

Seventeen arrested at May Day protests in Seattle, Washington

David Brown
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May Day protests in Seattle, Washington ended with 17 arrests as police clashed with protesters. Like last year, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) used the marches as an opportunity to experiment with crowd-control techniques and test out new equipment.

The day began with several marches and rallies centered on immigration reform. Despite their peaceful nature, there was already a strong police presence. At 6 pm, an “anti-capitalist” march (with a heavy anarchist presence) began at Seattle Central Community College.

The police immediately concentrated their forces and set about containing the unpermitted march with mounted police, bicycle cops, pepper spray, clubs and “blast balls”—a grenade-like mix of flashbangs (also known as stun grenades) and pepper spray.

The crowd was hemmed in by police and herded through the streets. Around 8:00 pm, police began making arrests and using pepper spray. By 8:30 they gave the order for protesters to disperse or face arrest.

Eyewitness and video accounts give the impression that the police actions were premeditated and not a reaction to an “unruly” crowd, as claimed by the media. Jordan Eisen told the *Seattle Times* “They’re making this into a war zone when it’s not. If you’re in a crowd and you’re surrounded by police in riot gear, you get defensive.”

The *Times* noted that one man was arrested at Cal Anderson Park because he “was suspected of throwing rocks at police.” The *Times* reports, “Friends of the man...deny he was throwing rocks during the protest. They said officers grabbed him earlier in the evening, but he was able to slip out of his backpack. ‘He didn’t throw [anything]’ said one young woman, who claimed she was pepper sprayed and hit with a baton during the march.

“‘For the most part, it was a peaceful protest,’ a

second woman said,” according to the *Times* .

The *Times* has a collection of photographs and videos showing police making liberal use of pepper spray and stun grenades, wielding long wooden batons, and using bicycles to push and corral protesters.

By the end of the night police had arrested 17 people on suspicion of either vandalism or throwing objects at police. Officials claimed eight police were “injured,” largely with scrapes and bruises, while one was allegedly hit in the leg by a rock. Untold scores of protesters were pepper-sprayed, hit with batons, or shoved to the ground.

Seattle has a long history of large protests and harsh police measures, beginning with the World Trade Organization protests in 1999. Especially since the Occupy movement and its violent dispersal, the role of the SPD has been to push forward the state’s ability to suppress crowds.

During last year’s “anti-capitalist” march, the mayor issued an emergency order authorizing the police to preemptively confiscate anything that could be used as a weapon in the downtown area of the city. Being caught with something that could be construed as a weapon carried a punishment of up to 180 days in jail.

The federal government used a grand jury investigation into the smashing of a courthouse door to hold several protesters for months in solitary confinement in order to question them about the political beliefs of their friends. (See, “US judge orders release of two anarchists held for five months without charges”)

An instructional video for “blast balls” featuring a Seattle Police Officer makes the connection between mass protests and the development of police techniques quite explicit. According to officer Chris Myers, after the WTO protests, “our patrol officers are encountering

violent crowds and violent subjects on a regular basis.”

These measures, as made clear in the recent lockdown in Boston, are being developed not as an exception, but as default actions to be taken in response to any social protests.



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