

Protesters in Philadelphia and Los Angeles resist attempts to end occupations

Our reporters

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Officials in Los Angeles, California and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—both headed by Democratic Party mayors—are seeking to end occupations in their cities, part of a nationwide campaign in the US to shut down the protests against inequality.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa set a midnight deadline Sunday night for an end to the occupation. Prior to the expiration of the deadline, some occupiers left, according to LAPD Police Chief Charlie Beck, who so far is tight-lipped on when the police will move in. On Sunday night, police did arrest four occupy protesters who allegedly were blocking traffic on Broadway Avenue, a street that borders on the City Council park.

At the Occupy LA camp that surrounds City Hall, an eyewitness gave details of the police operation that took place on Sunday night.

“Last night was very scary because the police had encircled the whole place. In all directions you had police, and, after seeing all the violence at Davis and UC Berkeley and Wall Street, everyone was expecting worse; it was pretty scary having police yell and threaten you.”

Police Chief Beck announced that the LAPD would choose when to evict the occupiers, without necessarily giving advanced warning.

Meanwhile, dozens of Occupy Philadelphia protesters remained in Dilworth Plaza, near City Hall, on Monday, November 28, despite the previous day’s 5 PM deadline for vacating the encampment, which had been set two days earlier by Mayor Michael Nutter.

As of Monday afternoon the police had made no move, although a spokesman for the mayor issued a statement that could be seen as an open-ended threat to close down the Occupy action at any moment the city authorities deemed tactically convenient.

“We are expecting people to pack up and leave,” said spokesman Mark McDonald. “I’m not going to speculate about anything the city might do at any time down the road from now.”

The encampment near Philadelphia’s City Hall began on October 6 and at its height included some 300 tents. As of this past weekend, this number had fallen to less than 100, but hundreds of participants and supporters of the Occupy movement gathered on Sunday night, after the deadline had passed, to reaffirm their support and determination to fight for the goals of the occupations that have spread throughout the country.

At 11 PM about 50 participants linked arms and made clear they were prepared for arrest in the event of police action. Hundreds of others milled around the plaza.

In recent weeks Mayor Nutter had shifted his position on the encampment from his earlier professions of support. City Hall, echoing its counterparts in New York and elsewhere, complained about cleanliness and crime. The mayor also announced that the indefinite occupation of the plaza was impossible because it was delaying a \$50 million renovation project across the street.

At the same time, the local Democratic Party politicians appear to have concluded from the eviction of Occupy Wall Street in downtown Manhattan that a slightly different tactic would achieve the same end result without the attendant publicity and encouragement of the Occupy movement. The mayor and Philadelphia police officials praised the protesters for their “non-violence” and decided to try to wear down and divide the participants before making any frontal assault.

On Sunday night, after the deadline, chief police inspector Joseph Sullivan was the picture of cooperation and good will, saying, “We look forward to

working with Occupy Philadelphia on a resolution to the problem.” Favorably comparing the situation in the city to that elsewhere, he added, “Confrontation is never good.” On Monday morning six patrol cars were stationed across the street from the encampment, but no action appeared imminent.

In negotiations over the past week, Mayor Nutter had offered nearby Thomas Paine Plaza as an alternative site for a section of protesters that split off from the larger Occupy group. This group, calling itself “Responsible Solutions,” was given a permit last Friday to set up at Paine Plaza.

The permit, as with a similar proposal in New York City, came with obvious strings attached. It covered only the hours from 9 AM to 7 PM, and protesters would not be able to set up tents or stay overnight. Responsible Solutions agreed to the restrictions and appeared ready to coordinate its activities with the mayor.



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