

Ten years since the Waco massacre

The Editorial Board
25 April 2003

April 19 marked the tenth anniversary of the Waco massacre, one of the most brutal acts of domestic state repression and mass murder in US history.

The *World Socialist Web Site* marks this anniversary with the republication of the statement that appeared in the April 26, 1993 edition of *The International Workers Bulletin* (IWB), the newspaper that was the precursor of the WWS. This statement was drafted in the immediate aftermath of the violent siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas that took the lives of at least 80 people, 21 of them children. We are also reposting an article that initially appeared on the WWS on July 25, 2000 concerning the official government whitewash of the 1993 mass killings.

FBI agents, backed by “observers” from the US Army’s secret Delta Force commando unit, attacked the house occupied by the followers of the religious sect after a 51-day siege. The combat-equipped agents used tanks to punch holes into the structure and then pump in tear gas. A fire that quickly swept through the compound killed most of victims, but a number were shot to death.

While the Clinton administration’s Justice Department claimed that the deaths were the result of a “mass suicide” and that the Branch Davidians had set the fire themselves, survivors of the massacre denied this, blaming the federal assault force for the killings. The tanks, they said, had crushed propane and fuel containers, which were then ignited by tear gas grenades fired by federal agents into the compound.

Federal authorities, led by Attorney General Janet Reno, repeatedly denied that any pyrotechnic devices were used in the siege that could have caused the fatal conflagration. More than six years after the massacre, however, the FBI was forced to admit that it had indeed used explosive munitions capable of starting the fire.

David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidians and one of those who died in the siege, combined

predictions of imminent apocalypse with hostility to the government. In its theological tenets, the sect was not far removed from other Christian fundamentalist currents that were cultivated by the right wing of the Republican Party under the administrations of Reagan and the senior George Bush, and remain a key element in the limited social base of the administration George W. Bush today.

Waco became a rallying cry for the extreme right and militia groups. Timothy McVeigh chose the second anniversary of the massacre to carry out the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City.

The followers of the Koresh group, drawn from several countries, were themselves largely apolitical, if socially disoriented, individuals. Whatever their beliefs, however, there was not a shred of evidence to justify the murderous actions undertaken by the Clinton administration.

The massacre was carried out ostensibly to serve a search warrant related to firearms violations. No one in the compound was accused of committing any violent crime before an abortive paramilitary raid by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) in February 1993 that left four BATF agents and six Branch Davidians dead. This raid led to the 51-day siege that ended with the incineration of the compound and most of its inhabitants. Claims floated by the Clinton administration that the group was abusing children or involved in drug trafficking proved to be fabrications.

The principal purpose of the assault was to uphold the authority of the state. The decision was taken to make an object lesson of the Branch Davidians, whose essential crime, as far as the Clinton administration was concerned, was defying the government.

The IWB statement issued at the time posed the question: “If this is how the capitalist state proceeds with a small group of religious fanatics ... how much

more brutally will it proceed against militant struggles of the working class, which pose a real challenge to the profit system?”

The cover-up of this crime continues to this day. The FBI stonewalled investigations into the Waco massacre. A supposedly independent investigation led by former senator John Danforth, a Republican from Missouri, led to a whitewash of the government’s actions. Even Danforth, however, was forced to protest the FBI’s obstruction of efforts to obtain evidence related to Waco.

The official accused of stonewalling that investigation, former FBI deputy general counsel Thomas A. Kelley, was subsequently tapped to serve as a lead investigator for the joint congressional intelligence panel that whitewashed the role played by the FBI and other agencies in the events leading up to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

A lawsuit brought by survivors of the Waco massacre is currently before the US Appeals Court. They are seeking another trial in a wrongful death suit they brought against the government. The judge in the first trial excluded key evidence—particularly that relating to the FBI cover-up—and was overtly hostile to the plaintiffs. Seven of the survivors remain in jail on voluntary manslaughter charges related to the original botched raid conducted by the BATF.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact