

# Michael Moore on 'Occupy Oakland'

The Right got what it wanted when Bay Area police stormed the Occupy Oakland encampment touching off clashes that left one protester, Iraq War vet Scott Olsen, in critical condition. Filmmaker Michael Moore discussed the protests with Davey D and Dennis Bernstein.

By Davey D and Dennis Bernstein

In the early morning hours of Tuesday, Oct. 25, the heavily armed Oakland Police Department in conjunction, with 16 other police departments from all over Northern and Central California, stormed the Occupy Oakland Encampment.

The police were fully dressed in helmets, and riot gear, and armed with shotguns, "nonlethal pellet guns," teargas and concussion grenades.

The first attack on Frank Ogawa Plaza, in downtown Oakland, where about 200 men, women and children were camped came at about 4:45 a.m. Helicopters were circling and crisscrossing their spot-lights from above, and at least one armored personnel carrier was in the streets, turning downtown Oakland into an instant war-zone.

Within a half an hour or so, the police had roughed up, cuffed, and arrested over 100 of the protesters, and routed the rest away from the area. The police occupied the area all day, denying the public access.

The peaceful protesters were held on high bail, for several days, contrary to the cite-and-release policy usually employed during arrests at political demonstrations.

Police then proceeded to rip apart and shred the tent city, with people's belongings and personal items being scattered to the wind. Buses were rerouted and downtown Bay Area Rapid Transit stations (BART) were closed for hours, as city officials and police advised workers in that area to stay away.

On Tuesday night, hundreds of protesters took to the streets again, and heavily armed police cracked down again, firing chemical gas canisters right into the crowd. Scott Olsen, a young two-time veteran of the Iraq war, was struck at close range in the head by one the canisters, putting him in the hospital in Oakland in critical condition.

On Friday, early evening, over 1,000 people gathered in Oakland, reconstructed the camp and held a rally in protest of the police action. Mayor Jean Quan, who was out of town when the police assault occurred, defended the police actions as

necessary, citing health and safety concerns.

She claimed that the police were there to protect property and guarantee the safety of all Oakland's citizens, while also defending local banks that were under attack. However, eyewitness accounts and extensive video footage show that there was virtually no damage to property, and no indication of violent protesters attacking the police.

Among those in the Oakland downtown plaza on Friday night was radical filmmaker and political activist, Michael Moore. He spoke with KPFA/Pacifica Radio's Davey D and Dennis Bernstein, after he addressed the crowd.

DB: When you spoke here about a half hour ago, there were no helicopters in the air, now there are four circling around overhead. This is sort of the regular part of the police operations here. So maybe they are here to cheer for you as well.

MM: Actually they are up in the sky, are part of the occupy helicopter movement. This thing is not only happening on earth it's also happening up in the atmosphere

DD: [The police] attacked the demonstrators, when they were asleep to catch them off guard. Are you seeing this type of pattern, everywhere, you know, in New York and other places, which is militarized, brutal police tactics against ordinary folks.

MM: I think one thing that Oakland has gotten a lot of people talking about across the country is how since 9/11 untold billions of dollars have been spent on so-called Homeland Security. We don't know how much, because by law they don't have to tell us how much.

But what we do know is that local police forces across the country have applied for and received an enormous amount of money to buy armaments, tanks, spying apparatus, equipment things that we don't even know about. And it is, on some level, frightening that we have allowed this to get out of hand. And they have all done it under the guise of 9/11.

You know, if I had had a loved one die that day and I did have a friend in one of the planes, the plane from Boston, was a producer, that I had worked with the fact that he and the others who died, that their deaths, their names have been used to create so much harm across the country, it's really disgusting.

DD: Definitely. You know, what about the whole thing with New York, you have the white shirts police that are now being paid by Wall Street financial/banking institutions; we're seeing a privatization of police and do you see that maybe

spreading going to other cities?

MM: No, actually, well it has spread but the spreading is going to stop, because this movement is growing so fast, so wide, so far. It is amazing. I've had the good fortune of being able to travel the country in the last few weeks. I have seen it with my own eyes.

It would blow your mind if you just got on a bus now or got in the car and drove across the smallest of towns having little occupy movements. There's a little town where I live called Niles. There are only 10,000, 11,000 people who live there. They've got a hundred people camping out there, demonstrating and occupying Niles.

Now a hundred may not seem a lot, here in Oakland. But a hundred is one percent of the population there. If one percent of America showed up on the national mall to a demonstration that would be over three million people. So a hundred people in Niles is the equivalent of three million people showing up for a national demonstration on the mall there in D.C., now that's never happened

DD: Right.

MM: Just to give you an idea. And again, there's nobody organizing it in Niles. There's no national organization that they belong to. They don't pay dues, there's no leaders. It is just happening organically. And it is an amazing thing to see. It has lifted my spirits; it almost feels like drugs, if I knew what drugs felt like.

DD: Boot Riley just hit me up and he wants me to talk to you about some sanitation workers and for you to accompany him tomorrow, if you are in town. But also the other thing that Boots reminded us of there is a general strike going on in Oakland, next Wednesday. And then on the fifth, I guess, there is a national effort for people to start switching banks. Your thoughts on that, the fact that the city of Oakland is calling for a national strike

MM: Ultimately that is what's going to have to happen. Ultimately people are just going to have to say "Sorry we're not participating in the system any longer. We're/I/we are no longer cogs in this wheel, we are resigning from that." I think eventually this is one of the things that will happen, and I don't know when it's going to happen, I don't know how it's going to happen.

DD: Well, I know for us next Wednesday, there's a general strike planned

MM: Sounds like it's going to start here [in Oakland].

DB: Michael Moore, Dennis Bernstein here with Davey D. Can I ask you what was

your gut reaction when you heard this young, really peaceful vet, Scott Olsen, was hit hard at close range and sent to the hospital in critical condition by a police action in which 17 police departments were sent to arrest 100 sleeping people, with children, in the camp. What's your response to that kind of violence at that level?

MM: Well, obviously appalling. It's not just me, I mean they, they again, overplayed their hand just like Wall Street has overplayed their greed hand. The police here overplayed their brutal fascistic hand because people, all kinds of people across the country, saw what happened here in Oakland and were horrified by it.

Nobody wants to live in that country. Nobody wants to see the police that they pay taxes for, do this to fellow citizens. I mean I think what happened here I feel really bad for the harm that happened to those who were injured and certainly to Scott Olsen who is sitting in a hospital here, who is going probably to take a long time for him to go back to being normal, if ever.

I just think about, too, these kids that, you know, he and his roommate, or his roommate was talking on T.V. the other night about how when they were both in Iraq they turned against the war, they saw first hand how wrong this war was.

And that's a very brave thing to do when you are a soldier, when you are in the war zone and you become anti-war. Man, that's ah, it's already, you know to be a soldier first of all, in a volunteer army the implications is, that if you sign up to go into the Army you are basically saying "I'm willing to give my life so that others can live."

Assuming, you know, if the military was actually used for what it only should be used for which is pure self-defense, you are willing to die. What greater gift can a human give to another human than to be willing to give their life for another?

So that's who these kids are and to have had two tours over there and want to come back and want tell his fellow Americans, "I've been there and I know this war is wrong." That takes a lot of courage, on top of the courage he already had. And to find that the only people who were going to harm him were the people here where he lived, in Oakland, California.

And the difference between Oakland and Iraq in terms of what Scott Olsen had to face is this. In Iraq, your biggest threat driving down the road is what they call an improvised explosive device, an IED. Okay?

Scott Olsen is in the hospital tonight suffering from an [un]improvised explosive device. There was no improvisation going on. These devices that were

being fired are meant to control the people. This is really what Homeland Security is about. They are not worried about Al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda is just a joke right now. Even our own CIA says there are only 50 Al-Qaeda left in Afghanistan, okay? All right, that's the boogiemán. That's the boogiemán that they want to create to try and get everybody afraid so everybody will back a huge military budget and the militarization of the police forces.

DB: Seventeen police forces, 17 in the Bay Area, but we don't know who exactly shot Scott Olsen because they were all wearing the uniform and masks.

DD: Well, they are saying now that it was the Alameda Sheriff's Department that did it. I remember, what he looked like, I was on the front line.

MM: The officer in New York who put the pepper spray in those girls eyes, you know, they were able to find out who that was and he's had to go through a suspension, and now he's been moved to Staten Island. They will find who did this.

[At this point in the Moore interview, that was being broadcast right from the Plaza, a witness, and an Occupy Oakland activists offered this eyewitness account of the Tuesday night melee that sent Olsen to the hospital with a critical wound.]

Eyewitness: Scott was next to me, and the other guy with the hat that was the Marine and they hit him just a couple of minutes after we were all standing there. You know what I'm saying, cause we were there, it was going down, they shot three tear things, "Boom!" then they waited like another 30 seconds, "Boom!" and then they did another one "Boom!"

It was crazy; it was like we were in a war zone! It was old women, it was, the media didn't report this, and it was people that were there. [There were children there] that couldn't breathe. I was, I'm a little bit healthy so I was able to run about three blocks to eleventh or tenth. But it was people that were on the ground that was choked up.

DD: Right, and those are the stories that aren't being told.

MM: Well, there being told here on Pacifica Radio, this is where it starts and then others will start to cover it. And eventually justice is going to happen. The people who made the decisions to do this, to unarmed citizens who were acting peacefully, there's going to have to be justice here.

And ultimately the buck does stop on the mayor's desk no matter how progressive she is, no matter how nice she is, no matter how broken-hearted she is over what

happened. No matter how much she had to interrupt her vacation, or wherever the hell she was, and had to come back. The bottom line is the buck does stop with her, and the people of Oakland have had to suffer for long enough.

For crying out loud, how many years, how many times have I come to Oakland over the decades of what this town has had to go through. And talk about a town that has been abused by the policies of Corporate America and Wall Street. It is amazing though, the life that is still here and the resistance that is still here. That people have not given up. And that in some ways I'm not surprised that this watershed moment, in this movement, happened here in Oakland, this week.

And if it had to be here, then it was here, and it has inspired, it has inspired people all across the country.

DB: It is a bit different than the peace marches of the Sixties a bit of a different crowd.

MM: It's different. Those things were well organized. This wasn't organized. And it's so counter-intuitive that out of disorganization came already one of the best movements I've seen in my lifetime. With no structure, no discipline, no organization and, I'm saying that. I'm not like an anarchist really, but there is something, it just appeals to my inner core of and I think that we are probably all this way.

You know I said at the end of my last movie, "I refuse to live in a country like this. And I'm not leaving." So, I think that is shared by millions of people. We refuse to live in the way that they've constructed our America. We're not going anywhere, so that means it's gotta change. End of story. Thank you so much for having me.

DD: Michael, is there any last words that you want to pass along before you leave?

MM: Yes, everyone listening to this whose been participating in the Occupy Movement; please know that you have already changed the national debate and discourse. We've already a number of victories here, you have killed apathy across the country, you have removed despair from peoples' hearts.

So many people sitting at home thinking they were all alone "What can I do, I live in Debuque?" "What can I do, I live in Boise?" "I live in Salt Lake," "I live in Grass Valley, California." What can I do? What can I do? I can't do anything. So I will just sit here on the sofa.

Well, aint no sitting anymore, no more sofas. Peoples' ears are wide open as are

their eyes, and they are participating. This is going to grow, and you, Dennis, me, we don't really have to do anything. Nobody really has to do anything. We just have to just watch it happen.

These seeds have been planted by the abuse of Corporate America on its own people. And it is just sprouting now, and there's no way to stop it. They must rue the day they overplayed their hand and decided to kill the middle-class of this country, and give no hope to the poor. They must just completely rue that day.

So have heart, everyone who is listening this is a movement already with a number of victories. And there's only going to be more to come, because this thing is going to blossom throughout the winter.

DB: I also want to thank you very much for stopping by the Pacifica table, for coming to Oakland. We appreciate the time and we hope you'll come back soon.

MM: I will, and thank you very much. I'm sorry we are on radio; no I'm not sorry we're on radio but if you could see. We've got a little card table here set up in the middle of Occupy Oakland. There's the Wells Fargo Bank over there and thousands of people, all kinds of people, and all kinds of people are here.

This is the America we want to live in, what we see here now, this is the democracy as the way it should be. And so I'm very hopeful.

**Davey D is the co-host and co-producer of Hard Knock Radio. Dennis Bernstein is the Executive Producer of Flashpoints on Pacifica Radio**

---