



Mayor to ex-detainees: Plead guilty

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Mayor Michael Bloomberg has something of a guilt complex when it comes to protesters arrested at the Republican National Convention - he thinks they're guilty and should simply fess up.

The mayor yesterday urged demonstrators not to fight their cases in court, despite the fact that many say they haven't done anything wrong - and out-of-towners who have pleaded guilty said they did so to avoid returning to New York.

"They might as well just plead guilty and go on," Bloomberg said yesterday before marching in Manhattan's Mexican Day Parade. "The truth of the matter is the city did what it was supposed to do. It protected the streets of the city and we did as good a job as we could, given the vast bulk of people who came here to get arrested. They were all treated humanely."

About 1,500 demonstrators were arrested and detained at a Hudson River pier, some for as long as 50 hours. About 400 have opted to go to trial on mostly minor charges, including disorderly conduct.

Some protesters have filed civil suits, claiming the city violated their First Amendment rights by making pre-emptive mass arrests in Herald Square, near the World Trade Center site and in areas adjacent to Madison Square Garden.

Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said, "The mayor's comment reflects a disdain for the principle that people are innocent until proven guilty. Hundreds of arrests are captured on film where people were doing absolutely nothing wrong, demonstrating on the sidewalk which is perfectly legal."

Yesterday's comments come several weeks after the mayor suggested that the right to free speech was a "privilege" that could be revoked if abused.

About 600 demonstrators have accepted guilty pleas to quickly process their cases, citing the inconvenience of battling the city in court. Bloomberg seized on that figure yesterday.

"I think roughly half have already decided to plead guilty," the mayor added. "Some said because they didn't want to come here. I suspect that most of them because they know they don't have a case. They broke the law."

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