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DA Drops Charges Against Protestors Arrested During GOP Convention

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The Manhattan District Attorney's office said Wednesday that charges against more than 200 protestors arrested during the Republican National Convention are being dropped.

"It's a huge victory for those who were arrested at a peaceful, lawful demonstration," said New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman.

Among those arrested were members of a group known as the War Resisters League, which did not have a permit to march from the World Trade Center site to Madison Square Garden on the second day of the Convention.

But according to lawyers for protestors, the Police Department allowed them to march anyway, provided they behaved themselves.

Shortly after they began marching, though, a large group of them was rounded up and taken into custody for blocking Fulton Street.

They were charged with disorderly conduct and marching without a permit.

The DA's office asked for the charges to be dropped because the group was not being violent and may have been confused by police orders regarding their march.

The NYCLU asked the DA to drop the charges, saying it had a videotape showing that those arrested had been acting lawfully.

In a statement, the Manhattan DA's office said: "In light of the short duration of the procession, the conduct of the defendants...no useful purpose would be served by continuing the prosecution of any cases arising out of the Fulton Street protest of August 31."

"They negotiated an agreement to march on the sidewalk and they started to fulfill the terms of the agreement," said Lieberman. "They crossed with the light, they walked on the sidewalk and lo and behold they were arrested. They didn't get more than a half a block."

All along, Mayor Michael Bloomberg has called the arrests justified and urged protestors to just plead guilty.

Meanwhile, in a statement, the Police Department said: "The DA's action today does not cast any doubt about the actions of the defendants, who were blocking pedestrian traffic in violation of the law, but reflects the difficulty of proving their intent in doing so."

More than 1,700 protestors were arrested during the Republican National Convention.

Demonstrators claimed they were held for too long, and in dirty conditions.

Thursday, the NYCLU plans to announce that several protestors are suing the city.

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