

New York police step up surveillance and harassment of political activists

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The New York Police Department (NYPD) used the excuse of outstanding warrants for the most minor infractions to visit the homes of Occupy Wall Street activists and others one day before last week's scheduled May Day protests, conducting interrogations on the planned demonstrations.

The April 30 incidents, first reported on the Gawker website, are the latest examples of the increasingly brazen police state tactics used by the NYPD's intelligence division and by the department as a whole, including the extensive spying on Muslim neighborhoods and students reported several months ago, on college campuses throughout the Northeast as well as New York City.

In the raids on the eve of May Day, the police used such pretexts as a five-year-old warrant for an open-container-of-alcohol violation to arrest the individual involved, but only after examining leaflets in his apartment.

Zachary Dempster reported that six cops broke down the door of his apartment in the Bushwick area of Brooklyn at 6:15 a.m. on April 30, brandishing a warrant for the arrest of his roommate on a six-year-old open container violation. They then proceeded to question Dempster on his plans for May Day. "They asked what I was doing tomorrow, and if I knew of any activities, any events." The roommate was also questioned.

An hour or so later, another activist was visited in an apartment in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. The pretext was warrants for two people who no longer lived there. There were no questions about May Day, but "we obviously don't think it's an accident that it happened the day before May Day, where people in the house are organizers," said the activist, speaking to Gawker.

Gideon Oliver, the president of the local chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, called the events "an upswing in law enforcement activity that seemed to fit the pattern of targeting what police might view as political residences.... They are asking what are your May Day plans, do you know who the leaders are—these are classical political surveillance questions."

Oliver told the *New York Times*, "I was surprised by the fact that bench warrants would be used as a pretext to this kind of activity as opposed to the officers knocking on the door and saying we want to talk to X, Y and Z."

Oliver said that he had heard of at least five addresses targeted by the police in the week before May Day, and that the visits were aimed at intimidating and discouraging people from "engaging in First Amendment activity on May Day."

These incidents are by only the latest in a series of similar kinds of harassment and intimidation, following the dismantling of the original Occupy Wall Street encampment in Manhattan on the orders of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly. Back in March, protesters complained of similar tactics, including what one lawyer called "preemptive" arrests. Occupy protesters have reported numerous instances of police and detectives posted outside buildings where private meetings are taking place, or visiting homes of protesters, in tactics reminiscent of the days of the police department's notorious Red Squad of the 1950s and '60s.

The harassment of protesters is completely consistent with the profiling of Muslims that has been carried out for years, and was the subject of media attention several months ago.

Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, issued a statement on

March 19, after that weekend's closure of Zuccotti Park and the arrests of many protesters, declaring, "The weekend raid on Occupy Wall Street is just the latest in a stream of scandals and abuse that has marred New York city's Police Department. From surveillance of New York City's Muslim and South Asian communities to the routine street interrogations of New York City's black and Latino men, the NYPD is out of control."

The White House, significantly, has gone out of its way to praise the police department. The Associated Press reported recently that a national security official declared that "I have full confidence that the New York Police Department is doing things consistent within the law" and termed the NYPD's work in the decade since the September 11 attacks a "success."

James Zogby of the Arab-American Institute, writing in the Huffington Post, said that NYPD internal documents overwhelmingly consist of either obvious and well-known demographic information on the city's Muslim community, along with other reports, by NYPD "Senior Intelligence Analysts," that present four phases of "homegrown" radicalization of Muslims, including criteria for "pre-radicalization," such as "male, under 35, residents and citizens of Western democracies, middle class, educated, recent converts, living 'unremarkable' lives with 'little, if any, criminal history,' " which clearly includes nearly all young Muslim men.

The surveillance and intimidation demonstrate that the NYPD's longstanding spying efforts targeting the city's Muslim citizens and residents—along with the stop-and-frisk campaign that has targeted the working class and criminalized large sections of African-American and Hispanic youth—is part of a campaign directed against the working class as a whole. The longer-range aim is preparation to violently repress resistance to growing poverty, homelessness and unemployment as the economic slump drags on and deepens.



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