

# Green Party opponent of Afghan war detained at US airport

David Walsh  
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In a disturbing and chilling episode, an official of the Green Party USA (one of two national Green groups in the US) was detained at the Bangor (Maine) International Airport November 1 and prevented from boarding an American Airlines flight to Chicago. Nancy Oden, Green Party USA coordinating committee member, was on her way to a meeting of her organization's national committee to discuss opposition to the war in Afghanistan when she encountered the official roadblock.

Oden, a longtime environmental and peace activist, explained to an interviewer ([www.wartimelibrary.com](http://www.wartimelibrary.com)) that when she gave an American Airlines ticket agent her name at the Bangor airport last Thursday he remained on his computer for a "long time," before putting an "S" on her boarding pass (for "Selectee"). According to Oden, the agent told her, "You've been picked for having your bag searched." She then said, "This wasn't random, was it?" and he replied, "No, you were in there to be searched, no matter what."

Oden asserts that when she entered the boarding area, a National Guardsman yelled at her, "Bring your bags over here." At some point during the security process the soldier grabbed her arm and started yelling, "Don't you know what happened? September 11, don't you know thousands of people died?" Oden claims she pulled her arm away and told him not to touch her. Later she heard the Guardsman say, "Don't let her on the plane."

The Green Party USA official was then prevented from boarding her flight on the grounds that she had refused to cooperate with the search. Oden asserts that she was approached by airline police and six machine-gun toting soldiers. The airport police official informed her that she could not fly out of the Bangor airport that day.

Airport and airline officials continue to claim that Oden refused to cooperate with the search. She responds: "Of course I had cooperated; why do I care if they search my bags?... What I didn't like was being singled out because of my political views. They couldn't arrest me because there was no reason for that. They had people who saw there was nothing to arrest me for."

The episode at the Bangor airport raises serious questions of democratic rights. Have federal authorities already provided to the airlines a list of those who are considered undesirable because of their opposition to the Bush administration's war in Afghanistan? Via the *Bangor Daily News*, various official spokespeople scoffed at the notion that Oden was targeted because of her beliefs. An FBI representative, according to the newspaper, would neither confirm nor deny the existence of any particular name on the "terrorist watch list," but said it was "extremely unlikely" that Oden was considered a potential terrorist because she was unknown to the federal police agency.

There is, however, no reason to accept the authorities' version of events. It simply does not hold water. Whatever verbal exchange took place between Oden and the National Guardsman, the objective fact remains that an opponent of the Afghan war was detained, confronted with heavily armed men and arbitrarily prevented from flying. Oden points out in her interview that her opinions are well-known in the area and that, in fact, she had a piece outlining her organization's opposition to the war published in a Bangor newspaper several weeks ago. The article, available on the Green Party USA web site, includes this passage: "Bring all American troops home from all over the world. We do not need far-flung bases whose only purpose is to protect U.S. businesses. Let U.S.

corporations ... protect themselves.” The notion that the local FBI would not be aware of such a public statement is ludicrous.

According to the *Daily News*, authorities assert that while Oden was singled out for added security measures, “it was more likely due to the manner in which she purchased her ticket than for her activist past.” Why should they be believed? Individuals are now being targeted for special attention, for example, if they purchase tickets with cash at the last moment. Oden, however, bought her nonrefundable ticket online.

An effort by this reporter to pry a serious explanation out of Bangor airport officials was unsuccessful. Interim airport director Rebecca Hupp observed that the placing of an “S” on Oden’s boarding pass was the result of a “computer generated profile,” an “additional security measure.” She explained this was the result of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations. When asked what the criteria were, Hupp said “I can’t give you any details.” It’s on a “need-to-know” basis, she maintained. What profile could Oden, a 60-year-old woman from northern Maine, possibly have met, other than the obvious political one? Hupp couldn’t say, simply repeating the mantra that the Green Party official “meets the profile.” She commented, “I can’t speculate what those criteria are.” The conversation had a Kafkaesque quality to it, which is to say, it smacked of police-state mentality and measures.

It has generally been standard operating procedure for the American ruling elite to insist that no attempt is being made to clamp down on political opposition even as it does precisely that. During the McCarthyite witch-hunt, for example, film industry executives strenuously denied the existence of a blacklist. There were always other reasons given why an individual was denied employment. So today it can be expected that all sorts of explanations will be advanced to justify repressive measures. But a systematic campaign against democratic rights is well under way, about which there is virtually no public discussion. It is worth noting that Oden’s treatment has been entirely blacked out by the national media.



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