

# Release of last protesters arrested during Republican convention

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On August 15 the last of more than 450 protesters arrested during the Republican National Convention (RNC) were released from Philadelphia jails. Most were arrested either committing acts of civil disobedience to protest capital punishment in the US or during a police raid on a warehouse where about 80 people were preparing signs, banners and puppets for demonstrations.

At a press conference Tuesday evening, R2K Legal and Medical, which aided protesters with legal and medical concerns during the convention, released an updated list of physical and mental abuse to which they assert police subjected demonstrators during their incarceration. They listed 188 counts of excessive force, 15 counts of sexual abuse, 67 counts of denial of medical needs and 25 counts of mental abuse. The Independent Media Center reports that when a demonstrator asked one guard why their civil rights were being violated the latter responded, "We do it our own way."

The released protesters have also issued a set of 15 demands from the general prison population and statements about the treatment of these prisoners. The demands include honoring the right to a speedy trial, prompt medical and dental attention, decent food, an end to overcrowding, an end to abuse by guards, reliable phone service, prompt credit of monies sent from outside, genuine rehabilitation programs, adequate law libraries and prenatal care for pregnant women.

The R2K press conference was moderated by Kate Sorenson, a leader of ACT UP/Philadelphia, an AIDS activist organization. After she was arrested while talking on a cell phone, Sorenson had her bail initially set at \$1 million and was charged with 10 felonies. Sorenson denounced presidential candidates Al Gore, George Bush "and the corporate interests that fund

them," who "believe that they can pay our cities to beat our citizens." She said she could not even imagine having to live through what she experienced in prison on a long-term basis.

Marina Sitrin of the R2K Legal Team explained that the team, made up of dozens of lawyers who have volunteered from the National Lawyers Guild and the Center for Constitutional Rights, would be working to obtain equal treatment for all those arrested and make sure no one was singled out for punitive sentences. Sitrin also promised there would be "countless civil suits filed based on brutality, lack of medical needs, denial of due process."

Angus Love, a civil rights attorney, criticized the mainstream media coverage of the demonstrations, pointing out that peaceful protests received little coverage. He charged that the profit-driven media operates by the motto, "If it bleeds, it leads." He said the media focused on isolated incidents of vandalism, which city officials used as an excuse to justify the outrageous bail requirements and brutality directed at the protesters. Love concluded by quoting Benjamin Franklin, "He who sacrifices liberty for security deserves neither."

One of the jailed protesters, Zozera Imaana, spoke of the conditions she had observed, commenting, "You do not know the truth of America or the reality of its lies until you have been in its prisons. There is nothing there but black, Latino and poor white people."

The final speaker was Michael Africa, who was born in jail to one of the nine members of the MOVE organization imprisoned since 1978 after 400 Philadelphia police laid siege to their West Philadelphia home. He was arrested by seven police officers and thrown into a van during the RNC demonstrations. He said the reaction to the televised beating of suspect

Thomas Jones a few weeks before the convention made the police careful not to commit acts of brutality when cameras were around.

Jamie Graham, a legal observer for the National Lawyers Guild, told the *WSWS* that those prisoners who were moved into prison medical blocks had to be monitored by nurses after they entered the second week of their hunger strike. He added that in some prisons the officials tried to alienate the arrested demonstrators from the other prisoners by putting the entire jail on lockdown and blaming it on the protesters, but the latter reported the prisoners were not fooled by this and were supportive of what they were doing.

Graham was arrested himself as he was walking to a vigil for jailed protesters at the Roundhouse, the police headquarters. He was trying to photograph a man and woman who were thrown against the wall as they were being arrested. He noticed the woman was having an asthma attack. When he put on his legal advisor identification cap a police officer knocked the camera out of his hand. When he tried to pick up his camera he was attacked by two police officers. He had to go to the hospital for cuts he received and then was held for two and a half days. He was charged with obstructing a highway, disorderly conduct and failure to disperse.



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