

Los Angeles police infiltrate Occupy LA

Our reporter
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As part of the crackdown on protests against social inequality in the United States, nearly a dozen Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers infiltrated the Occupy Los Angeles camp over the course of a few weeks prior to the police assault and dispersal of the camp on November 30.

The ostensible goal of the infiltrators was to gather information on any plans among the protesters to violently resist eviction. However, their more practical purpose was to violate the democratic rights of the protesters and provide justification for the militarization of the police response. It is part of a growing effort by police agencies to monitor and spy on oppositional groups.

LAPD Commander Andrew Smith told a reporter that the undercover officers were important for understanding the protesters before the raid. He downplayed the significance of the infiltration saying that “the camp was accessible to everyone.”

The undercover officers cited the absurd story that some protesters were making bamboo spears to fight off the police. When 1,400 officers cleared out the encampment of a few hundred, it was the police who acted violently.

Multiple eyewitnesses have claimed that the police attacked peaceful protesters and journalists with their batons to drive them from the park. Out of the 291 protesters arrested, 187 were released without being charged with any crime, and 46 were charged with the misdemeanor of “failure to disperse.”

Overall, the LAPD attempted to enforce strict restrictions on the media covering the eviction. They declared that only media given LAPD-issued press passes would be allowed to cover the event from a limited area on the City Hall steps. Further, only reporters who attended a meeting at 7 pm on November 28, which was only announced an hour and 15 minutes before, would be eligible for the press pass. Any press

without a pass inside an undefined distance from the park would be arrested with the protesters if they did not disperse.

The only person who was charged with assault and battery of a peace officer was a photojournalist, Tyson Heder, for allegedly spitting on an officer. The video of Heder’s arrest, captured by CBS, shows him being thrown to the ground for no apparent reason and being tackled by several police after demanding the name of the officer who assaulted him.

This is not the first time that the police have gone undercover within the Occupy movement as part of preparations to disperse an encampment. In late October, members of the Tennessee Highway Patrol infiltrated Occupy Nashville prior to police raids resulting in 55 arrests.

In both instances, law enforcement began surveillance on the basis of political dissent and not credible suspicion of illegal activity. Antonio Villaraigosa, the Democratic Party mayor of Los Angeles, and Bill Haslam, the Republican Governor of Tennessee, both justified the police surveillance and assault on protesters as necessary for public safety.

This preemptive surveillance of political opposition is part and parcel of the Democrats’ and Republicans’ steady assault on democratic rights. Concurrent with the politically motivated infiltration of the Occupy movement has been the Obama administration’s arguments before the Supreme Court defending unlimited, warrantless GPS surveillance, and the passage in the Senate of the National Defense Authorization Act, which legalizes the unlimited military detention without trial or judicial oversight of US citizens.



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