

Open letter from trade union activists condemning the FBI attacks on civil liberties:

As trade union activists, we are writing to speak out against the escalating attacks on civil liberties in the United States. On September 24, 2010, the FBI carried out coordinated raids on the homes and offices of fourteen anti-war activists in Minnesota, Illinois and Michigan. During the raids, the FBI confiscated everything from computers and mailing lists to children's drawings and photos of Martin Luther King.

These raids are part of an alarming trend to criminalize dissent in the United States. Four days prior to the September 24<sup>th</sup> raids, the Office of the Inspector General of the United States revealed that the FBI has systematically and illegally spied on political activists; that FBI director Robert Mueller lied to Congress about details of the surveillance; and that agents frequently confuse civil disobedience with "domestic terrorism."

During the September 24 raids, FBI agents served subpoenas on activists, compelling them to testify before a grand jury in Chicago. Those called to testify are not allowed legal representation during their testimony. If they refuse to cooperate, they face imprisonment, jeopardizing their jobs, homes and families. If they agree to testify, they give credence to an illegitimate fishing expedition. All have refused to testify. Prosecutors have long misused the grand jury process to harass progressive activists. During the 1960s and 1970s, prosecutors used the grand jury to distract and threaten activists in the movements against the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement.

From the Industrial Workers of the World's (IWW) fight for free speech in the 1910s to the major labor-inspired civil liberties court decisions of the 1930s the labor movement has often been in the forefront of defending the right to speak and protest. Trade unionists understood that without the ability to speak out, union efforts would be crushed. Of necessity, the fight for civil liberties went hand in hand with the fight for workers' rights.

Ten of the fourteen victims of the raids are union members in good-standing. Many have years of experience leading the fight for labor rights. Joe Iosbaker, whose house was raided in Chicago, is the chief steward at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a member of the SEIU Local 73 executive board.

A growing number of trade unionists are speaking out against these attacks on civil liberties. The AFSCME Council 5 convention, representing 46,000 public

employees in Minnesota passed a resolution noting “the recent FBI raids are reminiscent of the Palmer Raids of the 1920’s, the McCarthy hearings of the 1950’s, and the FBI’s harassment of the civil rights movement, and our grave concern that these raids be the beginning of a new and dangerous assault on the First Amendment rights of every union fighter, international solidarity activist or anti-war campaigner.” Central labor councils in San Francisco, Duluth, San Jose, and Troy, New York have passed resolutions condemning the raids. Local unions, including Teamsters Local 705, AFT 1493, AFSCME Local 3800, and AFT 6157 have passed resolutions.

We call on all trade unionists to speak out against these attacks on the right to dissent. As fighters against power and privilege in society, trade unionists, more than anyone, need to have the right to dissent. Yet the right to speak out is under attack.

We also call upon President Obama and Attorney General Holder: end the repression of anti-war, international solidarity, and labor activists; return all materials seized in the raid; and call off the grand jury.

Signed (list in formation),

Richard Berg, Past President, Teamsters 743

Phyllis Walker, President, AFSCME 3800

Peter Rachleff, Labor Historian, Macalaster College

Dave Riehle, former Local Chairman, United Transportation Union Local 650

Gladys McKenzie, Field Representative, AFSCME Council 5

Cherrene Horazuk, Chief Steward, AFSCME 3800

Joe Burns, Labor Attorney/Negotiator

To sign on to the open letter, send your name, title/affiliation, and whether it is for ID purposes only to [labor.stop.fbi@gmail.com](mailto:labor.stop.fbi@gmail.com).

For more information go to [www.stopfbi.net](http://www.stopfbi.net).