

Violence Bookends First Day of Protests, But Activists Undeterred

A protest in Alameda this Thursday, Oct. 25th (the first in a weekend of actions) against intensified ICE and Customs and Border Patrol operations in the Bay Area was marked twice by violence, once at the [morning prayer vigil](#) hosted by the Bay Area Interfaith Council and again at night when US Coast Guardsmen fired a barrage of shots at a U-Haul van backing towards them on the Coast Guard Island Bridge.

Witnesses on the scene described seeing the U-Haul reverse into the intersection of Dennison St. and Embarcadero East. At first assuming the truck was there to add to a make-shift blockade of dumpsters, they began to panic as it continued to back towards line of Coast Guards lined up across the bridge in an “aggressive” manner.

“It was pretty clearly trying to agitate the Coast Guard,” said one eyewitness who asked to remain anonymous. “Everyone kept screaming for them to stop, and when they got super close, we saw the Coast Guard hunch down and pull out guns... and shots were fired.”

They described how a bystander was hit by a stray bullet.

“Everybody ducked and ran... a minute or two later, somebody came hobbling up saying they were shot. It looked like they were grabbing their side... when I looked back, he was being loaded into a car and people were screaming, ‘get him to the hospital now!’”

A tire on the U-Haul van was also hit and flattened, although so far, no solid reports have emerged as to what happened to the driver.

An undeniable air of shock characterized the tone of the demonstrators’ recollections. With the exception of the flash-bang grenades ICE agents threw at the a.m. protesters as they left the base, outright aggression and violence were anathema to the overall peaceful manner of the demonstration.

For most of the day, people of all ages and backgrounds milled about the intersection in front of the CGI bridge, some holding signs that read “Fuck ICE!” while others chanted “End the deportations!” through megaphones at the fifty or so California Highway Patrol officers who had amassed in a loose ring around the intersection.

(One officer, when asked if he ever thought he’d be doing something like corralling protesters at an anti-ICE protest, silently shook his head, as if to say that even the CHP battalion knew that their presence – beefed up by four or five units from surrounding counties and dressed in riot gear with batons – crossed over into the ridiculous.)

Others shouted angry questions at the Coast Guardsmen who stood in a line across the bridge. The general consensus among the crowd was deep disappointment in the USCG as the only branch of the military that everyone likes.

A woman named Gina Shepherd spoke about how her late father was a part of the Guard, and the disappointment he’d have in them now.

“My father was a Coast Guard in World War Two. His ship was blown up by the Nazis. He would be rolling over in his grave to see what had happened to the Coast Guard.”

One Guardsman – who declined to identify himself – said that in his thirteen years in the Coast Guard, “he had never seen or done anything” like they were doing that day. The Guards later cooperated with protesters that asked to see their USCG ID’s before clearing the intersection for exiting vehicles.

Not all protesters came with stern faces. An act of resistance for a couple named Goose and Jen consisted of blowing basketball-sized bubbles; another woman came dressed as a clown, determined to make the straight-faced CHP officers smile. She managed to crack a few, aided at one point by a protester wearing an inflatable penis costume.

For much of the afternoon and evening, stereos blasted classic rock and contemporary hits – “K-Pop Demon Hunters” followed “Bohemian Rhapsody” and “Don’t Stop Believin’” – that had people dancing and singing while monitoring who entered and exited the island. But the peace was shattered when gunshots aimed at the errant U-Haul rang out, and a man cried out in pain.

In spite of this violent ending, organizers continued to plan more actions to be staged around the Bay Area.

Maria Moreno, an organizer for the [San Francisco Street Monitors](#) (a local expansion of the “[Adopt A Corner](#)” program), was particularly adamant that their work would not cease with the weekend even after it was announced that [ICE and CBP had canceled](#) their impending immigration raids.

“This administration is not done after this weekend... they always want to make an example out of the Bay Area, so for us, we’re proceeding with our plans of community defense with no end in sight.”

Executive Director of [Trabajadores Unidos Workers United](#) Jennifer Alejo – known as Alejo – spoke about how TUWU spent the last year preparing for intensified federal immigration action.

“Having good relationships with different organizations and community folks have really allowed us to be informed... preparation over these past months allowed us to be able to mobilize allies, folks on the street, while also continuing to center the needs of immigrant workers.”

TUWU was not surprised by either the (recalled) deployment of the National Guard or the speed of the response by activists. Alejo said that tracking federal actions in other states and cities – particularly L.A., where she spent this past June and July – has allowed Bay Area immigrant advocacy organizations to develop a unique and highly interconnected framework within which to respond to intensified immigration raids.

“The Bay Area is a very organized and coordinated community, a very intergenerational community... different communities, but all with the same goal of keeping each other safe. Unlike L.A., when the [National Guard] came, a lot of the organizers were caught by surprise, and in the Bay we’re very lucky to have a little bit of time to prepare.”