

Seattle anarchists imprisoned for refusing to testify before a grand jury

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Three witnesses in a grand jury investigation into acts of vandalism during May Day protests in Seattle last year remain incarcerated for refusing to answer questions about the political activities of people they know. None of the three—Matthew Duran, Katherine Olejnik, and Matthew Pfeiffer—are accused of participating in any criminal act.

Judge Richard Jones ordered the confinement of Duran on September 14, Olejnik on September 27, and Pfeiffer on December 26, 2012, all for civil contempt of court. The judge also imprisoned Leah-Lynn Plante on October 10, 2012, but she was released on October 27.

The imprisonment took place following government raids in July against individuals involved in Occupy protests around May Day. Among other items, the agents sought “anti-government or anarchist literature or material,” seizing political material as supposed evidence of “domestic terrorism”—essentially criminalizing political opinions. The FBI monitored the May Day events as part of a Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) operation.

Olejnik told a reporter for the Seattle newspaper *The Stranger* that she was only asked four questions about the events on May Day, of which she had no knowledge. Then the prosecutor showed her pictures of people and questioned her about their social contacts and political opinions. She refused to answer because, she said, “I truly believe that people have the right to believe whatever they want politically. And it’s none of the government’s business.”

When Plante also refused to answer the federal prosecutor’s questions, Judge Jones told her, “You hold the keys to your freedom” and that she could be released if she would “exercise [her] right to provide testimony.” The judge reminded Plante that she could remain in custody until the expiration of the grand

jury’s term, which is not until March 2014. In addition, there is the possibility of criminal contempt charges, which could extend the confinement period longer.

Olejnik and Duran were initially placed in solitary confinement at the SeaTac Federal Detention Center in Seattle, a maneuver their attorneys say is unusual. They were released from solitary confinement after a short time, only to be placed there again without explanation a few days after Christmas. Olejnik described solitary confinement as “intense psychological torture” in the article that appeared in *The Stranger*, shortly before SeaTac decided to return her there.

Legally, the court justifies confinement by claiming that Duran, Olejnik, and Pfeiffer have no Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination because the federal government has granted them immunity from prosecution. The real purpose of the confinement, however, is to intimidate any opposition to the political establishment and to test the machinery for repression. The single defendant convicted for acts arising out of the May Day events served just over a month in prison for causing damage to courthouse doors.

At the time when the federal government was monitoring and cracking down on protesters last year, President Obama signed into law the Federal Restricted Buildings and Grounds Improvement Act of 2011, which expands the criminalization of public protests. Since then, Obama has exponentially broadened the attack on democratic rights by declaring his “right” to assassinate anyone, anywhere, that he deems to be a “terrorist.”

The May Day raids in Washington and Oregon followed a series of actions carried out by the Obama administration targeting political opponents under the rubric of “domestic terrorism.” In September 2010, the homes of the Anti-War Committee and the Freedom

Road Socialist Organization were raided, with 23 individuals brought to testify before grand juries. In May of 2012, individuals involved in anti-NATO protests in Chicago were arrested on trumped-up “terror” charges.

Documents obtained in December 2012 in response to a Freedom of Information Act request by the Partnership for Public Justice Fund reveal that the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security worked with private corporations across the country to mount a response to growing protest movements, such as Occupy Wall Street.

These actions constitute a grave threat to the democratic rights of the entire working class. From the beginning, the “war on terror” has been utilized as a pretext for the expansion of police state measures by the ruling class in preparation for the inevitable social explosions resulting from austerity at home and war abroad.

This author recommends:

FBI raids homes of Occupy protesters in Oregon and Washington
[13 August 2012]

Hands off anti-Wall Street protesters
[14 August 2012]



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