

Police attack Occupy protests in Denver, Colorado

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The police repression of Occupy demonstrations in the US escalated over the weekend. In the most serious incident, riot police using tear gas and wielding batons arrested 20 in Denver, Colorado. Several protesters were injured.

Other arrests were carried out in Portland, Oregon; Nashville, Tennessee; Rochester, New York; and Austin, Texas.

Nearly three thousand people have been arrested nationwide on various charges since the protests began in September. The past two weeks have seen a marked increase in arrests in different parts of the country, primarily in cities with Democratic Party mayors.

In Denver, the 20 protesters were arrested in two separate incidents on Saturday afternoon and evening, and one protester was hospitalized for injuries inflicted during a police arrest. Other protesters were shot with rubber bullets or “pepper balls,” including one in the face. One was knocked out of a tree while filming the incident.

The total number of protesters arrested as part of Occupy Denver is now at least 77. The Denver city government is headed by Mayor Michael Hancock, a Democrat.

Five of the arrests over the weekend occurred during a protest involving about 2,000 people at the Colorado state capitol building. Police later gathered en masse to tear down tents at the nearby encampment, arresting 15 more, including several minors. Two of those arrested are being held on felony charges.

The *Denver Westword*, an independent newspaper, reports that one man, Phillip Becerra, “was injured in the face and neck [from pepper bullets] during the afternoon’s first outbreak away from the tents. Another

protester was injured when a police motorcycle rolled over his foot. ‘They pepper sprayed me and I fell and then went to pour water on my face,’ says Becerra... ‘When I got back up, I was shot in the face. I had to go to the hospital to have the wound treated.’”

When they moved to the camp, police came decked out in riot gear. The *Denver Post* reports, “University of Colorado student Daniel Ellen tried to jump through a gap to help other protesters he feared were stuck in the tents but was knocked to the ground by police. He stood up and charged at them again, screaming in anger, took a blow to the temple with a baton and was pushed down twice more.”

Most of those arrested had to pay out \$550 in bail, despite misdemeanor charges (of “failing to obey a police order”) with no prior record. One individual, apparently the same person who had his foot run over by a motorcycle, faces a Class 4 felony charge for assaulting a police officer.

He allegedly pushed the motorcycle as it passed through the dense crowd. The police officer got off his bike and chased him down, forcibly arresting him.

The *Westword* quoted defense attorney John Buckley: “Sidewalks are historically a place where people can assemble. What law they violated at that point is a mystery to all of us.”

A telling incident occurred during the earlier protests when Ed Pelmutter, a Democratic member of the US House of Representatives, waded into the crowd in an attempt to defuse the protests. “We want jobs!” one protester reportedly shouted at him. “Democrats won’t get elected anymore!”

In Nashville, Tennessee, police arrested more than two dozen protesters early Saturday morning, bringing

the total arrested in recent days in that city to about 50. Republican Governor Bill Haslam arbitrarily declared a curfew of 10:00 pm on Thursday for Legislative Plaza, providing the pretext for arresting those involved in a week-long demonstration.

Tennessee courts have so far rejected attempts to prosecute those arrested, with Magistrate Tom Nelson declaring Saturday that he could “find no authority anywhere for anyone to authorize a curfew anywhere on Legislative Plaza.”

A reporter from the alternative weekly, the *Nashville Scene*, was among those arrested. A video records his attempts to explain to police that he is a member of the media. As he is forced down and handcuffed, a police officer can be heard saying, “Gentleman, when you get him up there, charge him with resisting arrest.” He was later charged with public intoxication.

In Portland, Oregon, 27 protesters were arrested early Sunday morning after refusing to leave a public park in the city’s downtown area. Portland’s Democratic mayor, Sam Adams, called the arrests “unnecessary” as the city had given protesters “numerous opportunities to simply walk away” and abandon the camp.

In Austin, Texas, 38 people were arrested early Sunday morning. The conflict apparently was sparked by demands from city authorities to remove food tables, which became the pretext for mass arrests.

In Rochester, New York, police arrested 32 protesters on Friday night. One protester told the crowd on Saturday afternoon that Mayor Thomas Richards, a Democrat, “decided that Rochester, New York would be the first city in New York state to forcibly remove protesters exercising their first amendment rights.”

The weekend arrests followed similar actions in San Diego, California (51 arrested on Friday); Tampa, Florida (3 arrested on Friday); Atlanta, Georgia (52 arrested on Wednesday morning) and San Jose, California (7 arrested Tuesday morning).

In Oakland, California, Scott Olsen, a protester who was critically injured by police on Tuesday night, was listed as in “fair” condition after nearly a week in the hospital.

The extreme reaction of police to the relatively small Occupy protests is one reflection of a deep-seated fear within the ruling class that these demonstrations could become a spark for a much broader and powerful movement of the working class. Many of the police

operations have the stench of test runs for various methods and technologies used to suppress popular opposition. Several, including in Oakland and Denver, have turned into police riots.

The repression poses all the more clearly the basic political issues, in particular the central role of the Democratic Party enforcing the interests of the corporate and financial aristocracy in the United States. Barack Obama has said nothing about the police repression, tacitly endorsing the arrests by insisting that protests must remain “lawful.”



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