Police confiscate tents from Minneapolis protesters

Our reporter
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Hennepin County sheriff's deputies descended upon the Occupy Minneapolis (Occupy MPLS) encampment in downtown Minneapolis during the early morning hours to dismantle tents set up by occupiers the night before to challenge a ban on their use at the Hennepin County Plaza. About 50 deputies dragged protesters out of their tents and loaded them on a truck to be hauled away. Those who tried to prevent the confiscation of tents by moving them away from deputies had them ripped out of their hands.

The previous evening, a mass rally was held to kick off the decision by occupiers to erect the tents in direct defiance of a new regulations passed by Hennepin County Commissioners banning the practice and backed up by a US District Court judge. The county sheriff and deputies waited until 4:15 a.m. to march on the plaza, where they removed tents in about 15 minutes. No arrests were made.

Demonstrators assembled and later moved off the plaza, which houses the Hennepin County Government Center, and crossed the street to set up other tents in front of Minneapolis City Hall. The Minneapolis City Council, dominated by the Democratic Party, had passed an innocuous resolution last month purporting to support the 99 percent movement. One demonstrator told the WSWS that Democratic Mayor R.T. Rybak had even handed out apples to occupiers.

But once demonstrators moved off Hennepin County property, the Democratic administration was no longer able to hide behind Hennepin County commissioners and moved rapidly against the occupiers. At about 9 a.m., Minneapolis Police arrested two demonstrators and tore down a tent in front of City Hall. One arrestee received a wound to his head during the altercation.

"The way I look at what the sheriff, the Minneapolis police department and the courts have done is pretty much in keeping with what's going on around the country," Nathan Thompson told the WSWS. "Our group here in Minneapolis is a bit smaller than other parts of the country. The response has been to treat that as an opportunity to not have the negative media coverage that some of the larger cities are having.

"But I've been down here since the occupation began on October 7. And what I see is a slow attempt to create rules to make us grow tired and make us go away. It's a slow squeeze. You could say slow strangulation.

"The Minneapolis police department has a long history of responding quickly and aggressively. This is the way they operate. As far as the mayor and the City Council go, I don't know what their intentions are, but I don't really believe they support us."

The current clash came as a result of new rules drawn up Hennepin County commissioners that ordered an end to sleeping in tents on the plaza and banned the posting of signs. The commissioners couched their ban on overnight sleeping behind "safety" concerns. Last week, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a suit on behalf of the occupiers that sought a temporary restraining order against the new regulations which it believes violate the First Amendment.

"The rules put forth by Hennepin County are particularly troubling because they were created as a direct response to OccupyMPLS," declared ACLU attorney Justin Perl. "They were not based on any previous ordinances. The Constitution does not allow the government to just make up new rules as you go along in order to target a particular group."

Charles Samuelson, executive director of the Minnesota ACLU, pointed out, "In the United States, we have celebrated protestors occupying spaces around the globe during the Arab Spring, yet we are quick to criticize the Occupy Movement for utilizing some of

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the same methods of expression.”

US District Court Judge Richard Kyle upheld the ban on tents and overnight sleeping, but allowed the posting of signs in the plaza. He ordered the county and Occupy protesters into settlement talks with a US magistrate judge to ultimately settle differences.

Walker, another occupier who has camped out in the Hennepin County Plaza since day one, called Hennepin County regulations “an infringement on our rights.” He continued, “They are doing this just to get us out of here.

“They claim it's for our own good. Our government likes to say things like that. Just like the Patriot Act. They claim they are doing it to protect us from terrorism.”

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