

New York City Mayor steps up harassment of Occupy Wall Street protesters

Sandy English
29 October 2011

The billionaire mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, escalated state harassment of the several hundred anti-Wall Street protesters who have occupied a small plaza in New York City's financial district since September 17.

The mayor sent 40 firefighters, accompanied by police, into the encampment on Friday to remove several canisters of gasoline and six electrical generators. Bloomberg said during his weekly WOR-AM radio show, "It came to our attention cans of gasoline and generators were in the park. These are fire hazards (and) against the law."

"Our first concern is safety," Bloomberg said, though few New Yorkers would be inclined to doubt that the mayor's first concern is to find a tactic that will allow him to break up the protest against his fellow Wall Street oligarchs. Temperatures are expected to plummet this weekend with snow and freezing rain forecast for Saturday.

One spokesperson for the encampment told the media that the mayor's actions were "a pretext to make the protest less sustainable and more difficult for us". Demonstrators have also noted that the move is an attempt to restrict Internet use, since the generators powered laptops at the occupation.

The intimidation follows the Wednesday arrests of at least 17 demonstrators protesting the police assault on the Occupy Oakland decampment and the serious injury to Iraq veteran Scott Olsen by a police-fired tear gas canister.

On Thursday as well, the Murdoch-owned *New York Post* reported in glowing terms that the union for New York City police sergeants, the Sergeants' Benevolent Association, would pursue legal action against protesters who injured any of their members. "In light of the growing violence attendant to the 'Occupy'

movements across the country, particularly as evidenced by the recent events in Oakland, I am compelled to place these so-called 'occupiers' on notice that physical assaults on police officers will not be tolerated," SBA President Ed Mullins said in a statement.

Like the mayor's statements, this verbal provocation turns reality on its head. It is the protesters who have suffered violence from the police on a nearly daily basis, including mass arrests, pepper-spraying, and the police riot in Oakland on Tuesday.

New York Occupiers continued their protest against leading financial institutions on Friday with a march to Bank of America, Morgan Stanley, Wells Fargo, Citigroup and JPMorgan Chase where they delivered petitions protesting unfair lending practices.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* visited Liberty Plaza on Friday afternoon and spoke to a number of occupiers, many of whom have now experienced arrest or police intimidation and violence. Many others were present, as has been the case every day for over a month, coming to the encampment out of sympathy or friendly curiosity.

William Macgee, a student from Chattanooga Tennessee, told us, "I came out to see Occupy Wall Street and each person's reason for coming here. I'm in school studying the 1960s student movement and I'm comparing it to Occupy Wall Street and the student debt crisis. I know a lot of people who are affected by student loans."

When we asked him about the police violence in Oakland, he said, "That's the thing that will escalate this. It's what happened in 1968 at Berkeley."

Aileen Pare, who has been going to anti-Wall Street demonstrations in New York City several times a week,

said, “The police in Oakland were extreme. It didn’t have to be handled that way. Three weeks ago I was at the Brooklyn Bridge demonstration, although I didn’t actually cross the bridge. The marchers were going to cross on the pedestrian way, and the police led them where the vehicles are. So it was entrapment.

“In Oakland, the police were armed, the protesters were not. Scott Olsen, the Iraq War veteran, was hit with a tear gas canister, which fractured his skull.”

We asked about the political state of the United States, and Aileen said simply, “The vast majority of politicians get their money from the corporations.”

Mickey Smith, a young worker from New York who has also been attending protests regularly at the occupation in Liberty Plaza, has been unemployed for a year and a half. We asked Mickey how the economic crisis had affected him.

He said, “I was an office worker but was laid off due to a lack of work, because the economy is so bad. They had to let people go. I know this is a common story. The companies are concerned with the bottom line. There is a problem with the profit system. For example, I don’t believe that medical care should be for profit. It does not work. They could help all the people that are sick. If your ailment costs too much money, then you are in a lot of trouble. Nobody should be uninsured. Everybody should have the right to health care.”

What did he think of the escalation of police violence against the protesters? “In Oakland the police went beyond the call of duty,” Mickey said. “The people involved in the occupation movement are far from violent. In fact, our movement remains nonviolent in the face of the violence of the police.”

“The police officer that pepper-sprayed the girls,” Mickey added, “has worked in the Police Department for 29 years, and makes over \$100,000 a year. He lost 10 days of vacation pay for what he did. That gives him 10 extra days to work and make overtime, build up his last year’s salary and build up his pension. This ‘penalty’ is not a punishment, but rather a reward for his behavior.

“The police should not be here with their cameras and their barricade gates. We are nonviolent. There are already a lot of police in the financial district to protect

Wall Street. They get paid to protect Wall Street against the 99 percent.”

Asked if he felt there was a significant difference between the Democrats and Republicans, he answered, “The Democrats and Republicans are the same exact party. Wall Street refuses to compromise with us. They employ a lot of politicians. The politicians are paid to do a job, which is to work for Wall Street.

“I am against the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. America kills a lot more people than they say they do. Wall Street likes the wars. They make so much money from them. Washington gave Wall Street \$6 trillion, and they fight these wars for the military industrial complex, which includes Wall Street.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact