

Free the Cleveland 4

Entrapped Activists Need Movement Support

Amanda Schemkes

2017



The Cleveland 4 need continued movement support as they deal with harsh sentences resulting from the interest that the government has in orchestrating terrorism convictions.

The Cleveland 4 are Brandon Baxter, Connor Stevens, Doug Wright, and Joshua Stafford, a group of young Occupy activists who were entrapped into a government-created terrorism plot to blow up a bridge in 2012.

They were sentenced to almost a decade in federal prison followed by lifetime supervised release due to a terrorism enhancement.

As the Occupy Cleveland encampment fell apart and the four men were struggling to deal with poverty, addiction, mental health issues, and the loss of community, a paid government informant, Shaquille Azir, preyed upon their vulnerability and need for support and pulled them into a web of manipulation.

Azir gave them jobs, money, food, alcohol, drugs, and promised to help them and their families, and the remnants of Occupy with financial support.

He spent months coercing or insisting that they participate in a plot to place fake, government-supplied explosives at the base of a bridge in Cleveland.

Such coercion has been a common pattern since 9/11: The FBI creates a terrorism plot, entraps vulnerable young men in it, and then captures the fabricated terrorists—allowing the government to manipulate the public into accepting any form of surveillance or violence employed in the name of counter-terrorism efforts.

In this case, prosecuting the Cleveland 4 served the added purpose of allowing the government to effectively chill any inclination people may have had to be involved with Occupy, identify as anarchists, criticize the corporate State, or effectively challenge the status quo.

The Cleveland 4 lost their appeal of the terrorism enhancement. They've endured time in high security prisons, done long stretches in solitary confinement, and have their communications subjected to heightened monitoring.

Brandon, Connor, Doug, and Joshua need increased and continued support to send the message that such government tactics won't frighten resistance movements out of organizing, out of growing, or out of challenging State power.

Although locked down hard, Brandon has written, "I've lived my time incarcerated by the philosophy that no one can take this time from me unless I choose to let them, that so long as I spend each day productively, then that time is not wasted; it's still mine."

Visit the Cleveland 4 Solidarity website at Cleveland4Solidarity.org/ . follow Cleveland 4 Solidarity on Facebook at facebook.com/freethe4/ and on Twitter at twitter.com/FreeCleveland4.

Amanda Schemkes is a grassroots organizer and Lawyer, who does support work for political prisoners.

Write to the Cleveland 4; send them books, donate to their commissary fund.

Brandon Baxter #57972-060, FCI Pekin, PO Box 5000, Pekin, IL 61555

Connor Stevens #57978-060 FCI Manchester PO Box 4000 Manchester, KY 40962

Doug Wright #57973-060 FCI Edgefield PO Box 725, Edgefield, SC 29824

Joshua Stafford #57976-060, USP McCreary, PO Box 3000, Pine Knot, KY 42635

Other prison news

BARRETT BROWN RELEASED

Investigative journalist Barrett Brown was released from federal prison in late November and sent to a halfway house outside Dallas.

Brown is the founder of Project PM, a crowd-sourced investigation into the cyber-industrial complex.

He spent 28 months behind bars on charges related to the hacking of the private intelligence firm, Stratfor, exposing how the firm spied on activists on behalf of corporations.

Brown was targeted for investigating the highly secretive world of private intelligence and military contractors. Before entering prison, Brown said, "The U.S. government decided today that because I did such a good job at investigating the cyber-industrial complex, they're now going to send me to investigate the prison-industrial complex."

As part of a plea bargain to avoid a possible 100 year sentence, he pleaded guilty in 2014 to some of the charges, including transmitting threats, accessory to a cyber-attack and obstruction of justice.

REBECCA RUBIN RELEASED

Green Scare prisoner Rebecca Rubin was released from a halfway house in April. According to the Earth First! Newswire, Rubin was sentenced in 2014 to five years in federal prison for numerous Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front actions, including the arsons of Vail Ski Resort and US Forest Industries, and liberating horses from and burning down Bureau of Land Management facilities in California and Oregon.

Rubin was a fugitive in Canada for a decade, but surrendered in 2013, pleaded guilty, but did so as a non-cooperating defendant. Her surprisingly light sentence came at the hands of a liberal federal judge who also ordered her to write a review of a Malcolm Gladwell pop culture book. See earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/



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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/398-summer-2017/free-the-cleveland-4>
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