

LAPD arrests after Trump election exposed as political repression

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The *Los Angeles Times* reported last Thursday that the Los Angeles Police Department's mass arrests at demonstrations exactly one year ago protesting the election of Donald Trump resulted in virtually no criminal prosecutions.

According to the *Times* analysis, 462 people were arrested between November 7 and 12 last year at the massive, and overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrations in downtown Los Angeles and nearby Westlake, a center for the city's huge Latin American immigrant community. Of those arrested, the LAPD presented only 10 cases to prosecutors, a tacit admission that the arrests were intended to suppress the demonstrations, a violation of the First Amendment.

Of the few cases presented, two of the three proposed felonies were rejected for insufficient evidence, and the third was resolved with a plea to disturbing the peace. Only two of the seven misdemeanor cases resulted in a criminal filing. One demonstrator was convicted of carrying brass knuckles, and another for vandalism.

No other city appears to have had nearly the number of arrests as Los Angeles, despite many that experienced more provocative conduct. In Oakland, California, for example, police arrested only 60 demonstrators, despite some who threw Molotov cocktails, and Portland, Oregon police made about 100 arrests during demonstrations that included widespread vandalism.

Arresting over 450 people and ultimately prosecuting only three demonstrates that the LAPD openly sided with those seeking to suppress the widespread outrage over the election results.

Rather than reining in its police officers, who have shown contempt for protesters dating back at least to the Vietnam War era, the Los Angeles City Council last Wednesday approved an "urgency ordinance" banning

those who choose to attend future demonstrations from carrying certain objects, including signs made from stiff materials. The ordinance was rammed through so that it could be used at protests marking one year since Trump's election.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California condemned the City Council's action as an attack on freedom of assembly. While many of the prohibited items are already restricted under existing laws, the ACLU pointed out that the new ordinance gives the LAPD even more pretexts to arrest peaceful demonstrators for simply carrying ordinary items such as soda bottles or stiff signs. Many of the items now banned from protests are otherwise legal to carry on the street, thus criminalizing the very act of participating in a demonstration. Moreover, the ordinance gives the LAPD additional powers to decide whether a public assembly is a "demonstration," subjecting those present to arrest for possession of prohibited items.

Existing criminal statutes provide police authority to arrest demonstrators who actually commit assaults with weapons, signs or sticks, and the additional law is obviously unnecessary. Many such crimes, moreover, are instigated or committed by the LAPD provocateurs regularly infiltrated into the crowds, or by rightist counter-demonstrators generally ignored by the LAPD.

The *Times* quoted Commander Vito Palazzolo, who feebly tried to explain that the LAPD sought to charge demonstrators arrested for blocking roadways in municipal traffic court before learning that the venue no longer prosecutes those actions. The cases were not refiled, Palazzolo admitted, because the purpose of the arrests was to end the protests, not to convict demonstrators.

Assistant Chief Michel Moore admitted to the *Times* that LAPD officers used mass arrests to stop

demonstrations in part because spontaneous demonstrations were stretching resources thin. The LAPD paid over \$2 million in overtime during the protests.

“We effected arrests as a means of stopping violence, of stopping property damage,” Moore said to the *Times*, “in some cases, stopping things from going on to infinity.”

Jim Lafferty, executive director for the National Lawyers Guild in Los Angeles, which sends legal observers to demonstrations, said LAPD officials gave confusing dispersal orders and made arrests without giving protesters a chance to comply.

“They join a protest, it’s peaceful ... and without further ado they’re all arrested after being lulled into believing that’s what they can do,” Lafferty told the *Times*. “I think that’s outrageous behavior on the part of the Police Department.”

Nearly a third of the arrests took place on the final night of protests, when Los Angeles police officers detained nearly 150 demonstrators who took part in a winding, hours-long march. The LAPD declared an unlawful assembly in front of City Hall and ordered marchers to leave, but then arrested dozens resting in a nearby park.



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