

Victim of FBI Raid Speaks Out

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Antiwar activists in Minneapolis and Chicago targeted in last week's FBI raids for their support of nationalist movements defined by the US as "terrorist" say they have done nothing illegal and that the invasion of their homes came without warning.

Most of those raided have been served with subpoenas to appear before a grand jury in Chicago on October 12. An unknown number of activists in other states, including Michigan, North Carolina, California and Wisconsin, have been approached by the FBI for interviews, although it is not clear if additional subpoenas have been issued.

Jess Sundin, whose home in south Minneapolis was raided and who received a grand jury subpoena, spoke with the World Socialist Web Site about the government attack.

"At 7 AM I awoke to the sound of banging at my front door," Sundin said. "My daughter and my partner were already awake. By the time I got downstairs, there were six or seven federal agents in our house.

"When they came in and asked if we had any guns in the house, my six-year-old said, 'We don't believe in guns'. She took offense at the suggestion. We don't even allow toy guns in our house.

"The agents showed me a search warrant and proceeded to go through everything in my house, every room. Among the things they seized, they took books, they took music CD's, photographs, computers, my cell phone, check book, papers, camera and a lot more.

"We were very clear that we were not going to talk to them. They gave both my partner and me our subpoenas for the grand jury. They told us we were not detained, we could leave, but no one else was allowed in. We couldn't use the phone, except to call a lawyer.

"They took my phone into their possession and kept it with boxes and lists. I could hear it going off but I wasn't allowed to answer it. Steff, my partner, kept possession of her phone but we weren't allowed to use it to make or receive phone calls.

"They took about four hours to search the house. I don't know how many boxes they carried out. They gave me a receipt, but I refused to sign it. I said, 'I don't know what you've taken.'"

Sundin said it was "immediately clear" to her that she was being targeted for her antiwar activism, and, in particular, her activity against US foreign policy in Colombia and the Middle East.

"The US is heavily involved in Colombia," Sundin said. "They've been building military bases and they've been funding the Colombian government's war against its own people. It's the third largest recipient of US foreign aid in the world.

"Israel is the largest recipient of US foreign aid. And the Palestinian people have lived for generations—sixty-plus years—without an internationally recognized state. Their homes are bulldozed, they're second-class citizens with no right to participate in the political process. And in places like Gaza bombs fall from the sky."

Sundin said she is a member of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, a founding member of the Anti-War Committee of the Twin Cities, and a member of AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) Local 3800. She is a clerical worker at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

Sundin's opposition to US foreign policy took her to Iraq in 1998, where the sanctions regime imposed on the country by the Clinton administration and its allies had created a humanitarian disaster.

"We went to a children's hospital where I was most struck by the empty shelves in the pharmacy and the stories that doctors shared of a health care system that had been the best in the Middle East, but had been paralyzed by the sanctions and the war," she said. "So you had children that died because there weren't IV fluids to give them. You had people who died because they couldn't get inhalers for asthma, antibiotics, heart medicine. These things just weren't available there... The most striking thing I saw was Al Ameriya, which was a bomb shelter that was destroyed by two US smart bombs in 1991."

Sundin said she does not know what sort of case the government intends to make against her. The search warrant indicates the FBI may well seek criminal prosecution based on the "Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996," which, in effect, proscribes political speech in support of organizations the US president defines as "terrorist."

The law, which prohibits "knowingly provid[ing] material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization," even if that support consists of "expert advice or assistance" for "lawful, non-violent purposes," was upheld in June by the Supreme Court in the case Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project.

Sundin said she "can't speculate on what the government's plans are, but I will say that when we arise to the defense of democratic rights for any movement, it is for the greater protection of every movement."

She concluded by pointing to the threat that the raids and grand jury subpoenas pose not just to the targeted individuals, but to their families. "Lastly, I will say that I am the mother of a six-year-old," Sundin said. "A number of us involved in this case are the parents of young children, and I'm worried about what this means for our kids. I believe that I have the right to speak and that I wasn't putting my job in jeopardy by doing so."

Those raided by the FBI are clearly under attack for constitutionally protected political speech. The raids and grand jury hearings, at which those subpoenaed do not have the right to counsel, represent a frontal attack on democratic rights and a major step in the direction of police-state forms of rule. The Obama administration has carried out the raids to establish

a precedent and test the waters for far more sweeping attacks on political opponents of the government's reactionary policies, both foreign and domestic.

The Socialist Equality Party and the World Socialist Web Site call on all workers, youth and students who oppose the war policies of the government and all those who uphold democratic rights to defend the victims of the FBI raids. We have fundamental political differences with the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, which has its roots in Maoist student groups from the 1960s and 1970s, but we are unreserved in our defense of the democratic rights of the organization and its members against state repression.

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