

Los Angeles police riot leads to arrests, injuries

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A force of 150 Los Angeles Police Department officers broke up a small demonstration of Occupy Los Angeles protesters Thursday night, using rubber bullets and batons to disperse the estimated crowd of 200. Several demonstrators and bystanders were wounded in the confrontation, which the *Los Angeles Times* termed a “melee”. Four police officers were also briefly hospitalized with injuries.

The demonstration was called by Occupy Los Angeles in response to recent arrests of protesters for the “crime” of writing on sidewalks and walls in chalk. A Facebook page sponsored by the organizers of the event read: “11 people have been arrested in the last month for writing with chalk on a sidewalk, this is not a crime. This is harassment and an attempt to stifle dissent. We will chalk it out all over ArtWalk letting people know about the dangers of chalking.”

Several attendees of ArtWalk, a public gathering of street artists and vendors in Downtown Los Angeles, expressed their anger over the police response. “I was just here for ArtWalk, I didn’t think anything was going to happen, and as I walked towards a group of people, I saw the line of police. So, I turned around and that’s when they [the LAPD] shot me. I wasn’t even doing anything wrong. I was just walking down the street. I did nothing wrong,” explained Charlie Shepherd to NBC Los Angeles reporters as he revealed his rubber bullet wound to the camera.

In an absurd show of force, LAPD called a citywide tactical alert—a tactic reserved only for major emergencies and situations where public safety is generally at risk.

The brutal reaction of the LAPD to a small demonstration of “chalkers” at a public art fair highlights the increasing militarization of the police force in the face of unprecedented levels of rising social

inequality. Furthermore, such an obvious abrogation of the democratic right to free speech is no accidental occurrence. It underscores the preparations being made by the ruling class for an expansion of the struggle against austerity and budget cuts among broad layers of the working class.

The growing reliance of the police force on violence to control the population is not limited to the Occupy movement. In 2011, LAPD shootings increased by 50 percent compared with 2010, and this despite a drop in the city’s crime rate for the ninth consecutive year. “We’re safer that [sic] any time since 1952,” said Democratic mayor and former union bureaucrat Antonio Villaraigosa in January. LAPD Chief Charlie Beck even boasted: “These are the three best years of crime in the modern history of Los Angeles.”

The *LA Times* recently noted that there were only two areas where major crimes increased in 2011. One of the two areas to increase was shootings by police. The LAPD has responded to criticism by proclaiming that this 50 percent increase in shootings was in response to a 22 percent increase in assaults against police officers.

This is a lie, according to a report by Los Angeles Police Commission Inspector General Alex Bustamante released this month. Police officials covered up the fact that the number of assaults on police officers remained unchanged between 2010 and 2011. Bustamante’s report estimates that the police exaggerated the number of assaults against officers by 45 percent.

This was accomplished through a process in which LAPD officials counted attacks on officers based on the number of officers involved, while counting shootings by police as a single event, regardless of the number of victims involved. In an article earlier this month, the *LA Times* explained how this was carried out: “In an incident in April 2011, for example, in which a suspect

shot at police from inside a house, the LAPD counted 16 assaults on officers and one officer-involved shooting, despite the fact that 15 officers fired their weapons.”

Bustamante’s report concluded that “as such, there does not appear to be a clear correlation” between police shootings and assaults against police.

The increasing use of violence by the LAPD comes in the wake of further plans to make draconian cuts to California’s already devastated social services. Year after year the Democratic Party-dominated legislature has slashed billions from important social services, including health care, welfare, education and home services for the elderly.

Democratic Governor Jerry Brown’s revised budget proposal in May outlined another wave of attacks on workers. In addition to a proposal that was worked out with the trade unions to slash the workweek to four days and 38 hours, Brown plans \$1.2 billion in further cuts to Medi-Cal (health services for the poor), \$225 million from home care for the elderly, and \$1.3 billion from welfare and childcare.

If Governor Brown’s proposed tax measures fail to pass in the November elections, further cuts of \$6.1 billion will be made, all from public education. K-12 and community colleges will see \$5.5 billion in cuts, including \$250 million each from the University of California and the California State University systems. K-12 schools are preparing to cut the school year by three weeks if the trigger cuts are made.

Despite the fact that workers are being made to bear the full brunt of California’s budget crisis, Brown and the Democrats are unconcerned with the human costs. “You name it, we’ve got to cut it,” Governor Brown said.



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