banker, has made it clear that he will take a hard stance against the Occupy Chicago protests. Since taking office, he has also overseen the shutdown and privatization of dozens of Chicago public schools, the layoff of thousands of teachers, and other cuts in social services. In August, the Emanuel administration ended emergency overnight housing assistance to Chicago's homeless population.

The mass arrests in Chicago coincided with the arrest of 11 Occupy Cincinnati protesters in Ohio. Another 21 protesters in Cincinnati had been arrested the previous Friday morning for refusing to leave Piatt Park after closing.

The WSWs spoke to several protesters on Saturday, before the arrests. Lloyd, an independent contractor and furniture repairman, said, "The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer. Corporations run the government. We get laid off, and we are screwed. I'm so far in debt that I myself can't see the light. I'm a slave to the bankers for life."

Speaking as police began to assemble prior to the arrests, Lloyd said, "Any ordinance that goes against the First Amendment is unconstitutional. On any given day I find people sleeping in this park, and they don't really do anything about it. But now they send in the police for this? The police know exactly what they are doing and why—they serve the 1 percent. I grew up during Kent State and the '70s. We're seeing that all

over again.

“Obama made sure his buddies on Wall Street got their interests taken care of—it didn’t matter how bad it was for the rest of the country. People are starting to understand that we used to be a free country. We aren’t anymore.”

James, a 28-year-old social studies teacher at a private school, said, “I teach social studies from fifth through eighth grades and try and incorporate what’s going on in the world today. My students ask me, ‘Why are we at war? Why are we sending troops abroad when we don’t have jobs here?’ Many of my students come from very poor backgrounds, so they already feel the economic and social problems in their daily lives.”

James added, “Many of my students are African American, so they think that Obama is a hero. But they also ask me, ‘Why did he bail out the banks and Wall Street if he’s one of us?’” Asked about his own opinion about Obama, he said: “I think Obama represents the 1 percent and Wall Street, for sure. And I agree that we need a new political party.”

Speaking about teaching conditions, James said, “I work Monday through Friday, at least 12 hours a day. I don’t have any textbooks, so I have to write my own material, which takes up a lot of my time. Many of the kids there are hungry too, but we’re not even allowed to feed them. I’m not sure how long I can keep doing this. I worked at a bank where I got paid more than double what I’m getting paid as a teacher now.”

Many Occupy participants also criticized the Occupy movement’s official “no politics” line. Eliot, a graduate student at Northwestern, told the WSWS, “I think the ‘no leadership’ slogan has become a mantra here—but at some point there has to be some democratic leadership. There have to be practical demands.” Asked if he thought capitalism was in a crisis point, he agreed, adding: “I want to find out, what’s the way forward? How do we end capitalism and replace it with something like socialism?”

Marshall, 20 years old and unemployed, spoke about the changes he wants to see: “Everyone who is able-bodied should be able to work. A world where people can’t get a job, like myself, is a very twisted world. The top 1 percent use unemployed people like me to

force the vast majority of the labor force down. It has gotten to the point where we cannot reform this system. We need to break this system of capitalism.”

Marshall added, “Education should be free. I think the college system today is a scam. The fact that college is not free is why I am not in college either.”

Alex, 23, an independent construction worker and moving company owner, told the WSWS, “I got laid off as a leasing agent a few months ago. I started my own moving company. I go on Craigslist, find whatever work I can because I couldn’t get a job after I got laid off.”

He added, in reference to the three years of the Obama administration, “I stopped caring about politics because nothing seems to be working for us anymore. I agree we need a new political party.”



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