

The Oscar Grant Plaza Gazette

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

Day 17

OUR LOVE IS STRONG

HERO LIBRARIAN KEEPS BUILDING OPEN DESPITE COPS

The *San Jose Mercury News* reports that Oakland Public Library director Carmen Martinez kept the main library open during yesterday's rally of over five hundred citizens.

During Tuesday's rally at the main branch of the library at 14th & Madison, organizers announced that police "called the library in anticipation of our gathering and asked them to shut it down. They said, 'No,' because they know what side they are on." The crowd exploded into cheers. On Wednesday morning, library Director Carmen Martinez said the City had supported her decision to keep the library open.

In the early afternoon Tuesday, hours before the protest arrived at the library steps, City Administrator Deanna Santana called Martinez and asked how she wanted to handle the situation, Martinez said. "I said that we are a symbol of civil society for a lot of groups, including this one, and the folks who protested against the libraries budget cuts, and we will remain open as long as service can be continued without disruption," Martinez said. "Deanna said she understood and respected that." Police also called to ask if the library needed any help or backup, Martinez said, but she declined.

At about 5 p.m., however, with the crowd already shutting down an entire block of 14th Street, Santana called back with information that a second group was on its way and could make it impossible for library staff to leave, Martinez said, so the library ended up closing a half-hour early. Nonetheless, Martinez said, the library remains "a symbol of gathering for 1st Amendment issues. We welcome everyone unconditionally."

Martinez is a hero for insisting on using her city office to stand up for the rights of citizens to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed right to peaceable assembly. Mayor Jean Quan, who signed off on the brutal paramilitary predawn raid by over five hundred police of the sleeping encampment of Occupy Oakland at Oscar Grant Plaza, could learn a trick or two from Ms. Martinez.

Please call the office of Ms. Martinez at 238-3281 or write her at cmartinez@oaklandnet.com to express your gratitude for her actions. All citizens, including those employed by the city (from administrative assistants and custodians through beat cops up to the mayor herself), ought to follow her example and find the courage to act on their convictions based on their conscience. "I was only following orders" didn't cut it for Eichmann, and it doesn't cut it in Oakland California either.

COUNTERING MISINFORMATION FROM THE CITY AND OPD

After yesterday's outrageous predawn paramilitary raid on Occupy Oakland by over five hundred police officers from all over California, the *Gazette* received this letter from a supporter in the Midwest :

"I'm (outraged? saddened? confused?). I just got home from work and had heard nothing yet....(Paramilitary operation - 500 riot gear police?!?!). The yahoo (actually AP) story I followed up with focuses on the trouble caused by Occupiers who are said to be responsible for filth, urination, at least one rape, damage to property, increased shop lifting and need for security, drugs, alcohol, drum beating that keeps people up at night..."

I think there must be at least a grain of truth on which to base these reports -- and yet I feel that the lens on these main street media reports are, at the very least, distorted with the worst of the incidents magnified and the larger picture lost. As [the *Gazette*] clarifies (the long time vendor reporting) the rats have been in the park for seven years, but only now is anybody noticing or caring -- and all because it makes a great excuse to haul away the protesters. I can't believe they sent five hundred plus riot geared officers, rubber bullets, mace and military vehicles. It did look like a war zone -- except that the protesters were completely unarmed. Scary. Even if there was disorder about the camps, the response (attack) by police was disgusting."

We here at the *Gazette* appreciate the national and international solidarity that this letter represents, but we feel we must speak to the specific misrepresentations being perpetuated by the office of Mayor Jean Quan and the Oakland Police Department, as well as media like the Oakland Tribune that are fulfilling their role as what Noam Chomsky called "stenographers of power" -- in other words, the loyal parrots of those who deploy crushing state force against sleeping, unarmed protesters engaged in the exercise of their constitutionally guaranteed right of free assembly.

We'll take the issues mentioned in the first paragraph of the letter point by point. The views expressed represent those of the *Gazette* and are based on eyewitness experience during two incredible weeks between the beginning of our peaceful encampment and this Tuesday's violent state repression of that encampment. (Continued on other side.)

- *"filth"* : There were numerous porta-potties on site, which were being used by campers. (In fact, we here at the *Gazette* were told that during the siege of the camp, these porta-potties, paid for by the police -- prompting one occupier to ask of a policeman who made use of these facilities : "Did you find a copy of the US Constitution to wipe your ass with?"). Many of the people at the camp were homeless -- like the rats, the "filth" in which they have been permitted to live went unremarked-on until it became the pretext for the use of police force.

- *"urination"* : Likewise, once the porta-potties were set up they were used by occupiers. Again, as with the rats, people were pissing in that park at night long before this month (imagine Washington Square Park in NYC, or an analogous urban park in a gritty neighborhood of Chicago).
- *"at least one rape"* : We are unaware of any claim of rape. In fact, we'd like to know the source for this claim. We suspect it's unsubstantiated gossip. The camp was basically a very safe place, with everyone watching out for everyone else, and with special attention being paid to women's safety. If there was an attempted or successful rape, we feel certain that the *Gazette* would have heard about it. For this reason, we suspect that it is a false rumor -- one with the specific purpose of underwriting the supposed necessity of police force.
- *"damage to property"* : We neither observed nor heard of damage to local businesses or public property. The historic Oakland oak tree was respected by protestors, who even put up signs saying "FRAGILE ROOTS" and "PROTECT THE TREE" and told people not to urinate on it. Other than the minor issues of the trampling on ornamental grass in the park, and graffiti in the porta-potties and elsewhere (the kind which is easily removed by the kind of cleaning that comes with standard servicing, in the case of the toilets, and power-washing, in the case of the plaza), we can't think of a legitimate claim of damage to property that we observed in two weeks of peaceful protest.
- *"shoplifting"* : We don't really believe this. We'd like to see the specific claims made by local businesses. It must always be remembered that we're talking about downtown Oakland, one of the nation's most high-crime urban areas, so, like so many of these other issues (rats, urine, drugs, etc.) it is not like this stuff started two weeks ago. It's that the city decided to use it as a pretext for violent police action, with consequences that have now become national news.
- *"drugs & alcohol"* -- Again, public drinking & use of illegal drugs are nothing new in downtown Oakland. Their use was more flagrant in the camp, but however we may feel personally about these issues, it must be remembered that these things were, first of all, already happening downtown, & second of all, that they are basically petty infractions which can't legitimately be used to justify the abrogation, by police violence, of our most basic rights as citizens (e.g. the right of peaceable assembly as guaranteed in the first amendment of the constitution -- which mayors are supposed to uphold and cops are supposed to protect).
- *"drum beating that keeps people up at night"* -- Like many downtown areas, Oakland's downtown pretty much empties out at five o'clock. It misrepresents the specifics of Oakland's urban geography to claim that people were kept up at night -- there are simply not that many residential buildings down there. (Again, imagine Wall Street in NY, or an analogous business / city administration district in Chicago).

In any event, and as we wrote above, all of these issues, even considered in the aggregate, are basically petty infractions, and in the opinion of the *Gazette* do not add up to the legitimate claim of the necessity to deploy overwhelming paramilitary police forces in the middle of the night on a sleeping camp of unarmed US citizens explicitly exercising their constitutionally guaranteed freedom of peaceable assembly. Period.

Last night in Oakland a protester shouted at a riot cop : "Why are you doing this ? Because we were *littering* ?"

That seems to sum it up pretty well. The disproportion between (putative) cause & the police response is the first thing to remember. The second thing to remember is that this is a political protest, and that the repression is therefore political repression. Any justification of that repression on the grounds of the need to suppress petty infractions is just that : a justification.

Oakland Police

use rubber bullets, flash grenades
use rubber bullets, flash grenades, & smoke bombs
fire tear gas & stun bullets
fire two more rounds of tear gas at crowd
launch tear gas, flash-bang canisters into crowd of protestors
turn on protestors with tear gas, grenades
throwing tear gas bombs
attacked
descended
gleeful
used tear gas
in riot gear

No one was injured during the Tuesday morning raid,
Interim Oakland Police Chief Howard Jordan said.

OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS ARE WITH SCOTT OLSEN

As many of you know, during OPD's brutal attack on Occupy Oakland last night, Scott Olsen, an Iraq war veteran, was shot in the head by the police with a projectile. A spokesperson for Highland hospital in east Oakland confirmed he was critically wounded upon admission Tuesday night ; he's reported to be undergoing surgery today for a fractured skull and swelled brain. Scott's friend Adele Carpenter said to England's *Guardian* newspaper : "I'm just absolutely devastated that someone who did two tours of Iraq and came home safely is now lying in a US hospital because of the domestic police force."

Our love and solidarity continues, as we hold Scott and all other injured or imprisoned comrades in our hearts!

ONWARD!

The *Oscar Grant Plaza Gazette* aims to be a voice & record of the historic Occupy Oakland movement, part of a national & international movement of resistance. We are committed to continued daily publication despite state repression. Please send us your writing -- you are part of this movement ! Send submissions to oscargrantplazagazette@gmail.com -- we'll strive to publish all materials received. We reserve the right to decline to run materials which would render us legally liable.