

FBI agents raid black nationalist group's homes, offices over bogus allegations of conspiracy with Russia

E.P. Milligan
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Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents conducted a series of raids on July 29 directed against the African People's Socialist Party (APSP) in St. Louis, Missouri and St. Petersburg, Florida.

The raids are linked to a 25-page indictment issued against Aleksandr Viktorovitch Ionov, a Russian national accused of “conspiracy to commit offense” against the United States (18 U.S.C. § 371), a loosely defined federal crime with a penalty of up to five years in prison as well as heavy fines.

The APSP as well as several other unidentified political groups, all of which remain unindicted at this point, are accused of having acted as “co-conspirators” with Ionov and Russian intelligence in order to undermine the authority of the United States, sow division within the broader population, and “interfere” in US elections.

All supposedly conspiratorial political activity listed in the indictment is protected under the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

The indictment against Ionov cites as evidence of an alleged conspiracy involving the targeted US-based organizations correspondence and collaboration with the Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia (AGMR), an organization headed by Ionov, which the FBI and the Department of Justice (DOJ) claim has ties to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB).

It further accuses senior members of the APSP of having known of AGMR's ties to the Russian state, and alleges that the APSP and other “co-conspirators” willingly received money from the Russian government—a claim the APSP has publicly denied.

The APSP's only activities noted in the indictment consist of holding rallies in various American cities opposing the “Genocide of African People in the United States” and making public statements denouncing US-NATO involvement in the war in Ukraine, while expressing political sympathy for Russia.

The case has all the hallmarks of a political frame-up

targeting a political organization for its opposition to the US-NATO war against Russia. It points to an attempt to intimidate and criminalize opposition to the war more broadly.

It should be noted that the indictment was drawn up against Ionov in the knowledge that he resides in Moscow and any attempt to extradite him to stand trial would be almost certain to fail. It appears that the main purpose of the indictment against Ionov is to justify the Biden administration's use of state repression against left-wing opponents within the US of Washington's imperialist agenda with regard to Russia.

The indictment explicitly refers to the ongoing conflict, devoting an entire section to the subject under the heading “2022: Russian Invasion of Ukraine.” It states:

On or about March 13, 2022, [Unidentified Co-Conspirator 4] gave a video presentation on behalf of [the APSP], in which she stated that [the APSP] and [Yeshitela], along with “the leaders of Venezuela, China, Iran, Cuba, and Nicaragua” had spoken out in opposition to the “U.S. imperialist-created” crisis in Ukraine and in solidarity with the people of Russia and their elected government and leadership.

“The impact of Russian malign foreign influence cannot be overstated,” said Luis Quesada, assistant director of the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division in an official Department of Justice statement on the indictment. Quesada then made an ominous warning: “The FBI will aggressively pursue any foreign government that attempts to divide American citizens and poison our democratic process.”

Heavily armed FBI agents raided the St. Louis home of APSP Chairman Omali Yeshitela, 80, and his wife Ona in the early morning hours of Friday, July 29. FBI agents drove

to their home in an armored vehicle, set off flash bang grenades throughout the neighborhood, hovered a drone at the front door of the house, and commanded through a loudspeaker that Yeshitela and Ona come outside with their hands up.

Yeshitela stated that the drone almost struck Ona in the face as she exited their home. Agents handcuffed them and forced them to sit on the curb while investigators searched the house, seizing their cellphones and computers.

Yeshitela, in a Facebook Live video, described the FBI's highly provocative behavior: "There are combat-clad FBI agents all over the place carrying automatic weapons. ... They not only are in front of the house, they are occupying the porch and the yard of the neighbors next door."

He noted that during the raid, agents had "broken a window downstairs" and forced their way into the apartment next door by smashing the door in. "They were making a big show in the community," he said. Neither Yeshitela nor Ona were shown a physical copy of the search warrant until well after the fact.

Simultaneous raids were carried out at APSP offices in St. Louis and in St. Petersburg, Florida. In all cases, agents used battering rams to knock down doors.

In St. Louis, agents detained APSP members and supporters at gunpoint and handcuffed them prior to searching the premises. In St. Petersburg, agents raided the APSP-affiliated radio station as well.

FBI officers also went to the home of Akila Anai, an APSP member in St. Petersburg, and lured her outside by telling her the lie that her car had been broken into. Agents proceeded to search her vehicle, confiscating her laptop and cellphone.

The APSP was founded in 1972, developing out of the black nationalist and student radical movements of the 1960s. The party was founded on a platform of self-determination for Africans and African Americans and reparations for slavery. Along with a broad swathe of left-wing organizations, it became a target of repression by the US government under COINTELPRO. The APSP notes on its website that during this period, Yeshitela "was constantly being imprisoned."

Yeshitela acknowledges having attended an AGMR conference in 2014, where he met Ionov. This is entirely legal and constitutionally protected political activity.

He flatly rejects any suggestion that he or the APSP received money from, let alone carried out orders on behalf of, Ionov or any Russian official.

"They have accused us of taking money from Russia," Yeshitela stated at a news conference on July 29. "We've never taken [money] from the Russian government. But I'm not saying that because I'm morally opposed from taking

money from Russians or anyone else who wants to support the struggles for Black people. ... Don't tell us that we can't have friends that you don't like."

He accused the US government of seeking to use the APSP as a "pawn" in its proxy war with Russia.

The unsubstantiated allegation that opponents of the war are "co-conspirators" with a foreign power are intended to bolster the phantom of a Russian bogeyman in the public consciousness. The escalating military aggression by the US against Russia and China is already being accompanied by increasing repression and an attempt to criminalize left-wing opposition to the unpopular war.

The Biden administration is intensifying the neo-McCarthyite anti-Russia fearmongering that has been a staple of the US political establishment, and particularly the Democratic Party, over the past 15 years.

This was, and remains, the focus of the Democratic Party's opposition to Trump—deemed insufficiently aggressive toward Moscow—not his fascistic contempt for constitutional and democratic norms and his dictatorial agenda.

The anti-Russia campaign includes the censorship by social media corporations with intimate ties to the military and intelligence agencies, such as Google, of left-wing and anti-war websites, including the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The targeting of the APSP in the context of a rising tide of working class struggle and opposition to the imperialist proxy war against Russia in Ukraine is preparation for a direct confrontation with the working class itself.

The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS have fundamental political differences with the APSP. Despite these differences, we condemn the state attack on the organization and its members and demand the withdrawal of the Justice Department's allegations against it.



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