

Police arrest 20 Occupy Atlanta protesters during late-night rally

Kranti Kumara
7 November 2011

In Atlanta, Democratic Mayor Kasim Reed, who has openly displayed his hostility towards Occupy Atlanta, moved once more against the protesters late Saturday night, flooding the streets surrounding the renamed Troy Davis Park (formally Woodruff Park) with police after protesters vowed to reoccupy the park.

Despite the fact that most of the protesters had dismantled their tents and left the park voluntarily by the park's closing time of 11 p.m., Reed was not satisfied. He ordered his police to arrest those who had gathered beside the park to hold a peaceful rally. Most of the 20 people who were arrested were slapped with the absurd charge of "obstruction," supposedly for stepping onto the street.

This is the second time Reed has unleashed his police force against peaceful protesters, having forcibly evicted them from the park they had occupied in the early morning hours of October 26. On that day police arrested 53 people. (See "Occupy Atlanta: Protesters speak after forcible eviction from park")

Subsequently, the protesters regrouped by sleeping in the city's Peachtree-Pine homeless shelter. The three decades-old shelter, which is the largest homeless shelter in Atlanta, is itself under threat of closure for failure to pay the exorbitant water bill the city levies.

After the October 26 arrests, Occupy Atlanta protesters promised to reoccupy the park on November 5 in defiance of Reed's threats to arrest them again. Although they set up scores of tents in the park to stay overnight on Saturday, all but two dismantled their gear at around the 11 p.m. The two individuals deliberately stayed back to court arrest while the rest of the 200 to 300 protesters gathered on the surrounding sidewalks and streets.

Robert, one of the protesters arrested on October 26, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* on Sunday at the Peachtree-Pine homeless shelter, where he has been sleeping since being released. He described what happened on Saturday.

"At around 11:30 p.m. a huge contingent of motorcycle police arrived and drove around the park in an act of intimidation," he said. "They were then followed by a large

group of police, some of whom were clad in full riot gear, some on horseback and others on foot. A police helicopter also circled overhead for a while.

"Most of us, except for the two in the park, were gathered on the sidewalks and streets, protesting against this infringement of our right to protest in a public park. We were shouting slogans but were peaceful, as we did not want to give the police an excuse to be violent against us.

"Suddenly, a police officer on a motorcycle attempted to plough through the protesters. This was a deliberate act of provocation. The protesters in front of the motorcycle got angry and stopped the motorcycle by stepping in front of it and holding onto the handlebars. They then surrounded the officer and started rocking his motorcycle back and forth, with him still sitting on it.

"These were tense moments and it appeared that the other police were confused about how to react to what was happening. After this the police moved in and started arresting many of the protesters on the road and even on the sidewalks, despite there being no violence.

"Twenty people were arrested, including the two in the park. Some of them, especially the ones who stood in front of the motorcycle, were physically carried away after having their hands and feet tied. Two of the arrested suffered serious enough injuries to be treated in Grady hospital before being taken to jail.

"The riot police had lined up in an arc at one end of the block with another group of riot police lining up at the other end of the block where we had gathered. But they did not attack. We were energized by this oversized reaction of the mayor to our peaceful protest. This whole thing was an absurd spectacle and shows their nervousness at what our protest represents."

By late afternoon Sunday, 19 of the 20 arrested were released from jail, with 12 of them giving signature bonds and another seven giving cash bonds of various amounts. A group of volunteer attorneys has been representing these protesters for free.

Only one person, Brandon Wojcik-Tremblay, 20 years old,

is still behind bars at the time of this writing. He has been charged with aggravated assault against the motorcycle officer who tried to run him over. His bail hearing is set for Monday morning.

The arrests were indiscriminate. They included three female reporters who had displayed their journalist's credentials, a late-night patron of a restaurant who had just stepped out after eating, and Georgia State University (GSU) Professor Diana Eidson.

The reporters arrested were Alisen Redmond, a 21-year-old journalism student from the Kennesaw State University *Sentinel*, Judith Kim from the GSU *Signal*, and the weekly *Creative Loafing* photographer Stephanie Pharr.

Despite police harassment, Occupy Atlanta protesters plan to repeat their protests again Sunday evening in the streets and sidewalks surrounding Troy Davis Park.

The arrests Saturday in Atlanta were among others taking place in cities across the country over the weekend, as the anti-Wall Street protests continued to spread.

In the nation's capital, a driver who struck three Occupy DC protesters Saturday will not be charged. According to protester Heidi Sippel, she, her 13-year-old son and her wife Brandy Sippel, six months pregnant, were taking part in a demonstration outside an Americans for Prosperity event when a silver Lexus drove quickly towards them. Sippel said the driver slowed down, threw up his hands, and then drove forward and hit them.

Brandy Sippel was grazed by the car's rearview mirror, and Heidi Sippel said she and her son were both hit by the front of the car. The three were treated at a local hospital and released. DC Police Chief Lamar Green said at a Saturday press conference that after speaking with witnesses the police had determined that the collision was unavoidable and the driver would not be charged. Police made two unrelated arrests of protesters for disorderly conduct.

In New York City, police arrested at least 20 protesters Saturday among hundreds who had marched to Foley Square, which is surrounded by government buildings. The police blocked demonstrators from climbing the steps of the State Supreme Court building and made the arrests on the pretext that protesters were "blocking pedestrian traffic."

In Hawaii, police arrested about a half-dozen people late Saturday after Occupy Honolulu protesters attempted to set up a camp at a local park. Protest organizers had said earlier that day that they planned to begin camping in Thomas Square beginning at 10 p.m., park closing time.

About 40 protesters were gathered at the site. Police ordered them to vacate the park and arrested a number of protesters who refused to leave. Protesters said they stood in solidarity with the homeless population, under conditions where authorities are seeking to clear the streets and parks as

the city prepares to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

In Worcester, Massachusetts, about 20 protesters were arrested late Saturday night. Some 60 Occupy Worcester protesters had set up tents in the Common earlier in the evening after voting as a group to move their camp from Lake Park.

The group had first attempted to set up tents at the Worcester Common on October 16, but had remained at Lake Park after a meeting with police. A city ordinance prohibits staying on the Common between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. City Manager Michael O'Brien had warned earlier, "They cannot squat there, they cannot occupy, they cannot set up cities, light camp fires, demand utilities, etc."

Most of those arrested were released later on \$40 bail.

In many cities on Saturday, Occupy protesters took part in demonstrations in connection with was called "Bank Transfer Day," urging mass cancellation of accounts at Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Chase and other large banks in favor of small institutions like credit unions.

In California, several hundred protesters marched through the financial district in Los Angeles. In downtown Oakland, a branch of Wells Fargo closed its doors as demonstrators gathered outside to protest the bank's ties to private companies that run immigrant detention centers.

Dozens of protesters marched Saturday through downtown Indianapolis Indiana, chanting slogans and urging people to transfer their money to local banks and credit unions. In Florida, hundreds of people marched from Occupy Orlando's camp base at Johnson Park to Orlando City Hall, shouting, "The banks got bailed out, we got sold out!"



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact