

Occupy DC protesters ordered to end camps

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Occupy DC protesters were ordered to end their months-old encampments in the US capital on Monday. Federal government officials gave notice last week that protesters had to remove all camping equipment from two sites they have occupied in downtown Washington, DC.

As of this posting, the protesters remained in a standoff with Parks Police, who had ordered the the camps to be cleared out by noon.

The parks, McPherson Square and Freedom Plaza, are owned and policed by the National Parks Service, an agency of the US Department of the Interior responsible for much of the open space in the center of Washington. Parks Police warned Occupy protesters that they would start to enforce an established prohibition on overnight camping, which officials had waived since protesters set up the encampments October 1.

The Occupy DC camps are part of the US and worldwide protests, begun in New York City under the banner Occupy Wall Street, against social inequality and the domination of political power by a financial oligarchy.

The change in attitude toward the Occupy demonstrators by the Parks Service appears to have been prompted by the actions of Congressional Republicans in the nearby US Capitol, who last week questioned why protesters were being permitted to camp on federal land.

The head of the Parks Service, Jonathan Jarvis, responded to the Republican effort with a statement that protesters had a right to be in the parks and could not be evicted, but that sleeping there would be

discouraged.

Occupy DC organizers answered the change in policy toward them by pointing out that the Parks Service has long taken a very selective view on when to apply the no camping rule on federal property, allowing several other protest groups to camp on National Parks' land in Washington, including during the Civil Rights demonstrations of the 1960s.

On Sunday, police posted eviction notices around the McPherson Square and Freedom Plaza camps and handed out fliers warning demonstrators that camping would be forbidden from Monday at noon. The notices referred to National Parks ordinances that defined camping as maintaining "temporary structures" intended for sleep (i.e. tents) and the "laying down of bedding for the purpose of sleeping."

Parks Police officers then went around all the tents to warn their occupants of the new measures to be used against them. Following this exercise in McPherson Square, officers used an electric shock device to subdue one protester who was tearing down police posters. Parks Service officials claimed the man was being "aggressive and confrontational," while fellow-protesters said the police use of a stun gun had been unprovoked.

"My mother is a police officer, and I grew up trusting the police, but this was blatant police brutality," protester Ellie Milne, 23, told the *Washington Post*. Milne, who works as a nanny, claimed she witnessed three officers physically restrain the man before using a Taser gun to shock him. A Parks Police spokesman later issued a statement that the man had been admitted to hospital and would be charged with resisting arrest.

On Monday, Occupy protesters in McPherson Square pulled a large tarpaulin over a statue to create what organizers called the “Tent of Dreams.” Surrounded by police and media, the demonstrators chanted “Let us sleep so we can dream,” and “From Oakland to DC, defy the police,” a reference to the police violence used to clear Occupy protesters in the California city.

Oakland police arrested some 400 Occupy protesters over the weekend after riot-clad officers attacked a large demonstration with stun grenades, pepper spray and batons.

Protest organizers in Washington, DC have attempted to strike a compromise with the Parks Service, promising to maintain a round-the-clock presence in the two parks and to keep tents up for shelter, though unzipped on one end to show that no one was sleeping inside.

“We’re here to exercise our freedom of speech, which is our right,” said Barry Knight, one of the Occupy DC demonstrators. Knight said that if Parks Police attempted to clear the camps then the protesters would sleep on the sidewalks adjacent to McPherson Square and Freedom Plaza.

Parks spokesman David Schlosser stated that the Occupy DC protesters would at first be expected to voluntarily comply with the no camping rule, but that officers would forcibly remove bedding. Any perceived lack of compliance by demonstrators would lead to “incremental measures” to bring about an end to the encampments, Schlosser warned.

While the Democratic Party has hypocritically sought to associate some of the concerns of the Occupy protests, it is Democratic mayors and other officials, and the Obama administration itself, that have led the way in cracking down on Occupy encampment and demonstrations.

Typical of this duplicity, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (Democrat—District of Columbia), who had previously toured the McPherson Square camp and spoken in favor of the Occupy protests, warned the demonstrators this week that they must obey the new

restrictions imposed on them by the Parks Police. In a written statement, Holmes Norton insisted that the protesters had to show “the same respect and civility that the [National Parks Service] and the District of Columbia have shown to Occupy DC.”



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