

New York City police raid Occupy Wall Street camp

Jerry White

16 November 2011

In a predawn raid Tuesday, hundreds of riot-equipped police descended on Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, the birthplace of the Occupy Wall Street movement, forcibly expelling protesters and tearing down their tents. At least 142 demonstrators in the park were arrested, along with another 50 outside.

In a police state-style operation, beginning around 1 a.m. Tuesday morning, the New York Police Department (NYPD), led by specially trained cops from the Emergency Service Unit, moved in against around 220 occupiers, most of whom were sleeping at the time. As the attack began protesters were deafened by orders being barked over a truck-mounted loudspeakers and blinded by powerful klieg spotlights.

The police sealed the area off with metal barricades. They closed Broadway—the main thoroughfare in the area—for several blocks and shut down nearby subway stations to prevent supporters from reaching the protesters. They then systematically went through the tents and kitchen area over the next three to four hours, roughing up protesters, and using police shields, batons and pepper spray to drive them out of the park and surrounding blocks.

Those who resisted and tried to defend the camp—dubbed Liberty Square—were slammed to the ground, cuffed in plastic restraints and thrown into waiting paddy wagons. One video showed several cops physically lifting an occupier over the barricades and dumping him on the concrete sidewalk outside of the park. At least one protester was hospitalized.

Police with bulldozers tore down tents and “destroyed everything” while forcibly removing protesters who had locked arms, Chris Porter, 26, a welder from Indiana who joined the protest in the park about a month ago, told the media. Before the siege, reporters were ordered out of the park, others were barred from entering the area, and press helicopters were evicted from the airspace above the park.

A blogger from the *New York Times* was one of those arrested.

The attack was carefully planned and coordinated by the city’s billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, and the NYPD, which consulted with its counter-parts throughout the country that have carried out similar evictions.

Tuesday’s raid came just days after similar actions in Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado and Oakland, California. Last week, occupiers and students protesting tuition hikes in Berkeley, California were attacked by police. Eviction notices also went out occupiers in London, England. British protesters issued messages of solidarity with their counter-parts in New York City, noting that the US frequently issues hypocritical statements about violations of democratic rights in other countries while it was carrying out mass arrests of protesters at home.

The police action enjoys the backing of the Obama administration. While previously feigning sympathy with the protesters, the White House is deeply concerned about the widespread support for a movement that has taken aim at social inequality and the Wall Street banks, which the president has dutifully served since taking office. The attack in New York was launched while the president was in Hawaii for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference.

The New York City operation, led by Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, had been planned for weeks, according to an article in the *New York Times*. Police officials “watched how the occupations in other cities played out. They held conference calls with colleagues in other cities. They increased so-called disorder training—counterterrorism measures that involve moving large numbers of police officers quickly—to focus on Lower Manhattan.

“The last training session was on Monday night, on the Manhattan side of the East River. The orders to move into

Zuccotti Park came down at the ‘last minute,’ said someone familiar with the orders, which referred only to the assignment as ‘an exercise.’”

The action took place when police believed the fewest numbers of protesters would be in the park and also on the eve of a protest Thursday to “shut down Wall Street.”

During a Tuesday morning City Hall press conference Mayor Michael Bloomberg took credit for issuing the eviction order, claiming protesters posed a health and safety risk to the public and had to be removed to “to reduce the risk of confrontation and to minimize destruction in the surrounding neighborhood.”

“The First Amendment protects speech,” Bloomberg said, “It doesn’t protect the use of tents and sleeping bags to take over a public space.” He insisted, “no right is absolute, and every right comes with a responsibility.”

The mayor simply ignored a temporary restraining order obtained by protesters at 6:30 a.m. barring police from stopping the occupiers from returning to the park with their tents and other equipment. Bloomberg insisted the park would remain closed until “we can clarify the situation,” and city attorneys appearing in the state Supreme Court made outrageous claims that protesters had “a significant number of items that could potentially be used as weapons, including mace and knives” and posed a “substantial threat to public safety.”

Later in the day, state Supreme Court Justice Michael D. Stallman ruled for the city, saying protesters could go into Zuccotti Park but could not take their tents and sleeping bags.

After the decision, protesters were allowed to return to the park Tuesday afternoon, passing through a gauntlet of riot police one at a time. The mayor reiterated that they would face arrest if they violated park rules, including a ban on sleeping at the park overnight. As of this writing, police continued to surround the park.

The New York City mayor, a Wall Street media mogul with an estimated net worth of \$19.5 billion in 2011, is a living example of the financial oligarchy’s control over the American political system. Bloomberg, the country’s 12th richest person, has overseen vicious attacks on city services and public employees over his decade in office, while transferring even greater wealth into the hands of the ruling elite.

Bloomberg has moved in and out of both the Democratic and Republican parties, depending on electoral advantage, and has cultivated close ties with New York City trade unions, which have collaborated with him in the destruction of the jobs and living

standards of teachers and other city workers.

Over the last several weeks, the news media around the country has decidedly turned against the protests, seeking to condition public opinion for the police attacks by condemning protesters as a public nuisance. In New York, this has not only included the right-wing gutter press like the *New York Post*. The mouthpiece of the liberal establishment, the *New York Times*, has expressed its exasperation with the continued protests, and hailed the professional “clean up” job the police carried out Tuesday.

On the eve of the police raid, the *Times* carried a piece asserting that many residents near the park were annoyed by the sound of drumming from protesters that allegedly “scare young children.” Further down, the article acknowledged the bulk of the complaints came from “a tall building that overlooks the park and contains sprawling, multimillion-dollar condominiums.”

The anti-Wall Street protests continue to enjoy broad popular support. Up until this point, this support has not been actively mobilized because of the lack of political perspective and the virtual ban on any discussion of political strategy, program and leadership enforced by many of the movement’s leaders and various pseudo-left organizations.

This orientation, despite the self-sacrifice of many of the protesters, has left them vulnerable to the efforts, led by the trade unions, to subordinate the movement to the Democratic Party and Obama’s reelection campaign. The trade unions, which have done nothing to defend the protests against police attacks, are allied with the very same politicians, whether it is Bloomberg in New York or the Democratic mayors in other cities, that are suppressing the protests and doing the bidding of Wall Street.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact