

Remaining RNC 8 Defendants Accept Misdemeanor Plea Agreement

Community service sentence but no jail time

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ST. PAUL, MN—The case against eight Twin Cities anarchists known as the RNC 8 came to a conclusion October 19, when the remaining four defendants pled guilty to misdemeanors resolving their legal and political battle stemming from arrests at the 2008 Republican National Convention.

Last September, county prosecutors dropped all charges against RNC 8 defendants Monica Bicking, Eryn Trimmer, and Luce Guillen-Givins. In June, RNC 8 defendant Erik Oseland entered a guilty plea to one count of conspiracy to commit criminal damage, a gross misdemeanor

The dismissal of the charges and the reduction of felony charges demonstrates that the prosecutions were the state's response to the defendants' political beliefs and activism rather than any illegal acts. The eight were preemptively arrested before the convention in St. Paul, some in raids by heavily armed SWAT teams.

Defendants Rob Czernik and Max Specktor plead guilty to one count each of gross misdemeanor conspiracy to riot. Garrett Fitzgerald and Nathanael Secor plead guilty to one count each of gross misdemeanor conspiracy to destroy property.

Under the terms of the plea agreements, the defendants will complete 100 hours of community service, one to two years probation, and pay a \$200 fine. There is no jail time or restitution. Additionally, the defendants will not be required to testify in criminal proceedings arising from their cases.

Jaime Hokanson, of the RNC 8 Defense Committee, said, "This plea must be embarrassing for [the county]. Their case was so weak from the beginning that through political pressure, they have been forced from pursuing felony terrorism charges into settling on a plea with no jail time."

Hokanson explained the circumstances that led to the plea: "The way the criminal justice system actually works is to wear down defendants through grueling proceedings, not to honor the supposed right to trial by jury in which guilt must be proven in open court. What the state calls 'justice' is just more of the coercion and force that the defendants and thousands of other people were organizing against [at the convention] in the first place."

The resolution of the case marks the mostly successful end of a wide-ranging campaign to defend the RNC 8. Since September 2008, fund-raisers and other events have been held in dozens of cities nationwide, and as far away as Russia and New Zealand. In spite of efforts by the state to vilify the defendants for their openly anarchist politics, monetary donations to the RNC 8 Defense Committee surged.

Thousands of people signed a petition that was delivered to the Ramsey County, Minnesota prosecuting attorney before the original felony terrorism charges were dropped in April 2009. Supporters continued to demand that all charges be dropped—as a result, defendants Monica Bicking, Luce Guillen-Givins and Eryn Trimmer were released from prosecution.

"We have long held that the charges against the RNC 8 were politically motivated, as the defendants were openly organizing resistance to the Republican National Convention as anarchists," said Hokanson. "Police intimidation,

harassment and slander of activists in the lead up to the RNC was part of a broader strategy of criminalizing political organizing, and this view is now widely accepted in the Twin Cities,” he said. “Many of us are disappointed we will not have the chance to further expose the criminalization of dissent at trial, but we are pleased the state did not succeed in sending eight respected activists to prison.”

RNC 8 supporters planned an array of solidarity activities during the expected trial including a series of six joint fund-raisers with other social justice organizations. Those events will go on as planned, demonstrating a continuing bond with Twin Cities social justice causes. This solidarity helped strengthen the activist community against repression from the state, as evidenced in the broad support of anti-war activists in the wake of FBI raids in September.

“Supporting the RNC 8 through their ordeal has made our community and our movement stronger in many ways,” said Melissa Hill of the RNC 8 Defense Committee. “The judicial system always exerts pressure on everyone, and activists are not exceptional in this. Now, our struggle against state repression moves into a new phase. The continued FBI harassment of activists in our community calls on us to stand together in solidarity to fight back against attempts to destroy our movement. We will meet this call.” But as usual, the state shows no shame for its repression. In October, a National Guard advertisement hung on the side of the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in Minneapolis, proposed site of the 2012 Democratic National Convention, depicted Guard members being deployed against protesters during the 2008 events.

The huge multiple-panel advertisement, stretching around the sports facility depicts various Minnesota Viking players above the text, “FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE.” Another panel shows battle-ready National Guard above text reading, “MINNESOTA NATIONAL GUARD...MINNESOTA'S FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE.” The photo is a composite image derived from a September 1 National Guard press image showing 150 soldiers and a helicopter deployed against peaceful protesters during Day One of the convention.

Nigel Parry, coordinator of the RNC '08 Report project, a citizen's archive of media reports, government documents, and other resources relating to the convention, said: “Of the more than 800 people arrested during the Republican Convention, 75 percent of those were seized in mass arrests. On September 1, the Minnesota National Guard, coordinating with police, drove protesters, bystanders, and concertgoers into the first of three mass arrests that took place during the RNC.

“Using percussion grenades and teargas, the army and police drove protesters and onlookers where the protesters, together with members of the public attempting to reach the free ‘Take Back Labor Day’ concert on Harriet Island, were surrounded and detained. Over 200 people were arrested and held for up to 72 hours. No one arrested was ultimately prosecuted and there is a civil suit against the City of Saint Paul for the mass arrest.”

Parry also said, “It is unbelievable that the National Guard would use an advertising image under a banner declaring ‘Minnesota's first line of defense’, which depicts its soldiers being deployed against Minnesotans and other American citizens. The fact that this image appears hanging on the proposed site of the 2012 Democratic National Convention completes the Orwellian picture perfectly.”

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