

# US port shut down by anti-Wall Street protests

OAKLAND: One of the United States' busiest sea ports remained closed early on Thursday (3 November 2011) after anti-Wall Street protesters marched on it at the climax of a day of protests and strike action.

California's port of Oakland, which does 59 percent of its trade with Asia, sent staff home early as hundreds of protesters besieged the docks, at the fourth busiest US container port by cargo volume, according to its website.

"Maritime operations remain effectively shut down," said a Port of Oakland statement in an update late Wednesday night, adding that services "will not resume until it is safe and secure to do so.

"Our hope is that the work day can resume tomorrow and that port workers will be allowed to get to their jobs without incident," it said, adding that there had been no injuries, property damage, or major security problems.

The dockside shutdown came after thousands of people rallied in the city center during the day to support a strike called after police fired tear gas while clearing a protestors' camp last week, injuring one person.

"Celebrate the death of capitalism," read a banner on a makeshift altar decorated with flowers. Vendors sold ice cream and cotton candy, music blared, and booths handed out anti-capitalist literature.

Brother Muziki, an elementary school teacher, was helping carry a banner reading: "Bail out schools and services, not banks!"

"Our classrooms are overcrowded, he said. "The banks are being bailed out -- but not the schools."

While the protests were mainly peaceful, some acts of vandalism were reported, targeting closed-up bank branches downtown.

At one point some 200 people chanted outside a Wells Fargo branch, which has graffiti scrawled on its walls including "The 1 percent won't back down" and "Who's robbing who?" according to local CBS television.

The protesters had headed towards the port from 4:00 pm, splitting up when they got there into a number of different groups blockading different terminals by early evening -- at which point the port declared itself effectively closed.

A line of several dozen riot police in gas masks blocked the march at one point but later dissipated without conflict, and most protesters did not even come close to police lines.

A giant black banner strung up across one intersection read: "Death to capitalism. Occupy everything!"

Local media reported that two protesters had been hit by a car and taken to hospital with non-life threatening injuries.

With their mission accomplished by late evening, the protesters began heading back downtown. Police blocked freeway entrances.

In the Frank Ogawa Plaza outside City Hall - where violence flared last week after riot police moved in to clear a two-week old camp - the Occupy encampment had expanded back to more than 50 tents.

By the end of the night the mood was upbeat -- Jessica Callahan, 20, said she thought the strike day had been a success for Oakland, which has been hard-hit by the global recession.

"A lot of people doubt Oakland," she said, sitting on a curb at the port as protesters played music and milled around. "But we can come together and we need to."

Inside the port - which handles some \$39 billion in imports and exports per year and generates tens of thousands of jobs in the area - authorities said they hoped operations would get back to normal on Thursday.

"Continued missed shifts represent economic hardship for maritime workers, truckers, and their families, as well as lost jobs and lost tax revenue for our region," they said.

*Source: AFP*

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