

Mayor Bloomberg backs mass arrests of Wall Street protesters

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New York City's billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, has endorsed the police operation in which some 700 peaceful protesters were arrested Saturday on the Brooklyn Bridge.

It was the largest mass arrest in the city since the NYPD rounded up some 1,800 protesters outside the Republican National Convention in 2004. Many of those who participated in Saturday's march have charged that police deliberately deceived them, using agents provocateurs to lead unwitting marchers into a pre-prepared trap.

While the arrests resulted in the issuing of minor summonses, ranging from disorderly conduct to blocking traffic, the effect was to put hundreds of non-violent demonstrators "through the system," photographing and finger-printing them and throwing them into precinct holding cells for many hours. Nine individuals, who either lacked identification or had prior summonses, were locked up for 24 hours or more.

Bloomberg, whose net worth of some \$19.5 billion is derived from Wall Street, voiced unqualified support for the police repression on the Brooklyn Bridge.

"The police did exactly what they are supposed to do," he told reporters Sunday before marching in the Pulaski Day Parade. He declared that New York City "is the place where you can come to express your views. Protesting is fine, but you don't have the right to go and without a permit violate the law."

In reality, with or without permit, the city and its police department have increasingly restricted protest. They have used barricades to pen in and block demonstrations, employed undercover infiltrators and agents provocateurs to spy upon and entrap those participating and used excessive force, including beatings, pepper spray and mounted police charges to suppress unresisting demonstrators.

Bloomberg has repeatedly made clear his hostility to the Occupy Wall Street protests. Responding to a question about the actions during a recent radio interview, he declared, "The protesters are protesting people who make \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year and are struggling to make ends meet. That's

the bottom line. Those are people that work on Wall Street or in the finance sector...We need the banks, if the banks don't go out and make loans we will not come out of our economy problems, we will not have jobs. And so anything we can do to responsibly help the banks do that, encourage them to do that, is what we need. I think we spend too much time worrying about how we got into problems as to how we go forward."

Bloomberg, who cynically pretends to identify with Wall Street workers making \$40,000 a year, registered a \$1.5 billion increase in his personal fortune last year. Meanwhile, 2010 also saw the city's poverty rate rise from 18.7 percent to 20.1 percent, or 1.6 million people. The billionaire mayor has plenty of reason to want an end to the "worrying about how we got into problems," as he is a prime beneficiary of the parasitic speculation and financial criminality on Wall Street that played such a major role in dragging the rest of the economy into the abyss, with millions losing their jobs, seeing their homes foreclosed and having their incomes slashed.

As for "going forward", Bloomberg's solution, like that of both Democrats and Republicans on the federal, state and local level, is to impose the full burden of the economic crisis on the backs of working people by slashing funds for vital social programs, laying off municipal workers and increasing the sales tax. At the same time, Bloomberg actively campaigned to ensure the ending of the so-called "millionaires' tax," which placed a moderate surcharge on the New York state income tax for the wealthiest 2 percent.

Meanwhile, the city's top elected Democratic official, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, a leading candidate to succeed Bloomberg, also voiced support for the mass arrests.

"We all have the right to protest," she said. "The police, when it spills over into civil disobedience, have the right to arrest individuals who are engaging in civil disobedience." She added, that while people had First Amendment rights, "When exercising that right becomes a public safety issue, the NYPD has to take actions to maintain order."

A few union bureaucracies aligned with the Democratic Party, such as the United Federation of Teachers, SEIU and Transport Workers Union Local 100 have formally endorsed the protests, as have some groups aligned with the Democrats, such as MoveOn.org and the Working Families Party. An article in the *Wall Street Journal* Monday, however, pointed to the dilemma of Democrats hoping to make political hay out of the Wall Street protests. It quoted Democratic political consultant Hank Sheinkopf as saying in relation to Democrats coming out in support of Occupy Wall Street: “The upside is that most of the people in the city probably agree with the protesters...The downside is most people on Wall Street, the people who work on Wall Street, won’t forget that.”

In the end, whatever the inclination toward pseudo-populist demagoguery, the demands of the Wall Street bankers and financiers who fund the Democratic Party are what predominate.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to a number of those participating in the Wall Street occupation about the issues raised by Saturday’s mass arrests and other acts of police repression.

Akio Rodriguez, who has been part of the protest since its second day, was arrested Saturday and given a summons for disorderly conduct and obstructing traffic. After an hour and a half to two hours sitting on the bridge he was taken to a Brooklyn holding cell.

“I was in the middle of the crowd, not aware at all that we weren’t allowed on the roadway,” he said. “We had no warning. The part that confused me was that the cops seemed like, ‘hey, go this way.’”

“When the cops moved in with the netting, it got chaotic, people were getting panicky. The cops could have just said ‘please leave the bridge’ or from the beginning not allowed anyone on the road. Instead it was used like a training exercise. That’s what it felt like, a well-prepared trap or a training exercise. The blue shirts [patrol officers] didn’t know exactly what to do, like they were some new recruits just brought in. But the white shirts [senior supervisors], they were directing them around, telling them to get control and arrest their five people each. It was just like a training exercise.

“I think the people with money are forcing the cops to get these ‘hippies’ out of the financial district. They don’t want us here. I heard that Chase bank just made a huge donation to the cops.”

Adam Salater, from Miami, who joined the protest four days ago, was also arrested and brought to a Brooklyn police stationhouse cell. He was issued the same charges of disorderly conduct and obstructing traffic.

“I didn’t hear until today that the cops had given any

warning or said anything about using the road,” he said. “When I rounded the corner I didn’t even know I was on the road. Then the police officers moved in and initially we thought they were gonna crush heads.

“This is another example in a long process of the police attacking dissent. I think they thought they could rough us up and the whole thing would fizzle out. That hasn’t worked. Now they don’t know what to do. I think they’re afraid that this has the potential to shut down the city if it grows.

“There’s a level of frustration building in this country and in New York. The fuel for the fire is there. We’re trying to spark it. I think this represents a fundamental shift in the power dynamics. It represents mass action and a popular uprising.

Shea Riester, a Brandeis student, has been at the occupation since the beginning. He was on the pedestrian walkway of the Brooklyn Bridge and was not arrested, but witnessed the mass arrests from above.

“Some in the march deliberately wanted to go on the road, and at first cops warned them,” he said. “However the mass of protesters that followed weren’t warned at all. The cops made no attempt to stop them. When they got around one third of the way in, squad cars came in from one side, and cops from the other.

“I think the arrests are crazy, insane. If it were really about blocking traffic why wouldn’t the police block it off? Instead they detained them for hours on the road. Traffic ended up blocked for four hours, rather than just stopping it initially.

“My expectation is that the protest will grow till it reaches a tipping point. That is when in every major city it becomes a household name, when students don’t go back to dorms and politicians are forced to come here.

“That’s my expectation, but my hope is that a new political party is formed. Not of the left or the right, but based on our collective values and how we want to change the political system. We need one person, one dollar, one vote. No big donations from the corporations. The change won’t happen through the two party system. Even if it starts small, I hope it happens here.”



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