

Activists Get \$50,000 for FBI & Police Raid Prior to 2008 Republican Convention

Preemptive, politically motivated raids are the police tactics used to suppress dissent

Fifth Estate Collective

2011

St. Paul, Minn. — Three activists and their attorneys won a \$50,000 settlement May 23 in a lawsuit that challenged an August 30, 2008 police raid on a St. Paul home before that year's Republican National Convention (RNC).

The plaintiffs in the case, Sarah Coffey (who wrote the FE's Detroit anarchist convergence article in the Spring 2011 edition), Erin Stalnaker and Kris Hermes, are giving most of the award to the Committee to Stop FBI Repression, the Institute for Anarchist Studies, and the formation of a national legal defense fund for political activists.

The St. Paul house raid was one of several police actions taken against protesters days before the RNC began, including the search and seizure at a central political meeting space. A separate suit brought by the ACLU was settled June 3 when the Ramsey County sheriff's office agreed to pay \$27,000 to six plaintiffs who were victims of the illegal raid at the protest headquarters.

"The City of St. Paul and the federal government were forced to pay for their politically-motivated attack on organizers," said Coffey. "Rather than spend years in court fighting the government over its political surveillance program, we decided to use settlement money to invest in projects that oppose such repressive tactics."

The lawsuit, accusing the St. Paul Police Department and the FBI of violating the plaintiffs' First, Fourth and Fourteenth amendment rights, is so far the largest settlement of its kind stemming from convention protests.

The raid garnered significant media attention at the time due to an hours-long standoff between 10 activists and residents and a heavily armed police contingent that had surrounded the duplex. Because the police attempted to raid the home without a search warrant, those inside refused them entry.

After allegedly receiving verbal authority from a local judge, the police used force to enter and detained everyone inside. The owner, several tenants and activists, including members of the I-Witness Video collective were detained for hours. No illegal items were found, no one was arrested and nothing was visibly seized, although computers and camera equipment were searched.

The search warrant affidavit relied solely on a confidential informant who made the claim that weapons were being shipped to the home using the U.S. Postal Service. In a sensationalist move, the police also tried to tie property owner Michael Whalen to a defunct 1970s political group, the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), to bolster the warrant's outrageous claim of arms shipments. However, once inside, police discovered that the boxes contained only vegan literature. Unsatisfied, they broke through a locked attic door to enter the neighboring but separate house, which plaintiffs claimed was the operation's true objective.

The plaintiffs' attorneys also contributed a portion of the award to the Impact Fund, which provides money to small law firms and nonprofits for lawsuits involving issues of civil rights, environmental justice, and poverty.

The plaintiffs in the ACLU suit are also donating their litigation award to local organizations that support infrastructure and capacity for social justice movement building.



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