

INS pretext for political retaliation

Palestinian activist arrested in New York City

Bill Vann
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A well-known Palestinian activist in New York City has been placed under detention on trumped-up immigration charges and is threatened with deportation to Israel after being arrested by city police and federal agents.

Faruk Abdel-Muhti, the coordinator of the Palestinian National Alliance, is now being held in the Essex County jail in New Jersey. His attorney reported that he has been beaten by FBI agents and subjected to intense interrogation about the Arab-American community and his contacts with Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Police Department undercover detectives and several uniformed cops joined an agent of the Immigration and Naturalization Service April 26 in raiding the Palestinian activist's Queens apartment at approximately 6:30 a.m. Asked if they had a warrant, the cops threatened to break down the door and said they were prepared to use teargas and call in a SWAT team.

The police claimed that they wanted to talk to Abdel-Muhti about the September 11 attacks and that they believed he had weapons or explosives in his home. After gaining entry, however, they made no search of the apartment, merely demanding the Palestinian activist's documents and then detaining him on immigration charges.

It was the second time that police gained entry to the home in a space of three weeks. Earlier in April, detectives identifying themselves as members of the NYPD Joint Terrorist Task Force talked their way into the apartment while the Palestinian activist was out. Abdel-Muhti's roommate, Bernard McFall, an employee of the Environmental Protection Agency, reported that the cops threatened to throw him out the window of the fourteenth floor apartment if he did not

tell them the truth. They also grabbed address books, copying names and phone numbers, and opened computer files.

The police insulted both McFall and Abdel-Muhti's teenage son, telling the EPA employee that he was "a disgrace to his country" for associating with Palestinians, and warning him that he could be fired from his government job.

Since his detention, Abdel-Muhti has been deprived of food and hit by his interrogators, according to one of his attorneys, Gilma Camargo. FBI agents told him that he could go free if he provided them with information on Arab Americans and Palestinian organizations, she said. If he did not, however, they told him that Mossad, the Israeli secret police, had asked for his extradition and that papers had already been prepared to ship him to Israel.

The government's interest in Abdel-Muhti apparently stems from broadcasts he made recently on the Pacifica network radio station, WBAI, which included interviews with Palestinians in Nablus and Jenin on the atrocities carried out by the Israeli military there. The immigration charge is a patent pretext for political retaliation for his speaking out against the US-backed Israeli aggression.

The Palestinian activist had also played an active part in organizing recent demonstrations that have turned out thousands of protesters in New York City to condemn Israel's actions.

"This INS issue has been outstanding for five years," said the Palestinian activist's lawyer, Kamal Franklin. "It wasn't until the recent events in Palestine and with him being on the radio that all this stuff started happening."

The attorney said that authorities had repeatedly lied to him and his client about the case, initially asserting

that they merely wanted to talk to him, something that he agreed to do as long as his lawyer was present.

Franklin said the Palestinian activist, a man in his early fifties, had been in the US for more than 15 years with no charges ever brought against him. “Now, because he was outspoken in defense of the Palestinians, he has been incarcerated,” he said. “We believe that they are planning to turn him over to Israel.”

The attorney said that plans were being made to file an appeal for asylum on Abdel-Muhti’s behalf, asserting that he would face imminent danger of imprisonment, torture and even death if handed over to Israeli authorities.

The arrest underscores an ominous shift on the part of the NYPD, which previously had an official position that it would not be responsible for enforcing immigration statutes and would not aid the INS in tracking down or apprehending undocumented immigrants. Under a 1985 executive order, cops are barred from even asking suspects about their immigration status, let alone reporting them to the INS or aiding immigration agents.

US Attorney General John Ashcroft, however, has floated proposals to deputize local police forces and provide training for hunting down the undocumented. The case of Faruk Abdel-Muhti suggests that in New York this plan is already being implemented.



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