

Mayors conspired to close Occupy Wall Street encampments

Arrests continue in major cities

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As cities throughout the United States step up the police crackdown on the Occupy Wall Street movement, evidence has emerged of a conspiracy between city officials—possibly coordinated with federal intelligence agencies—to shut down the occupy encampments on the basis of trumped-up charges of sanitation and public safety.

In an interview with the BBC Tuesday, Oakland mayor Jean Quan said that she had coordinated her efforts to crack down on the occupation with the mayors of other major cities.

“I was recently on a conference call with 18 cities across the country who had the same situation where what had started as a political movement and a political encampment ended up being an encampment no longer in control by the people who started them,” said Ms. Quan.

City officials were quick to deny that the meeting referred to by Quan, which was held Nov 10 and organized by the United States Conference of Mayors, was aimed at shutting down the protests.

A spokesman for Portland Mayor Sam Adams told *The Atlantic Wire*, “The mayors talked about how difficult it is to communicate with the leaderless movement,” adding that “It was not a strategy session” and “not a coordinating session.” The spokesperson said that the mayor’s staffer referred to the meeting as “group therapy.”

A spokesperson for the US Conference of Mayors told *Mother Jones* magazine Wednesday that the call Ms. Quan mentioned was one of numerous conference calls—which included mayors and top police brass—that focused on discussing “efforts cities have made to accommodate the demonstrators and maintain public

health and safety.”

A report in the Associated Press gave a summary of tips given out to city administrations in these discussions: “Don’t set a midnight deadline to evict Occupy Wall Street protesters—it will only give a crowd of demonstrators time to form. Don’t set ultimatums because it will encourage violent protesters to break it. Fence off the parks after an eviction so protesters can’t reoccupy it.”

Rick Ellis, a Minneapolis reporter at examiner.com, wrote that an anonymous federal official informed him that “in several recent conference calls and briefings, local police agencies were advised to seek a legal reason to evict residents of tent cities, focusing on zoning laws and existing curfew rules.”

Mr. Ellis continued, “Agencies were also advised to demonstrate a massive show of police force, including large numbers in riot gear. In particular, the FBI reportedly advised on press relations, with one presentation suggesting that any moves to evict protesters be coordinated for a time when the press was the least likely to be present.”

These reports come together with mounting evidence of federal involvement in police repression at the demonstrations. Last month, officers from the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Protective Service arrested a photographer at Occupy Portland.

US President Barack Obama was conveniently out of the country during the crackdown on Zuccotti Square, but White House Press Secretary Jay Carney insisted to reporters Wednesday that the federal government was not coordinating the attacks, saying that “every municipality has to make its own decisions about how to handle these issues.”

Meanwhile, the police assaults against Occupy protesters continue unabated. On Tuesday evening, police indiscriminately sprayed large bottles of pepper spray into a peaceful demonstration in downtown Seattle. The victims included an 84-year-old woman, a priest, and a pregnant woman who was sent to the hospital as a result.

An Associated Press photo of 84-year-old Dorli Rainey with her face covered in pepper spray was widely viewed online Wednesday, becoming one of the symbols of police repression against the Occupy movement.

In response to popular outrage, Seattle police responded that pepper spray is “not harmful,” and that “Pepper spray was deployed only against subjects who were either refusing a lawful order to disperse or engaging in assaultive behavior toward officers.” The evening’s events resulted in six arrests.

The same night, five people were arrested in Pittsburgh and charged with defiant trespass, failure to disperse and obstruction of roadways. They were part of a group of about 200 participating in a protest downtown.

Police cleared out Occupy San Diego at 2 a.m. Wednesday morning, arresting 9 people, saying that the encampment was an unlawful assembly, and that the raid was a response to “a significant increase in the number of violent acts” at the protest.

Police likewise raided a portion of the Occupy San Francisco encampment Wednesday morning, arresting seven people and dismantling 15 tents.

Tuesday’s clearing of Zuccotti Park, in which 200 people were arrested, was only the most prominent in a string of crackdowns in dozens of cities. The morning before, police had cleared out the Occupy Oakland encampment, arresting 33 people.

On Sunday, police cleared a camp in Portland, Oregon, arresting 50 people. On Saturday, the occupation in Denver, Colorado was raided, resulting in 17 arrests, and the Salt Lake City, Utah occupation was shut down with 18 arrests. The day before, police in St. Louis, Missouri cleared the occupation there, arresting 27 people.

In Columbia, South Carolina, police acting on the orders of Governor Nikki Haley arrested 19 Occupy protesters on Wednesday evening. While Haley claimed to be upholding a legal ban on staying

overnight on the grounds of the State House, she was under pressure from Republican state legislators who claimed the protests were disrupting preparations for the state’s presidential primary January 21.

The attacks on Occupy encampments that began in the United States have spread to other countries. Australian officials ordered protestors in Melbourne to remove their tents, and police in London pinned eviction notices to the encampments outside St. Paul’s Cathedral, demanding that they be taken down by 6 p.m. Thursday.

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson said Tuesday that he wants to see the city’s encampment “gone before the Grey Cup weekend,” referring to the Canadian football game scheduled for November 27.

In response to the arrest of ten reporters during the clearing of Zuccotti Park, including those working for NPR, AP, and the New York *Daily News*, Free Press, a media nonprofit, called on mayors throughout the US to “honor the 1st Amendment and drop all charges against journalists.”



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