

FBI raids on antiwar activists: A frontal assault on democratic rights

Patrick Martin
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Workers, youth and students who oppose the war policies of the Obama administration and all those who uphold democratic rights must defend the antiwar and pro-Palestinian activists whose homes were raided Friday morning by the FBI. These raids are an ominous warning that the US government, unable to convince the American people to support the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a predatory foreign policy around the world, is moving to criminalize open political opposition.

At a press conference Saturday in Chicago, two of those targeted, Joe Iosbaker and Stephanie Weiner, gave details of the raid. Twenty FBI agents ransacked their home, taking away more than 30 boxes of papers, correspondence and personal items dating back over four decades. At several of the homes raided, FBI agents seized computers and cell phones.

While no one was arrested—a fact that in itself demonstrates there was no “terrorist” threat—many of those targeted were given subpoenas to appear before federal grand juries next month. They will apparently be questioned particularly about their personal travel to foreign countries where they met openly with political and labor groups.

Those targeted in the September 24 raids are not terrorists stockpiling bombs, but political activists whose “weapons” are leaflets, placards, newsletters and Internet postings. Most are members or supporters of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO), which publishes the newsletter *Fight Back*.

The Socialist Equality Party has a very different political perspective from the FRSO, which has its roots in the Maoist student groups of the 1960s and 1970s, and supports a variety of bourgeois nationalist leaderships in the oppressed countries of Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. But the SEP is

unreserved in our defense of the democratic rights of the FRSO and its members against state repression.

We also defend the supporters and members of the Arab-American Action Network, whose web site describes it as a grassroots organization that “strives to strengthen the Arab community in the Chicago area by building its capacity to be an active agent for positive social change.” The Bush administration witch-hunted and destroyed many Arab-American and Islamic charities and community groups after the 9/11 attacks, and the Obama administration is continuing in this reactionary tradition.

The SEP condemns as well the complicity of the corporate-controlled media with this blatant assault on political dissent. Outside of Minneapolis and Chicago, there has been little press coverage of the raids. The *New York Times*, for example, published a small article buried in its inside pages. The television networks have devoted zero time to the most flagrantly antidemocratic action taken by the US government since Obama entered the White House.

An FBI spokesman claimed that the raids were aimed at people “providing, attempting and conspiring to provide material support” to terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). But there is no evidence tying any of those targeted in the raids to terrorism.

The FBI is apparently attempting to use the precedent set by the recent US Supreme Court ruling in the case of *The Humanitarian Law Project v. Holder*. In this reactionary decision, handed down in June, the high court upheld the charge of “material support” to terrorism against people who were working with the PKK, a Kurdish nationalist guerrilla group fighting in

Turkey, and the LTTE, the Tamil nationalist organization fighting a civil war in Sri Lanka.

The individuals charged in that case were not providing military or technical assistance to guerrilla warfare. Some were seeking to persuade the PKK to make the transition from guerrilla warfare to electoral politics in Turkey (as the Irish Republican Army did in Northern Ireland, under the auspices of the Clinton administration). Others were advising the LTTE, during a period of ceasefire in the Sri Lankan civil war, on how to obtain disaster aid for the Tamil population after the 2004 Asian tsunami.

Both the PKK and LTTE had been designated as “terrorist” organizations by the US State Department because they were fighting governments allied to Washington. Similar organizations fighting governments at odds with US foreign policy were not so designated, although their tactics were identical.

If the *Holder* precedent had been in effect during the 1980s, antiapartheid campaigners in the United States could have been arrested and prosecuted for “material support,” because the Reagan administration had designated the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela as “terrorists.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time of the *Holder* decision: “This week’s ruling marks a new stage in the ongoing attack on democratic rights in the United States. At the behest of the Obama administration, the Supreme Court—for the first time ever—has given its imprimatur to the prosecution and imprisonment of US citizens for advocating support of organizations opposing the policies of the US government or its allies anywhere on the planet.” (See “Supreme Court backs use of terrorism law against free speech”).

The Bush Justice Department brought the “material support” charges and the Obama Justice Department carried the case to a successful conclusion at the Supreme Court, a fact which underscores the continuity between the Republicans and the Democrats when it comes to attacking the democratic rights of the American people.

The September 24 raids came only four days after publication of an internal report by the Justice Department’s inspector general admitting that the FBI improperly opened “terrorism” investigations into peace and social justice groups including Quakers,

Catholic Worker, the Thomas Merton Center, Greenpeace, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

The decade since the 9/11 terrorist attacks has seen the systematic buildup of police-state powers, beginning with the overwhelming bipartisan support for the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the Northern Command, the establishment of the Guantanamo Bay concentration camp and secret CIA torture prisons, and the assumption of greater and greater authority by the military/intelligence agencies and the White House.

The SEP has consistently warned that while these measures were declared to be directed against Al Qaeda and its alleged sympathizers, the real target was the American people. The financial aristocracy in the United States is well aware that the real threat to its privileges and wealth is not a handful of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists, but the American working class. Under conditions of deepening economic and social crisis, the ruling elite anticipates the growth of social opposition from below. It is preparing the state machinery of repression accordingly.

The role of the Obama administration and the Democratic Party in intensifying the buildup of police-state powers underscores the necessity for the independent mobilization of the working class against the entire political establishment and the capitalist system that it defends. This is the only basis for putting an end to war and defending democratic rights.

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