

# Inquisition 2012

**Northwest federal grand jury targets anarchists. Activists jailed for their resistance to the attempt to criminalize a philosophy.**

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As of early November, three people were detained in the SeaTac Federal Detention Facility near Seattle because of their refusal to provide a federal grand jury with information about anarchist beliefs and associations.

Federal government prosecutors claim they are investigating violent actions at demonstrations, but the Portland-based Committee Against Political Repression says the extensive surveillance, SWAT raids, and grand jury subpoenas are not simply a response to a few broken windows, but an effort to criminalize the political philosophy of anarchism.

Local activists Matt Duran and Katherine “KteeO” Olejnik are charged with civil contempt for refusing to testify. They, and anyone else subpoenaed by the panel during its term, can be incarcerated until it is dissolved in March 2014, or longer if its term is extended.

This political inquisition went public in July 2012, when several homes in the Pacific Northwest were raided by heavily armed local police SWAT teams, and FBI and Joint Terrorism Task Force agents, using battering rams, flash grenades, and assault rifles. They also exercised search warrants for literature and other items related to anarchist activities, and what government agencies vaguely identify as an “ongoing violent crime investigation.”

At the same time, subpoenas were issued for people to testify before a Seattle-based federal grand jury. In September, the jailing of anarchists who refused to cooperate with the nightmarish proceedings began.

All of those subpoenaed so far have bravely declared their resolve to resist the grand jury demands despite the hardships this creates for them, their families, and friends. Leah-Lynn Plante, the third person to resist the grand jury, has vividly discussed the fear and emotional turmoil she experienced from the military-style raid on her home, the exacerbation of previous emotional problems it has caused, and not being able to sleep properly ever since.

Sadly, what the government has been doing in the Northwest is far from an aberration, but an integral part of the normal ongoing state repression of dissenters. Since anarchist activities and ideas are currently receiving so much public attention, and even respect, it is no surprise they are being targeted.

In March 2012, the federal government formed a grand jury in Seattle to investigate political activities. But this only came to public notice in July when homes were invaded. These heavy-handed government moves can be best understood in the context of the past two years of militant protest activities throughout the U.S. In the Pacific Northwest, there have been increasing numbers and intensity of actions in opposition to widespread police brutality and murders, the vicious and degrading prison system, austerity measures, and decreases in public transit service with fare increases, deteriorating educational opportunities, loss of jobs and affordable housing, gentrification, racist and anti-immigrant policies, the crackdown against the #Occupy movement, and the general humiliations of everyday life.

Police attacks with so-called non-lethal weapons, arrests, prolonged court cases, and imprisonment, along with increasingly draconian laws, have not significantly quelled these diverse ongoing protest actions. This is of great

concern to those in power, particularly as people focusing on different social issues and approaches have joined together, albeit tentatively and with ongoing debates and disagreements over methods and goals.

The majority of those subpoenaed to testify have so far been anarchists, but the sweep of this attempt at intimidation also includes those who do not consider themselves anarchists or anti-authoritarians.

Federal grand juries have long been used in the U.S. to collect information about individuals and groups involved in social movements and to intimidate people as part of the government's long history of repressing dissent. These bodies consist of 16 to 23 jurors chosen solely by government prosecutors with no procedure for those called to testify or their attorneys to protest the empanelment of any juror based on that person's bias or any other grounds.

The very existence of such panels and what is being investigated are considered to be secret, and those subpoenaed may not even be told the purpose of the hearings. Moreover, there is no limit on the kinds of questions people can be asked including very personal matters, information about friends and acquaintances, as well as political activities.

The context is especially intimidating because the proceedings are held behind closed doors, and neither attorneys of those summoned nor the general public are permitted to attend. No one knows in advance whether or not a grand jury will charge any of those subpoenaed or their associates with crimes.

Over the years, many people subpoenaed before grand juries have refused to testify, risking jail for civil contempt, whether or not the grand jury has eventually decided to charge them with a specific crime. Those who refuse to testify can be held as long as 18 months, and extensions of periods of imprisonment are not unheard of.

In 2010 and 2011 there were militant demonstrations against police brutality and for students' rights in the Northwest. Following these, #Occupy and the West Coast port shutdowns involved many people in actions related to social issues for the first time. And, as the various protests have continued, people have been supporting each other in their increasing militancy.

Moreover, sympathy for, if not active involvement in, targeted vandalism has been on the rise. All of this has led to increasingly militant public demonstrations, including the 2012 May Day demonstrations.

Well before May 1, the international working peoples' day, mayors and police chiefs throughout the country were preparing the public to accept justification for government crackdowns by announcing that they were expecting "anarchist violence" and intending to meet it with strict control measures. The federal grand jury formed last March in Seattle is clearly part of the crackdown.

While it is wrong to conclude that growing militancy is the direct cause of the intensifying government repression, it certainly has been used as justification.

Seattle's liberal/progressive Mayor Mike McGinn strongly reiterated this message immediately before the scheduled May day demonstrations, on April 30. On May 1, McGinn went so far as to declare an emergency situation, claiming anarchists constituted a threat to public safety. As it turned out, what occurred was vandalism against corporate and government property.

Then in July came the raids on homes in Seattle and Olympia, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, along with subpoenas requiring people to testify before the grand jury.

On August 2, only Leah-Lynn Plante appeared at the Federal Courthouse in Seattle. After formally telling the grand jury that she refused to answer their questions, she was temporarily allowed to return home. But, Plante and two others were subpoenaed to appear again in September.

On September 13, the grand jury met again, and this time Plante and Matt Duran appeared, but both refused to testify. Duran was stripped of his right to remain silent by being given immunity from prosecution based on what he might tell the grand jury. He still refused to testify and was charged with civil contempt and held in solitary confinement for almost a month before being moved into the general prison population.

On September 27 another subpoenaed person, Katherine "KteeO" Olejnik appeared and refused to testify. Since, like Duran, she was stripped of her legal rights by being given immunity, she was also charged with civil contempt and incarcerated.

Plante refused to testify for a third time on October 10, and became the third person to be imprisoned for refusing to cooperate. However, on October 17 she appeared before the grand jury and was quietly released. The conditions of her release have not yet been made public.

On October 25, another person, Matthew “Maddy” Pfeiffer was served with a subpoena to appear before the grand jury on November 7. After receiving the subpoena, Maddy joined the others in declaring the intention to not cooperate.

It is clear that the Seattle grand jury’s intent is to gather information on anarchists and others for the purpose of further surveillance and repression, as well as to make cooperation between dissenters difficult by creating fear and distrust among those who have participated in protest activities. The grand jury resisters clearly articulate their intention to resist this.

As Olejnik says, “For me choosing to resist a grand jury is about humanity—I cannot and will not say something that could greatly harm a person’s life and providing information that could lead to long term incarceration would be doing that.”

Labeling those being targeted as “anarchists,” even those with long histories of identifying themselves as other than anarchist, does not simply stem from police and FBI ignorance of differences between various political and social perspectives. It enables the government to send the message that cooperating with anarchists, or even possessing and/or reading anarchist literature, is dangerous.

Nevertheless, the raids and grand jury proceedings have had the opposite effect, resulting in over 400 organizations and thousands of individuals expressing their support for and solidarity with those affected, and many actions in solidarity across the U.S. and the world.

For more information: Committee Against Political Repression at <http://nopoliticalrepression.wordpress.com/>

# fifth Estate

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