

Occupy Oakland votes for general strike

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About three thousand people gathered in Oscar Grant Park Wednesday night for the largest Occupy Wall Street demonstration in California since the movement began on September 17th.

After hours of discussion, about 97 percent of participants in the general assembly voted for a citywide general strike on November 2. Protestors also called for the strike to include the Port of Oakland, the West Coast's second largest sea-trade center.

The protestors originally gathered to re-take the public park in response to brutal police actions against peaceful marchers on Tuesday, most notably the severe injury inflicted on 24-year-old Iraq war veteran Scott Olsen.

Police Officers shot Olsen with a tear gas canister or rubber bullet from close range, hitting him in the forehead. When a group of protestors attempted to give Olsen medical attention, police officers threw a flash grenade at the group. As of Thursday morning, Olsen was in critical condition and remained unconscious, suffering from a cracked skull and brain swelling. By mid-day, he was listed in fair condition in an intensive care unit.

As in many other cities, the police action against the protests was overseen by a Democrat—in this case, Mayor Jean Quan. In an attempt to dampen popular anger, Quan acceded to the moves by protestors to retake Oscar Grant Plaza (Frank Ogawa Plaza) Wednesday night.

Placards reading “Hell yes this is class warfare”, “Tell Mayor Quan this is the peoples’ property”, “The system isn’t broken, it was built this way”, and “Blood is on OPD’s [Oakland Police Department] hands” dotted the steadily growing crowd as the group attempted to convene a general assembly. Police officers waited in unmarked vans.

Protestors erupted in applause when organizers read a communiqué from Tahrir Square. A tweet from an

Egyptian organizer read: “Tomorrow in #Tahrir we will march towards #USA Embassy calling them to stop crackdown their people and stop supporting #Scaf.” SCAF refers to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the US-backed military government in Egypt.

The communiqué also announced that the Egyptian protesters will be chanting: “Egypt and Oakland are one hand!”

The strike is scheduled to coincide with a series of University of California and California State University student walkout days, which will culminate in the occupation of the UC Board of Regents’ meeting at the University of California, San Francisco, on November 16, and of the CSU Board of Trustees’ meeting at Long Beach State, on November 17.

The regents will be considering a proposal to raise tuition by 81 percent. Tuition has more than tripled in the past decade. The trustees plan on voting on a similar fee-increase. A recent study by the College Board found that UC and CSU lead the nation in raising tuition and cutting budgets.

Democrats in the state government plan to slash another \$2.5 billion dollars if revenue estimates made earlier in the year fall short. A handful of reports have predicted that the so-called trigger cuts will be made in December, potentially resulting in lay-offs, fewer classes, and larger class sizes.

The WSWS spoke to several workers and young people participating in the strike vote on Wednesday.

“I am in support of the general strike. We need to be careful about organizing labor to help, but we should act all at once. It should be immediate,” Said Hannah, a young barista from San Francisco. “We need to maintain this.”

When asked about the role of the Democratic Party, Hannah voiced her frustration with President Barack Obama: “Obama is particularly good at being rhetorical without action. Change doesn’t mean anything unless it

is backed up with action.”

“The police actions were insane last night. They were denying that they used rubber bullets and then we found some!”

Don, a photographer from Martinez, emphatically supported the strike call: “I am absolutely for a general strike. We can’t rush into it and fail, though... I support the strike because corporations should have no say at all in government. They’re buying government because they have the money to do it.”

Lucas, a bartender from Oakland, said, “I absolutely support the proposal for a general strike. The people in power need to realize that we’re mad. Everybody needs to go to the left!”

Gabriel, a high school physical education teacher and long-time resident of Oakland, grew emotional as he spoke of the necessity for strike action: “I’m born and raised in Oakland. I have to support the people! We’re standing up for the rights of people against what is going down right now.”

“I voted all the way in favor of the general strike because what’s going on is wrong—society and the government should listen to the people, and right now they’re not. When they say they support the process, it’s wrong, because they don’t. If they did, we wouldn’t be having this right now.

“I want this to come to a positive climax where the people are in power—working people—with no exclusion of anybody.”



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