

Three from Cleveland 4 Sentenced — Issue 388

Government provocateur invented crime claims more victims.

Jenny from Sacramento Prisoner Support

Three entrapped anarchists, part of the Cleveland 4, were sentenced November 21 to harsh but lighter prison terms than what the federal prosecutors requested for an alleged conspiracy to blow up a highway bridge near Cleveland on May Day.

Three of the Cleveland 4, Douglas Wright, Connor Stevens, and Brandon Baxter, received 11 years, eight years, and almost ten years respectively on federal terrorism charges, followed by lifetime probation. The fourth, Joshua Stafford, as of this writing, is in a federal facility undergoing competency testing.

By contrast, a week earlier, a Texas Tech University Saudi student was sentenced to life in federal prison for a bomb plot that included former President George W. Bush's Dallas home.

The group was arrested May 1 by a swarm of federal agents. They were immediately identified as anarchists by the government and demonized by the media.

Anthony Hayne, arrested along with the 4, began cooperating with the government soon after his arrest, hoping for a less severe sentence than what the others faced. Ironically, his plea deal included a 15 to 19 year sentence. As of this writing, he has withdrawn his guilty plea.

Hayne's cooperation is sad for many reasons, but perhaps most distinctly, 1) for its effect on his codefendants who had already felt the sting of betrayal once in this ordeal, and who definitely took his cooperation into consideration when deciding to plead guilty and, 2) because none of them, Hayne included, should have been arrested in the first place.

The Cleveland 4 were entrapped.

The federal affidavit in the case states that a 38-year-old informant, Shaquille Azir, was directed by the FBI to attend an event "held by a protest group" (the "protest group" was Occupy Cleveland the event was an act of civil disobedience).

Azir was sent there in large part because of the reported presence of anarchists. It was at this event in October 2011 that he met and formed a "friendship" with Douglas Wright. Less than a year later, Douglas and four others were fighting trumped up charges.

The informant had to work hard to bring this case to the government. Azir provided one of the defendants with Adderall (kickstarting a recently overcome addiction), he gave all of them alcohol (two of them were underage), shared his vehicle, and brought them a computer.

Some of the defendants did not have a home or a stable income. The informant provided shelter and employment to at least three of the five. Azir supplied the explosives and the know-how while applying various kinds of pressure on them. The young men faced incredibly manipulative inducements from an informant—an informant who was paid and directed by the government. It appears as though the sentencing judge took this into account with his relatively lenient sentences.

Tragically, the Cleveland 4 case represents an alarming trend in post-9/11 policing. In recent years, the number of cases involving “pre-emptive prosecutions” has dramatically increased. In almost all of these cases the same story line unfolds.

A government informant is sent into a community the government identifies as a target. Often this includes environmentalists, animal rights activists, anarchists, and, most often since 9/11, Muslims.

The informant befriends people within the community. These are often people they perceive to be weak or who can be easily manipulated. Very rarely, if ever, are these the core organizers. Then, with the help of the government, often including the people who will end up prosecuting the case—the informant quite literally creates a crime and entraps their new “friends” in it. The informant will never be prosecuted for the crime they created. They are often working for the government in an effort to work off old charges, or for leniency in another case, such as Azir who has several outstanding charges.

The case of Eric McDavid in 2006 was a striking example of this kind of pre-emptive prosecution (See support-eric.org). A young informant was paid over \$65,000 to create a crime and entrap Eric in it. No action was ever carried out, but in 2008 Eric was sentenced to almost 20 years for what amounts to thought crime. In May, people were arrested in Chicago during NATO protests and charged with serious felonies. Those arrested were targeted for their political views and associations.

The government is manufacturing crime to instill fear in the population at large, which they hope will justify the demonization of entire movements of people.

We need to stand strong—together—in the face of repression. We need to ensure that when the state targets and attacks our friends and comrades, we’re with them every step of the way. Visit: cleveland4solidarity.org for more info.

Jenny works with Sacramento Prisoner Support and June 11th. They have just issued Government Repression, Prisoner Support, 157 pp., available from J&L Printing, Denver Colo.; \$10, order through pandlprinting.com. FE review next issue.

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