

Boston police arrest 100 anti-Wall Street protesters

Kate Randall
12 October 2011

Boston Police carried out an early morning raid on anti-Wall Street protesters Tuesday, arresting 100 people in a violent attack on the Occupy Boston protest. The police operation began at about 1:20 a.m., when officers in uniform and riot gear moved in to clear protesters from a section of land in the city's financial district.

The police action followed a day of protests Monday in which several thousand Boston-area students came out to rally in support of Occupy Boston. As in protests that have spread to dozens of cities across the country, participants are being driven by a profound anger over unprecedented levels of social inequality and the domination of corporate power over all aspects of social life.

The brutal police assault on the Boston protesters expresses the real attitude of the ruling elite to this growing movement, and is an indication of the methods that will be utilized against protesters in other areas as it continues to gather momentum. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, a Democrat, stated, "I understand they have freedom of speech and freedom of expression, but we have a city to manage... civil disobedience will not be tolerated."

Now nearing its second week, the Boston protest has steadily grown in numbers. Occupy Boston protesters have set up a tent city in Dewey Square on a section of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, with hundreds of people sleeping overnight on a regular basis. On Monday, protesters began expanding their occupation to an adjacent area of the Greenway, erecting new tents.

Until Tuesday's early morning raid, the Boston Police Department had adopted a generally hands-off approach to the protest. But on Monday afternoon, protesters began to notice a heavy police presence in the area. Police told protesters Monday evening that they would face arrest unless they vacated the area of the Greenway where they had expanded their protest.

At about 1:20 a.m. Tuesday, Police Superintendent William Evans and Police Commissioner Edward F. Davis stood across the street from the new occupation area. Speaking over a bullhorn, Evans gave the crowd two minutes to disperse, warning they faced arrest if they did not comply. Police lined up on Atlantic Avenue and minutes later dozens of sheriff's

vans and police wagons arrived. More than 200 officers surrounded the section of the Greenway occupied by the protesters.

An Occupy Boston protester told the World Socialist Web Site later Tuesday, "They came down with dogs, batons, riot gear, scare tactics. It was just disgraceful!" The group responded with chants of, "The people united will never be defeated," "This is a peaceful protest," and "The whole world is watching."

After about 10 minutes, the police entered the park and surrounded the protesters. Evans gave one more warning, and police then began the arrests. Each protester was shoved to the ground on his or her stomach, cable-tied, and dragged off to waiting police vans. Members of Veterans for Peace had formed a line in front of the mostly young protesters and police broke through their barrier. Vietnam Veteran John Niles, 74, was knocked down, but evaded arrest.

Protester James Woods, 52, told the *Boston Globe* that he saw police "aggressively manhandling women," and that police had used pepper spray on some people. As protesters were hauled away, their tents, clothes, cameras and other belongings were thrown into a dumpster.

Urszula Masny-Latos, who was on the scene as a legal observer, told the *Globe* that the police "really attacked. They used force that was completely unnecessary... it was just brutal. I have no idea why they arrested us with such force."

To her surprise, she was arrested herself, although she was wearing a green hat with the words "legal observer." She said the Boston police usually respect the rights of legal observers at public protests. Four medics were also arrested.

Masny-Latos also said that the violence of the arrests was contrary to the technique routinely used at other peaceful protests, in which police approach the protesters, inform them they are violating the law, and the protesters may then submit to be taken into custody.

The male arrestees were held in custody or ordered to appear in court Tuesday. The first group of men made appearances yesterday afternoon in Boston Municipal Court. All of the women arrested were released by police and were due in court Wednesday or Thursday.

As of mid-Tuesday, 10 men who had been released by police

and nine who were still in custody were notified that Suffolk County prosecutors had requested that charges against them be changed from criminal violations to civil infractions. The protesters were ordered to pay a \$50 assessment fee to the court.

The day after the arrests, Police Superintendent Evans defended the heavy-handed methods of the police. Elaine Driscoll, a spokesperson for the Boston Police Department, justified the repressive tactics used on the peaceful protesters saying the police “have the right to protect themselves” and claiming that “all our officers were respectful and proportional.”

Mayor Menino defended the police while at the same time claiming to sympathize with those who had been arrested. Echoing the comments of other Democratic politicians on the anti-Wall Street protests, Menino said, “I agree with them on the issues. Foreclosure, corporate greed. These are issues I’ve been working on my entire career.”

However, he said protesters had “crossed the line” Monday, when they marched on a bridge in Charlestown following the student rally and threatened to block traffic, and then expanded their campground to the newly renovated area of the Greenway and refused to leave.

The police crackdown in Boston, following mass arrests in New York, Des Moines and other cities, represents one element of a two-pronged strategy being employed by the ruling class against the burgeoning anti-Wall Street protests. On the one hand, the Democratic Party, utilizing the services of the trade unions and their pro-Democratic pseudo-left allies, have sought to co-opt the protests and channel the genuine outrage expressed by the participants behind that big business party and President Obama’s 2012 reelection campaign.

This would render the incipient movement against social inequality and the domination of the banks and corporations politically harmless and transform it into another prop for the capitalist two-party system, just as the movement against the war in Iraq was subverted and then shut down by tying it the Democratic Party and its various election campaigns.

After three years of right-wing, pro-corporate policies, the Obama administration is engaged in a demagogic public relations campaign to portray itself as a populist friend of the “middle class.” The centerpiece of this effort is Obama’s “American Jobs Act,” a pro-business bill that would provide only a token number of jobs and do so by draining Social Security of funds and extending more tax breaks to the corporations.

This measure is linked to an austerity plan that would cut hundreds of billions of dollars from social programs, including Medicare and Medicaid. And in Orwellian fashion, Obama is pretending to support higher taxes on the rich even as he pushes a bipartisan tax “reform” scheme that would slash tax rates for corporations and the wealthy.

Obama is combining campaign-style town hall meetings in

various cities to promote his phony “jobs bill” with fundraisers at which he collects pledges and checks from multi-millionaire corporate executives and bankers.

Typical of the cynicism of the Democrats’ attempts to portray themselves as allies of the anti-Wall Street protesters were the remarks of Obama senior adviser David Plouffe. Interviewed Tuesday on ABC’s “Good Morning America” program, he said, “If you’re concerned about Wall Street and our financial system, the president is standing on the side of consumers and the middle class.”

In their effort to corral the anti-Wall Street movement and prevent it from developing into a broader movement of the working class outside the control of the Democratic Party, forces allied to the Democrats are seeking to take organizational control of the protests. The *New York Times* on Tuesday pointed to the role of the Center for American Progress, headed by former Clinton White House Chief of Staff John D. Podesta, in “sometimes working in recent weeks with labor unions... from talking points to the realm of organizational guidance.”

But as the anti-Wall Street movement spreads, the political establishment is becoming increasingly concerned that the protests will move out of the orbit of the two big-business parties and in an increasingly anti-capitalist direction. Thus the supposed “support” for the movement is combined with violent police attacks intended to terrorize and intimidate, and deter new forces from becoming involved.

In Des Moines, 32 demonstrators were arrested Sunday night and charged with trespassing after Republican Governor Terry Branstad ordered state police to enforce a requirement to close state capitol grounds at 11 p.m. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the city manager has threatened similar action against Occupy Grand Rapids demonstrators.

On Tuesday, in Washington DC, six people were arrested at the Hart Senate Building after about 100 protesters filled the building’s atrium, chanting, “End the wars, tax the rich.” Demonstrators had marched from their occupation of “Freedom Plaza” downtown to the Capitol.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact