Police in Michigan mount a manhunt for anti-Klan demonstrators

18 July 1998

Police in Ann Arbor, Michigan have launched an extraordinary campaign to track down and arrest 35 people wanted in connection with a May 9 demonstration against a Ku Klux Klan rally. Sixteen people have already been arrested over the past several weeks on charges ranging from misdemeanors to felonious rioting, assault with a dangerous weapon and malicious destruction of property. The rioting charge, faced by half those arrested, carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in jail and a $10,000 fine. Two leaders of the National Women's Rights Organizing Coalition, a group associated with the Revolutionary Workers League, turned themselves into police July 14. A hearing is scheduled for August 25.

In the May 9 incident several hundred people protesting against the racist group attempted to get at Klan members by breaking down a fence surrounding the Larcom Municipal Building. Police used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators. Some windows were broken and exterior lighting torn down. Only minor injuries were reported.

Craig Roderick, Ann Arbor's deputy police chief, told reporters Thursday that detectives had finished a meticulous examination of videotape and photographs taken by police during the rally. Officers have gone undercover in pursuit of some of the suspects, attending Klan rallies in Kalamazoo County. Police seized one suspect, by leafing through photographs, during a demonstration held to protest the arrests July 14.

Ann Arbor police have made twice the number of arrests this year as they did in 1996, after a far more violent confrontation. Roderick attributed the increase to a more concerted effort to gather evidence by videotaping and photographing the rally. Protection for the Klan on May 9 cost the city $137,000; the subsequent investigation has cost another $25,000 in police and prosecutor time, according to Roderick. Two detectives were assigned to the case full-time and other officers have worked on the case throughout the two-month investigation. NWROC leaders characterized the arrests as a 'witch-hunt.'

According to the attorney for the protestors, George Washington of Detroit, there have been no prosecutions for rioting in Michigan since the 1967 Detroit rebellion and its aftermath. Washington noted the unprecedented character of the police operation: 'Police were going out rounding people up at gunpoint. One 17 year old was in the shower, when he got out, there was a police officer with a gun. He is charged with throwing a rock. Police were going out every morning for two weeks picking people up. The level of charges is higher this year and the number of arrests is higher.'

Demonstrations against the Klan presence in Ann Arbor, home to the University of Michigan, have been annual events. City authorities have decided to crack down. The current police manhunt is an attack on democratic rights. Notwithstanding our well-known differences with the politics and methods of the RWL and NWROC, the Socialist Equality Party denounces the arrests and calls for the dropping of all charges.

See Also:
The murder of James Byrd, Jr.
Racial violence and the social forces in America that fuel it
[13 June 1998]

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site