

The New York Times and the FBI raids

Hiram Lee
28 September 2010

The *New York Times* published an editorial on Monday entitled “A Reminder to the FBI” ostensibly chastising the federal police agency for spying on domestic antiwar groups and other protest organizations. The editorial makes reference to “abuses” and “missteps” committed by the agency.

The real significance of the editorial, however, lies in what it does not say. In a commentary lamenting “how easily civil liberties can be cast aside,” there is not a single mention of the FBI raids carried out against antiwar activists in Chicago and Minneapolis just three days before the editorial’s publication.

There is no innocent explanation for this silence. It is a highly conscious omission.

Of a piece with the *Times*’ decision to bury its news report on the raids in a perfunctory article on its inside pages, the editorial sends a clear signal to the Obama administration and the police/security agencies. The *Times* has no problem with the use of police-state methods to suppress antiwar sentiment and will not make an issue of the attacks carried out on Friday. This amounts to a tacit endorsement of the FBI raids.

The major organ of the liberal Democratic Party establishment is by no means alone in suppressing coverage and implicitly condoning the raids. The FBI action was ignored entirely by the *Washington Post* and has received only token coverage from other media outlets.

The brief editorial uncritically cites a Department of Justice report released on September 20 containing a review of the FBI’s investigations into “domestic advocacy groups.” (See, “Report whitewashes FBI political spying”) As the *Times* writes, “The report did not find evidence that the FBI routinely targeted groups that were trying to exercise their First Amendment right to protest government policies. It characterized the Merton Center incident as a slip-up.”

The “Merton Center incident” involved FBI

surveillance of Iraq war protesters at a 2002 peace rally in Pennsylvania sponsored by the pacifist Thomas Merton Center. The *Times* adds, “It sounds like the paranoid approach to dissent of J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI, but this and other abuses took place during the Bush administration.”

That the *Times* can speak of such abuses as a thing of the past when just days earlier the FBI raided the homes of antiwar activists in a coordinated action in two states, seizing computers, cell phones, books, papers and personal effects and issuing subpoenas to eight activists to appear before a grand jury, reveals the newspaper’s utter indifference to the defense of democratic rights.

It underscores its complicity in the antidemocratic policies carried out under Bush and intensified under Obama. The *Times* supported the Patriot Act and the entire panoply of police-state measures enacted after 9/11 and justified in the name of the phony “war on terrorism.” This goes hand in hand with the newspaper’s support for the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and Obama’s escalation of the bloodbath in the latter country.

It highlights the fact that no section of the political establishment is prepared to defend democratic rights. The general silence of the media, and particularly that of the nominally liberal press, on the brazen state attack on political dissent represented by the FBI raids must be taken as a warning. The liberal establishment will not lift a finger as the government uses “antiterrorism” as the pretext for broader attacks on social and political opposition to its reactionary policies.

The only social force that can defend democratic rights is the working class, mobilized independently of and in opposition to the Obama administration and the entire political establishment.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact