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## Another group of Occupy protesters acquitted

by Mensah M. Dean, Daily News Staff Writer, Posted: April 26, 2012



For the second time this year, a group of Occupy Philly protesters have walked out of court free and clear after a Philadelphia judge on Thursday dismissed all charges against them.

"I feel like this is a good day for the First Amendment and for the right of people to speak out against economic injustice," Dustin Slaughter, 32, said after leaving the courtroom at the city's Criminal Justice Center.

The freelance journalist and photographer was one of 30 defendants on trial for obstruction of a highway, failure to disperse and conspiracy stemming from a protest sparked when police forced the Occupiers from their Dilworth Plaza encampment outside City Hall on Nov. 30.


After hearing from the lone prosecution witness, police Capt. William Fisher, watching video of the protest and hearing arguments from lawyers on both sides, Municipal Judge Karen Y. Simmons concluded that prosecutors did not have enough evidence to bring their case to a jury and declared a judgment of acquittal. The same ruling was handed down Feb. 23 when 10 other Occupy protesters were tried for blocking traffic outside the police department's administration building.

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"Social justice and the struggle for social justice finds its protection in the First Amendment," said Center City attorney Paul Hetznecker, one of 14 defense attorneys representing the defendants. "Certainly this is a perfect example and expression of the court's recognition of how important our rights are."

"Our position is that we presented enough evidence to the court. So, while we respect her Honor, we are disappointed with her decision," Assistant District Attorney Vincent Regan said after the one-day trial.

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Two more groups of Occupy protesters will be tried in June on similar charges for protests at a Wells Fargo Bank branch and at the Center City headquarters of Comcast.

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