

# Growing anger over state repression of anti-Wall Street protests

**Bill Van Auken**  
**28 October 2011**

Tuesday's near-fatal attack by Oakland, California police on a young veteran during an anti-Wall Street protest is part of a wave of repression that has provoked nationwide anger over the growing assault on democratic rights.

Demonstrators poured into the streets of Oakland, New York City and other US cities to denounce the vicious attack on Scott Olsen, 24, who survived two tours of duty in Iraq, only to be cut down by the police.

Olsen was felled by a supposedly non-lethal police projectile, fired directly at his head. The attack came in the midst of what amounted to a police riot staged in response to a Tuesday night protest over the police eviction and mass arrest of Occupy Oakland demonstrators at their encampment in the city's Frank Ogawa Plaza. When other demonstrators went to his aid, they too were attacked with tear gas.

Olsen was admitted to Oakland's Highland Hospital in critical condition, suffering a fractured skull and reportedly in a coma, breathing only with the aid of a respirator. On Thursday, his condition was upgraded to fair. His roommate, Keith Shannon, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Scott had been taken off the respirator but was still under sedation. His parents, who flew in from Wisconsin, were with him.

Shannon, who was in Iraq with Olsen, reported that Olsen had been working at a San Francisco software company during the day and joining the anti-Wall Street protests at night, sleeping in the encampments in San Francisco and Oakland, California.

"He'd leave work, head there, sleep there and go to work the next day," Shannon told the WSW. "Scott was participating in Occupy San Francisco because he doesn't agree with how none of the banks and corporations were held accountable for their role in the economic downturn. Instead, the politicians work hand-in-hand with them to provide more laws that benefit the rich rather than helping the thousands upon thousands of people who have lost their jobs and their health insurance and really need it."

Shannon said that Scott's attitude toward the Occupy Wall Street movement developed in line with his views on the war in Iraq. Having joined the Marines in 2006, he turned against the war after his deployments twice to the country. "He just felt that we shouldn't be there," he said. "He thought it wasn't good for the Iraqi people and it wasn't good for the American

people. The only ones it was good for were the businessmen."

The repression in Oakland, which saw cops from 18 different police agencies deployed in riot gear, is only the most extreme example of the heavy handed repression that is being unleashed from coast to coast.

In New York City on Wednesday night, a crowd of several hundred attempted to march on City Hall from the Occupy Wall Street encampment at Liberty Plaza to protest the attacks in Oakland. They were met with police barricades and repeated physical attacks. At least 10 people were arrested. The city has seen over 900 arrests since the protests began on September 17.

Confrontations, meanwhile, appear imminent in city after city. In San Francisco Thursday, police called up reserve units. Hundreds of helmeted riot police were massed on Treasure Island early in the morning for a planned assault on the Occupy SF encampment at Justin Herman Plaza that was called off at the last minute.

In Los Angeles, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa issued a statement declaring that the occupation outside City Hall "cannot continue indefinitely", claiming concern for the lawn.

Similarly, in Philadelphia, the city administration is pushing for the removal of a tent city outside of City Hall in Dilworth Plaza. Philadelphia's managing director, Richard Negrin, commented that "if they force us to take stronger measures" the city would do so.

In Providence, Rhode Island, the public safety commissioner issued a written notice Thursday to Occupy Wall Street protesters warning that they will be forced to leave a downtown park where they have been camping within 72 hours. Authorities in Baltimore are reportedly taking similar measures.

In Albany, New York, the state's Democratic governor, Andrew Cuomo, has put pressure on the city's mayor, Jerry Jennings, to arrest and evict protesters occupying Academy Park. Jennings, also a Democrat, said that he had refused out of fear that the city would face a "civil liability" if it used force to drive out the demonstrators.

The new threats of crackdowns come on top of Mayor Kasim Reed in Atlanta sending in a SWAT team to evict protesters from a downtown park Wednesday, arresting 50 of them. Over the course of last weekend, police attacked protesters in Chicago, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Phoenix, Dallas, Orlando

and Tampa, arresting over 200.

In most of the cities carrying out the repression, local governments are controlled by the Democratic Party, which is pursuing a two-track strategy in relation to the anti-Wall Street protests. On the one hand, it is using the trade unions and various middle class groups to try to co-opt the largely spontaneous movement and turn it into a vehicle for the Obama 2012 re-election campaign. On the other hand are the billy clubs, tear gas, pepper spray and the kind of police violence that nearly killed Scott Olsen in Oakland. Underneath it all, the Democrats, just like their Republican counterparts, are deeply hostile to this movement, which they see as cutting across their own intimate relations with Wall Street. •

The Obama administration is implicitly backing the arrests, and Obama has said nothing about the violence. On Thursday, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney was asked about the violence in Oakland. He responded by blaming the protesters, saying, “As to the violence, we obviously believe and insist that everyone behave in a lawful manner, even as they’re expressing, justifiably, their frustrations.”

Dianne Feinstein, the Democratic Senator from California, commented in the immediate aftermath of the violent assault in Oakland that she did not believe that the “protesters have the right to occupy forever.” She added, “I don’t think people, for example, can sleep in a square for weeks on end. You have to have some order to it.”

She also questioned the purpose of the protests, saying that there were “all kind of agendas going on” and that it was “hard to figure out what people want.”

Undoubtedly a major impediment to Feinstein being able to figure out what the demonstrators want is her status as one of the 10 richest people on Capitol Hill, with a personal fortune conservatively estimated at over \$50 million and an investment banker husband.

What the demonstrators want is not a mystery. They have raised the issue that pervades economic, social and political life in America: inequality, the yawning social chasm between the top 1 percent and working people, the vast majority of the population. Their demands are for equality, decent incomes, jobs, and an end to both evictions and servitude to educational debt.

Their assessment of social reality in America received fresh confirmation in a report issued in Europe Thursday, which found that the distribution of wealth in the United States is among the most unequal of all the so-called developed countries.

The survey, released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), placed the US near the bottom of 31 OECD countries in terms of equality. Far from being the “land of opportunity”, the report found that the US was among the most difficult countries to move up the social ladder between generations. And, in terms of its “alarming” poverty levels, it said that the US placed third to worst, with

conditions being more dire only in Chile and Mexico.

Transforming these conditions requires far more than protest. What occupy demonstrators, along with masses of working people who sympathize with the protests, confront is the failure of the capitalist system, together with the relentless attempt by the banks, the corporations and the two big business parties that they control to force the working class to pay for this crisis.

The protesters in Oakland have made the call for a general strike to be carried out on November 2, urging workers not to go to work and students to walk out of their classes. Discussion on a similar demand is reportedly being held within the New York Occupy Wall Street protest.

Among those who are genuinely looking for a way to fight, the call for a general strike undoubtedly represents an attempt to turn to the power of the working class. However, among the pseudo-left organizations, such a demand is intended only to foster illusions in the unions.

To the extent that this demand is directed to the existing trade unions, which are completely subordinated to the Democratic Party and represent the interests of management and their own privileged officials, not those of the workers trapped within them, it will at best become another futile form of protest.

The organization of a genuine general strike requires the mobilization of the working class and the youth, independent of the Democratic Party and the unions. Preparation for such a struggle must begin with the formation of rank-and-file action committees in the workplaces, schools and neighborhoods. The occupation of Wall Street must be extended to the occupation of the factories, turning every workplace into a center of resistance to the attacks on working people.

The fight for jobs, decent living standards, the right to education, health care, retirement and other social necessities can be won only by means of a revolutionary struggle on the part of the working class to break the economic and political stranglehold of the top 1 percent and take political power in its own hands. Only in this way can economic life be reorganized along socialist lines to serve human needs rather than the profits and wealth of the financial elite.

This fight is political, and it is international. It requires the building of a new party to prepare the leadership for this fundamental revolutionary transformation of society based upon a socialist and internationalist program. We urge all workers and youth looking for a way to carry forward the struggle against Wall Street to study our program, join the SEP and take up the fight for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**