

FBI stages violent raids in Puerto Rico

Bill Van Auken
14 February 2006

Heavily armed US agents backed by helicopters raided five homes and an office in Puerto Rico last Friday in what federal officials claimed was an operation aimed at foiling a “potential terrorist attack.”

The raids, which come five months after federal agents assassinated the fugitive leader of a pro-independence group, are another indication that Washington is utilizing its “global war on terrorism” to violently suppress political opposition in the US island colony.

The simultaneous raids were launched in the Puerto Rican capital of San Juan and in the towns of Trujillo Alto, San German, Mayaguez, Aguadilla and Isabela and involved scores of agents, many of them masked, wearing helmets and flak jackets and carrying automatic weapons. The targets were Puerto Rican independence supporters, community activists and union leaders.

In the course of the raids, agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) attacked journalists and protesters with pepper gas, kicks and blows. The violence against the media was unleashed after a reporter attempted to interview a resident of one of the homes that was being invaded by the FBI.

“The number one priority of the FBI is to prevent future terrorist attacks,” said the FBI’s special agent in charge of Puerto Rico, Luis Fraticelli, in the wake of the raids. “As a result, the FBI is committed to aggressively investigating all matters related to national security and the security of the citizens of the United States.”

These alarmist official claims that the operation was promoted by a supposed threat of a terrorist attack with an “explosive device” were immediately called into question both by the failure of federal officials to arrest anyone in the raids and by the Puerto Rican government’s insistence that federal authorities had given it no warning of any supposed terrorist threat.

In several areas, the raids prompted protests by neighbors, and federal agents were pelted with stones and their vehicles kicked as they left the scene.

One of the sites raided was the Ecumenical Committee for Community Economic Development, a church-linked community group, where two independence supporters apparently worked.

Scenes of violence that were broadcast over Puerto Rican television took place outside an apartment complex in the Rio Piedras section of San Juan, where dozens of paramilitary FBI agents were raiding the home of Liliana Laboy, a writer and well-known supporter of Puerto Rican independence. Several reporters were overcome by pepper gas sprayed by FBI agents, and one had to be taken to the hospital.

“This is part of a campaign of intimidation against the independence movement,” commented Roxanna Badillo, an attorney representing Laboy.

The raids come just five months after the FBI mortally wounded Puerto Rican nationalist leader Filberto Ojeda Rios and left him to bleed to death on the floor of his home. Ojeda, 72, was the founder of the Boricua Popular Army, also known as the Macheteros. He was wanted in connection with his alleged part in the planning of a 1983 Wells Fargo armored car robbery in Hartford, Connecticut.

The Puerto Rican government is continuing an investigation of the FBI’s actions in the September 23 killing of Ojeda and has called upon the US Justice Department to conduct its own probe.

The latest raids promoted widespread protests and demonstrations, with even the island’s colonial government being forced to disassociate itself from the FBI’s actions.

“There is no justification for the excessive use of force that we have seen in the media,” said Governor Anibal Acevedo Vila. He added that the actions of the FBI violence were “repudiated by all Puerto Ricans

who love democracy and value the right to be informed.”

The chief of Puerto Rico’s national police stressed that no one in the local government had been told anything about an alleged terrorist threat. “Nobody mentioned terrorist attacks to me,” said the chief, Pedro Toledo. “The police were not informed, the police did not know, the police did not participate,” he said.

Toledo called the FBI’s use of force “uncalled for.” He said that the attack on the journalists was “totally outside the norm. This gas is used when your life is in danger, against an attacker, not against a journalist.”

The use of heavily armed “task forces” sent from the US to murder and raid supporters of Puerto Rican independence only underscores the colonial status of the Caribbean island, which since 1952 has been classified as a “commonwealth” or “associated free state” belonging to the US.

At the same time, it is becoming clear that Washington is utilizing its colonial possession as a testing ground for police-state measures that will be employed against opponents of the government’s policies within the US as well.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)