

Tales from the Police State

Fifth Estate Collective

2003

In early April, the Oakland Police Department (OPD) fired on non-violent anti-war demonstrators without cause or provocation.

No police were hurt. The protesters conducted themselves in an organized, dignified, and calm manner at all times, even while being fired upon.

Many demonstrators were shot and wounded. Almost all were shot in the back while retreating from advancing police. A concussion grenade exploded inches from protesters. Not only did OPD fire directly on non-violent protesters, they appeared to deliberately turn to fire on longshore workers who were clearly standing to the side and not involved in the protest.

Early this year, the NYPD gained greater power to investigate political activity, citing terrorism concerns.

The department convinced a federal judge that its security needs in these times of unprecedented danger outweigh most of the rights protections in a key 1985 ban on police probes of lawful activism.

But as civil liberties advocates feared, the most notable police actions since have had seemingly little to do with terrorism prevention and everything to do with repressing protest. Tensions between activists and police have swelled with each demonstration. The skirmishes are shaping up to be a struggle over the very right to protest in the streets of New York. The battle unfolds as potentially the biggest showdown of all, the 2004 Republican National Convention, looms.

People planning large-scale convergence-type protests should be prepared for police attacks before the events begin.

In May, at least two dozen people were arrested in coordinated “preemptive raids” on several St. Louis area homes, apparently to prevent activists attendance at a national Biodevastation conference and demonstration against the World Agricultural Forum.

Police stole materials from places they attacked, including at least one computer. Sarah Bantz—a speaker at the BioDevastation conference—was arrested for having a container of Vitamin C capsules, which police are claiming to be an illegal drug.

In the United States, a tenant can be evicted for protesting against the government.

That’s what a union local based in Albuquerque, New Mexico found out last month when they were evicted from their offices on San Mateo Boulevard.

According to the complaint filed by their landlord, Carroll Ventures Inc., the union “breached the terms of its lease by holding an anti-war demonstration...” The union local definitely held an antiwar demonstration, but it was at a nearby intersection and not at its offices.

In April, ten inmates of the Guantanamo Bay prison were handed over to Afghan authorities. Human-rights groups are still worried about those left behind in Cuba

They weren’t senior Taliban or al-Qaeda members, but the US military deemed them important enough to be transferred from Afghanistan to an ultrahigh-security prison on the other side of the earth. Then, after nearly a year

of interrogations at the US military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, they were set free without compensation or even an apology.

Human-rights advocates have criticized US President George W. Bush's administration for holding prisoners at the naval base indefinitely and without charging them with any crime, putting them on trial or giving them access to lawyers.

Human-rights groups called for the US to release teenagers from the prison after it was revealed that several boys between ages 13 and 16 were being held there.

Some teachers in Oakland, California rallied behind two students who were interrogated by the Secret Service.

For years the classroom has been the setting for the free expression of ideas, but this past spring, anti-Bush statements led to two students being taken out of class and grilled by the United States Secret Service.

At Oakland High, the discussion was about the war in Iraq. While the exact wording of what the students said is up for debate, the teacher didn't consider it mere criticism, but a direct threat, and she called the Secret Service.

Teacher Larry Felson says, "What we're concerned about is academic freedom and that students have the right to free expression in the classroom." Even worse is the fact that the students were grilled by federal agents without legal counsel or their parents present.

A New Mexico State University professor was arrested but not charged during a protest on campus Saturday. Police responded to complaints made by sorority sisters who did not want the protest near their home.

Professor David Boje contends he "was arrested, handcuffed, leg-shackled, and confined at New Mexico State University Police Headquarters for over an hour without charge, without Miranda rights being read, and without a call to an attorney."

In New York, the Columbia University Spectator charged anti-war professors with being too dogmatic at a teach-in that gained national attention. The controversy was sparked by Nicholas DeGenova, a professor of anthropology.

"Peace is not patriotic," DeGenova began. "Peace is subversive, because peace anticipates a very different world than the one in which we live—a world where the US would have no place. US flags are the emblem of the invading war machine in Iraq today. They are the emblem of the occupying power. The only true heroes are those who find ways that help defeat the US military."

Between DeGenova's condemnation of patriotism and his call for "fragging," his speech provoked many of the professors who spoke later in the night to disagree with DeGenova.

It is DeGenova who then received death threats and vicious verbal attacks from right-wing radio hosts, US congress-people, and the president of the university.

— Compiled by Tequila Mockingbird

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