

Police arrest over 70 in attack on Occupy San Francisco encampment

James Brewer
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In a surprise raid early Wednesday morning, one hundred police and sheriff's deputies in riot gear laid siege to the Occupy encampment at Justin Herman Plaza at the foot of Market Street in downtown San Francisco. At 1:30 am, a five-minute warning was given to protesters, many of whom were asleep in their tents, to gather belongings and leave the encampment. Over 70 arrests were made in the process of clearing the camp.

The police attack was the latest in a series of similar crackdowns on Occupy encampments across the country. Thousands have been arrested in a nationally coordinated assault on the right of political speech and assembly, carried out mainly by Democratic Party city administrations. The Obama administration, which has feigned sympathy for the protests in an effort to boost the president's reelection campaign, has signaled its tacit approval for the police violence by remaining silent.

In recent weeks the Occupy San Francisco encampment had attracted more protesters, bringing the total number of campers to over 150. Mayor Ed Lee, a Democrat, claimed that the protests had cost the city \$950,000. He said the city had issued repeated warnings to the protestors to move.

"I've been incredibly patient with the use and misuse of Justin Herman Plaza," Lee declared. He added, "Everyone in the city has the right to protest, but overnight sleeping will not be allowed."

Several protesters told the media that they had not been given enough time to clear out their belongings, which led to clashes between police and Occupy supporters. About 30 arrests were made during the raid itself. The rest were made when protestors tried to cross police lines to reenter the camp.

Jack Martin told Associated Press reporters that as he

was trying to leave, he was zip-tied and carted off to a police station while his tent and personal belongings were being trashed. After his release, he said tearfully, "Everything I own is gone, my medicine, my paper for my Social Security."

Later, as two dozen police officers blocked access to the camp, city workers raked up belongings and power-washed the sidewalks. Tents, blankets and bicycles were loaded onto flatbed trucks and garbage vehicles.

One of the 70 arrested, David Ritchie, said many items were damaged or destroyed in the process. He said he saw personal belongings being put in a garbage truck and crushed.

In a perfunctory move, the city notified the press that belongings could be picked up at the public works yard between 1 pm and 5 pm.

Occupy protesters later massed in front of the Federal Building on Market Street to, according to organizer Gene Doherty, "send a message that this is our right to protest, our right to assemble, and to talk about the economic injustices in the world."

At the noon rally, demonstrators blocked traffic and shouted, "Whose streets? Our streets!" Organizers vowed to retake the plaza.



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