

Free the NATO 3!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (US)

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The jail terms imposed on three young men arrested at an anti-NATO protest in 2012 are an outrageous and reactionary attack on democratic rights.

Last week, a Chicago judge sentenced Brian Church, 22, to five years in prison, Brent Betterly, 26, to six years, and Jared Chase, 28, to eight years. The vindictive prosecution of the three individuals with anarchist views exposes the real target of the “war on terror”: the repression and intimidation of all political opposition to the policies of the ruling class, at home and abroad.

Church, Betterly and Chase have been jailed for two years since their arrest, on the eve of the NATO summit in Chicago that was the target of days of protest demonstrations. In the case of Chase, who suffers from Huntington’s disease, the eight-year term is in effect a life sentence. An expert medical witness testified at his sentencing hearing that he has only about ten years to live.

The prosecution of the NATO 3 followed the template of political provocations that have become a staple in the build up of police-state powers under the Bush and Obama administrations.

Police agents select individuals they feel they can manipulate and set up. In the Chicago case, Jared Chase was apparently the prime target, as his illness made him particularly susceptible to provocation.

At least 17 police operatives infiltrated the ranks of the anti-NATO protesters as they assembled in Chicago in May 2012. Two cops, Nadia Chikko and Mehmet Uygun, befriended Church, Betterly and Chase, goaded them as they drank beer together in a Chicago apartment, and convinced them to fill the empty beer bottles with gasoline.

The three were drawn into discussion about throwing the bottles through the windows of the Obama campaign headquarters, Chicago police stations and the home of Mayor Rahm Emanuel. The police recorded the conversations, and tapes were played at the trial, but none of the defendants set foot outside the apartment or took

any action to advance their talk.

The three men were arrested and charged with multiple offenses under the anti-terrorism law adopted by the state of Illinois after the 9/11 attacks. They were targeted by the administration of Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Obama’s former chief of staff.

The targeting of the NATO 3 was part of a broader police infiltration of protest organizations. The two officers involved in the NATO 3 case, Chikko and Uygun, have a long record of infiltrating local Chicago protest campaigns to collect intelligence and select targets for frame-up. Other policemen infiltrated protests against public school closures, and a group demanding the building of a Level 1 trauma center on the city’s impoverished south side.

The arrest of the NATO 3 was followed by the mobilization of state resources in an effort to impose the harshest penalties possible. Screaming headlines about the “terror threat” accompanied the imposition of \$1.5 million in bail, keeping the young men locked up until their trial. Cook County State Attorney Anita Alvarez, who led the prosecution, publicly compared the defendants to the Boston Marathon bombers.

In the end, a jury acquitted them of all the terrorism charges, including material support for terrorism, conspiracy to commit terrorism and possession and manufacturing of an incendiary device with the intent to commit terrorism. The three were found guilty of lesser charges of possessing an incendiary device and mob action.

The jury decision was a partial setback for the prosecution. Alvarez was so angered by the jury decision that when an AP reporter suggested the verdict was a defeat, she asked him if he would like a Molotov cocktail thrown through his window. She then sought 14-year prison terms for offenses that would usually carry much lesser penalties.

Yet the fact remains: three men have been railroaded

into prison for their political views and as a consequence of a political frame-up.

The treatment of the NATO 3 reveals the type of methods that will be employed by the state against all opposition to the policies of the ruling class. As the WSWS warned, the principal target of the anti-democratic measures set up in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks is the American people.

The ruling class, under first Bush and now Obama, has systematically expanded the powers of the state. This has included the passage of the Patriot Act, the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security and the increasing militarization of local police forces. The president of the United States asserts the right to arrest, imprison and assassinate American citizens without due process.

A vast police-state spying apparatus has been erected, overseen by the NSA. Every phone call, email and electronic communication is monitored by spy agencies. It must be assumed that every protest organization is the target of police monitoring and potential infiltration. Whistleblowers like Bradley Manning, Julian Assange and Edward Snowden have been imprisoned or driven into political exile.

The “war on terror” has been the pretext for all of these actions, but their real source lies in the deep and growing social chasm between the corporate and financial elite that controls the state and both political parties, on the one hand, and the working class on the other. The ruling class is well aware that its policies are enormously unpopular, and that it is sitting on a social powder keg.

The Socialist Equality Party demands the release of the NATO 3 and the overturning of their conviction and sentencing. The defense of democratic rights and the abolition of the police-state measures must be linked to the independent mobilization of the working class in opposition to the political representatives of the corporate and financial aristocracy and the capitalist system they defend.



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