Amid mass arrests and suppression of media

RNC in Twin Cities: Eight protesters charged with terrorism under Patriot Act

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On Wednesday eight members of the anarchist protest group the Republican National Convention Welcoming Committee (RNCWC) were charged under provisions of the Minnesota state version of the Patriot Act with "Conspiracy to Riot in Furtherance of Terrorism."

The eight charged are all young, and could face up to seven-and-a-half years in prison under a provision that allows the enhancement of charges related to terrorism by 50 percent. They are: Monica Bicking, Eryn Trimmer, Luce Guillen Givins, Erik Oseland, Nathanael Secor, Robert Czernik, Garrett Fitzgerald and Max Spector.

Among other things, the youth, who were arrested last weekend even prior to the start of the convention, are charged with plotting to kidnap delegates to the RNC, assault police officers and attack airports. Almost all of the charges listed are based upon the testimony of police infiltrators, one an officer, the other a paid informant.

"These charges are an effort to equate publicly stated plans to blockade traffic and disrupt the RNC as being the same as acts of terrorism. This both trivializes real violence and attempts to place the stated political views of the defendants on trial," said Bruce Nestor, president of the Minnesota Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild. "The charges represent an abuse of the criminal justice system and seek to intimidate any person organizing large scale public demonstrations potentially involving civil disobedience," he said.

An affidavit filed by police with the District Court for Ramsey County that allowed the warrant to raid and arrest declares the RNCWC a "criminal enterprise" and strongly implies that it is a terrorist organization. It claimed that numerous examples of weaponry would be found if the judge allowed the warrants. However, police turned up no such physical evidence in conducting their raids.

"Police found what they claim was a single plastic shield, a rusty machete, and two hatchets used in Minnesota to split wood. This doesn't amount to evidence of an organized insurrection, particularly when over 3,500 police are present in the Twin Cities, armed with assault rifles, concussion grenades, chemical weapons and full riot gear," said Nestor.

In requesting the warrant, the police reminded the court that the RNC has been declared by the Department of Homeland Security a "National Security Special Event." The affidavit did not explain the connection between this designation and the necessity of the police raid.

Anarchistic groups like the RNCWC—with their emphasis on the "direct action" of small groups and their aversion to politics and the lessons of history—are quite easily infiltrated by agents and provocateurs. Nonetheless, there is little to suggest that the youth are violent or that they are anything more than politically naive. The police evidence is threadbare on the surface, and depends primarily on the counterfactual charge of "conspiracy"—that those arrested *would* have committed crimes, or that they are responsible for the crimes of others.

Several of those arrested were also members of the student group "Food not Bombs," and were working in a soup kitchen at the time of their arrest.

In an interview, Ramsey County Sherriff Bob Fletcher, who has faced criticism from protesters for his methods, gloated that the aim of the arrest had been to decapitate the RNCWC, which hoped to coordinate the

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protest activities of those attending the demonstrations from outside of the Twin Cities. “Severing that leadership ... was huge,” he said. “We only removed 10 percent of the problem, but the 10 percent was the coordinating aspect of it.”

The charges against the “RNC 8” stand as a sharp warning to the working class. The charge “conspiracy to riot” has a long and sordid pedigree in US history. It has been used against the leadership of unions and working class parties precisely as a means of “severing the leadership” from the rank and file. The coupling of this charge with “terrorism” under the Patriot Act is especially chilling.

The police-state atmosphere in the Twin Cities, not so long ago a center of American liberalism, continued throughout the week.

On Thursday, about 300 protesters were arrested in downtown St. Paul near the site of the Republican National Convention, bringing to well over 800 the total number of arrests since before the start of the RNC.

The protesters had planned to march from the grounds of the state capital to the Xcel Center, the arena housing the RNC. However, just before the start of the demonstration, police announced that the march permit would expire in 10 minutes, at 5 p.m.

In spite of the police order, hundreds of protesters determined to carry on the march. After starting out toward the Xcel Center, they were pinned down on a freeway overpass by police, who intercepted the march on horseback and bicycles. Police donned gas masks and prepared tear gas canisters. Intersections were blocked with dump trucks and steel barriers.

After an hour in this position, protesters retreated back across the overpass toward the state capital building, where they were trapped by yet another police barricade and soon surrounded by a police cordon.

On Wednesday night in Minneapolis, police arrested over 100 outside a concert of the radical rap-metal band, Rage Against the Machine. Police in riot gear massed outside of the Target Center in the downtown area. According to Minneapolis Police Captain Larry Doyle, the police had “intelligence that there may be issues.”

Prior to ending the concert, the lead singer of Rage Against the Machine, Zach de la Rocha, asked concertgoers to avoid trouble with the police. The police presence continued after the concert’s end, however, until well past midnight, when law enforcement ordered a crowd they accused of “loitering” to disperse. According to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, “some scuffles followed,” and at 12:30 a.m. police arrested over 100, who were charged with misdemeanor offenses. Of these 15 were jailed, two of whom were still in custody the next morning.

Members of the antiwar group Code Pink managed to enter the Xcel center, unveiling banners during the acceptance speech of John McCain. They were quickly removed from the building.

There has also been widespread repression of the media that covered the protests during the RNC. Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! was arrested on Monday, after protesting the arrest of several members of her news crew. Also reportedly arrested were Associated Press photographer Matt Rourke, two cameramen of Twin City CBS and NBC affiliates, and several independent videographers. There was also an unverified report that a Fox News crew was gassed.

The media reform movement Free Press has collected over 50,000 signatures demanding that charges against all journalists arrested during the RNC be dropped.

The conventions of the two major parties have been conducted in an unprecedented police-state atmosphere, in which local police and major American cities—Denver and the Twin Cities—have been militarized and placed under the official control of the executive branch of the federal government. The police have trampled basic democratic rights—including freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the freedom of the press—with impunity and contempt.

All of this has taken place without a murmur of protest from any section of the political or media establishment gathered to rub elbows with delegates and party officials inside the convention halls.

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