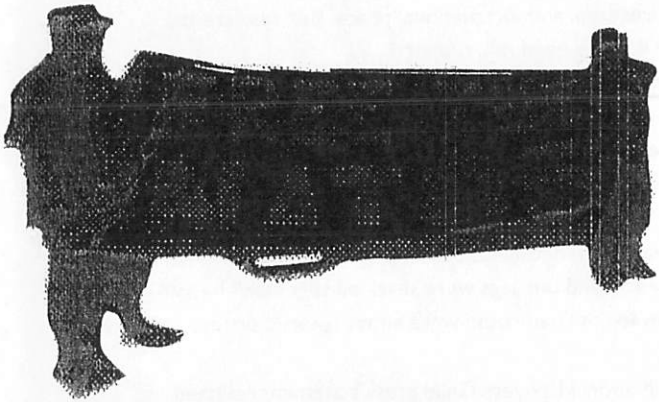

Who Are The NATO 5?

A Brief Outline of State Repression in Chicago and how you can help

By The NATO 5 Defense Committee
http://nato5support.wordpress.com

Defend the NATO 5

The arrest of five activists in Chicago just days before the NATO summit on May 20, 2012, came as a shock but not a surprise to anyone. The three separate cases of the NATO 5, Occupy activists arrested and still imprisoned for protesting the NATO Summit, are yet another example of State repression against those seeking economic equality, political freedom, and international peace. But who are the NATO 5 and why do they need our support?

In the late midnight hours a few days before the NATO Summit last May, Chicago police raided a Bridgeport apartment where several activists of the Occupy Movement were staying. Officers from the Organized Crime Division kicked in the door, shackled the nine people inside and put bags over their heads. Darrin Annussek, one of those detained and released, told CBS News: "For 18 hours, we were handcuffed to a bench, and our legs were shackled together," he said. "Some of our cries for the bathroom were either ignored or met with silence."

According to a National Lawyers Guild press statement released one day after the May 16 raid:

> "Police entered an apartment with guns drawn and tackled one of the tenants to the floor in his kitchen. Two tenants were handcuffed for more than two hours in their living room while police searched their apartment and a neighboring unit, repeatedly calling one of the tenants a "Commie faggot." A search warrant produced four hours after police broke into the apartment was missing a judge's signature, according to witnesses."

These acts of aggression and abuse targeting activists were shocking for their brutality, but they are all too common tactics used by law enforcement and politicians to attack the left. The Chicago police, the State's Attorney's office and Mayor Rahm Emanuel's administration are following a script that has been deployed again and again in the effort to crack down on protest against social and economic inequality.

What follows is the story of how these five activists—Jared Chase, Brian Church, Brent Betterly, Mark Neiweem and Sebastian Senakiewicz—fell prey to a carefully orchestrated strategy by Chicago police and public officials to target, infiltrate, entrap and harass activists as part of a larger effort to discredit protest, increase police

surveillance, and expand corporate welfare in the city of Chicago.

Policing dissent and Cashing in on Fear

The response of Chicago activist and legal communities, which have stood in defense of the NATO 5, was swift and certain. "We cannot say enough that we believe that these charges are absolutely... trumped-up," Sarah Gelsomino of the People's Law Office and the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) in Chicago told the media. "Charging these people who are here to peacefully protest against NATO for terrorism, when in reality the police have been terrorizing activists in Chicago, is absolutely outrageous."

In fact, the raids of apartments and pre-emptive arrests of dozens of activists in the days leading up to the NATO summit were just one aspect of a months-long campaign to undermine efforts to organize a series of protests against the Chicago gathering. The organization NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is a military alliance between major western superpowers. It is responsible for multiple violent interventions abroad-from Kosovo in the heart of Europe to Afghanistan in Central Asia and Libya in North Africa.

Here in Chicago, the summit in May was used to pass the, "Sit Down, Shut Up," ordinances through city hall which severely restricted 1st amendment rights of free assembly. The ordinances also allowed mayor Rahm Emanuel to shell out public tax dollars to corporate entities such as Boeing in exchange for no-bid security contracts. Seen in this light, the case of the NATO 5 is one political tactic along with the ordinances and media coverage of the Summit to undermine the genuine outcry of anti-war demonstrators, produce quick profits for corporate donors, and expand the invasive reach of city law enforcement. As University of Chicago professor Bernard Harcourt commented back in January,

> "Emanuel successfully exploited the fact that Chicago will host the upcoming G8 and Nato summit meetings to increase his police powers and extend police surveillance, to outsource city services and privatize financial gains, and to make permanent new limitations on political dissent."

Moreover, the NATO Summit was designated a National Security Special Event (NSSE) by the U.S. Secret Service, a notorious ploy used by federal police forces to de-legitimize protest. The NLG's

2010 report, The Policing of Political Speech: Constraints on Mass Dissent in the U.S. enumerates the various components of a common strategy used to restrict the right to protest at NSSE's. The report, for example, describes how authorities refuse or delay the issuance of march permits, use police infiltrators to entrap activists and fill the media with exaggerated claims of, "mayhem," and, "violence," caused by protesters to diminish, demobilize and discredit the efforts of protest organizers. All of these elements and more were used by Chicago and federal authorities in the run-up to the 2012 NATO summit.

The mere fact that activists express their intent to protest is used by police, "to justify police infiltration of activist organizations and subsequent terrorism-related prosecutions based on fabricated or highly tenuous evidence," according to the report. "In many instances, police simply lie about the existence of evidence in order to obtain warrants to search meeting spaces and arrest activists." This is precisely how the NATO 5 ended up in police custody facing ludicrous charges of, "conspiracy," and intending to commit, "terrorist acts."

Undercover Chicago police provocateurs began spying on activist meetings as early as March 2012 and likely earlier. Beginning with the May Day march on May 1, two police informants—who called themselves, "Mo," and, "Gloves,"—took to the streets to begin befriending activists. They approached a number of organizers in subsequent days in an attempt to encourage them to undertake illegal and dangerous actions, but repeatedly met with opposition from those they encountered. After the raids in Bridgeport, it became clear that the infiltrators targetted Brent, Brian and Jay and were instrumental in the ideologically motivated allegations now made against them.

Such manufactured plots are intended to divide and undermine social justice movements around the country and the world. These acts in Chicago must be understood as one element within an ongoing attempt to undermine calls for the end of military violence abroad and the start of economic equality at home. The arrests and subsequent prosecution of the Cleveland 4 are another example of how State infiltration is used to criminalize the politics of individual activists. In Seattle and the larger Pacific Northwest, organizers have been incracerated for not cooperating with Grand Jury indictments to testify against other activists. In other words, the case of the NATO 5 must be understood as an act of political intimidation by way of infiltra-

tion and spectacle, wielded to intimidate activists and legitimize State violence.

Fabricated plots and Terrorism Enhancement

The NATO 5 face multiple charges of so-called, "domestic terrorism." These flimsy allegations are being used to deny these political prisoners of basic human rights and dignities. They are charged with 11 counts including, attempted possession of an incindiary device, conspiracy to commit terrorism, and making terrorist threats. These allegations were filed a few days before the NATO Summit, effectively acting as State propaganda.

At Brian, Jared, and Brent's first arraignment hearing, instead of formally stating the charges against them, the state's attorney read a "proffer," essentially a legal statement of allegations in place of official criminal charges. This statement contained completely fabricated accusations and justified their arrests on the basis of their Anarchist politics, describing them as, "members of the Black Bloc Group," as if the Black Bloc referred to an organization or a an ideology. Furthermore, the evening prior to the actual hearing, unidentified members of the Chicago Police Department leaked documents on the case to the Chicago Tribune. This breach of legal privacy allowed the media to paint the three activists as "violent outsiders," unfairly skewing the public perception before their hearing. Clearly, the politics of these defendants were the target of the Chicago Police Deparment.

The case is being tried by the Cook County Prosecutors office led by Anita. Alvarez. The State is attempting to try the defendants based on the Illinois terrorism statute. These are some of the first cases the state of Illinois has pursued on the basis of Article 29D of the Illinois state criminal code. In late February, the defense attorneys for Brent, Brian, and Jay filed a joint motion challenging the constitutionality of these enhancements and the statute itself. The Illinois Terrorism Statute contains a virtually open-ended definition of terrorism which allows for minor crimes and free-expression to be criminalized and offers zero legal standards to reign in the actions of overly aggressive police and prosecutors. Because of this indefinite statute, the charges against these political prisoners allow Alvarez and other political figures to advance their own careers and to justify the vast public cost of

the NATO Summit.

Moreover, Alvarez's office has targeted other political activists following the NATO Summit, even reopening cases already dismissed. Take, for instance, the case of Danny Johnson. An activist apart of Occupy the walk, was arrested during a protest action leading up to the NATO Summit. A week later his charges were dropped and he continued on his trip visiting different occupations across the country. Anita Alvarez's office re-instated his charges through a grand jury indictment, mirroring the same repressive tactic used in the Northwest against the grand jury resisters. Such cases of gross political suppression and wasteful public spending by Chicago's top prosecutor is clearly not unique to the NATO 5 but a defining characteristic of how the State seeks to silence organizers.

Such hyperactive repression in Seattle, Cleveland, Chicago, New York and all over the country distracts from the very real, very horrible violence of the international military alliance these Occupy activists came to protest in the first place (NATO). By singling out peaceful demonstrators and demonizing them on the public stage, the global brutality of American militarism can be ignored and falls into the background. These cases are just one element in the normalization of 21st century imperialism abroad and police violence here at home.

What Can We Do to Help?

As it stands now, the case of the 3 Bridgeport arrestees is undergoing discovery hearings and awaiting the oral arguments on the challenge raised against the terrorism enhancement. This challenge is monumentally important, not just for their cases but also for the challenge it poses to State repression on the ideological basis of the word terrorism. Sebastien has taken a plea deal to leave the terrible conditions at Cook County Jail and has been sentenced to 4 months in a boot camp program for nonviolent offenders (quite the serious punishment for an alleged terrorist). Mark's case is also in the process of discovery awaiting trial. The actual trial dates in the two pending cases are several months away which means there is time and opportunity for you and your community to take a positive role in influencing the direction of the case.

To begin with, jail solidarity and visitation are all crucial in lifting the spirits of our comrades behind bars. Letter writing, book donations, and visits remind Jay, Brian, Brent, Sebastian and Mark that they are

connected to a community and that people on the outside are fighting for their release. For specific information on jail support please visit [http://nato5support.wordpress.com] for more details.

Additionally, any financial donations to the legal and commissary fund is greatly appreciated (https://www.wepay.com/donations/na-to-5-defense). if you are able to donate money to the support fund of the NATO 5, your money is greatly appreciated. Donations go to the defense costs for their upcoming trial. Additionally, funds may also be used for the immediate needs of commissary as the 5 await their trial date. Unfortunately, jails are an ample source for profiteering and, as such, inmates are only provided with terribly unhealthy meals. This means that toothpaste, soap, and other basic amenities of hygiene and personal care must be purchased through vendors offered exclusively by cook county (items cannot be sent directly either, they must be purchased from the State). Funds, therefore, go to court needs and the daily survival needs of our comrades. If you are a member of a social justice organization consider issuing a solidarity statement or hosting your own fundraiser. The People's Law Office needs money for witness costs, materials, and other various costs for a successful criminal defense.

You can also check the website for ongoing call-in campaigns, court dates, fundraisers and public demonstrations all circulating around the case. The NATO 5 Defense Committee is working hard to build knowledge about their cases and develop a grassroots campaign to defend the rights of these political prisoners as well as building a larger movement against all forms of police and state repression. We cannot forget that this case is important not just to defend fellow activists but to build the movement itself and demonstrate that we will not stand for the silencing of our dissent.

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In short, the case of the NATO 5 is an example of political repression directed at anti-war and economic justice activists. The ruling class is using the tactic of entrapment to alienate a movement challenging their oppressive power. This tactic has been continued by the ongoing legal persecution of activists justified by fear-mongering and baseless accusations of terrorism. We must join together and resist this flagrant attempt to silence activists. Stand with us and say: Free the NATO 5!

Write to the NATO 5:

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2012 - 0519001
PO Box 089002
Chicago IL 60608

Brian Church
2012 - 0519002
PO Box 089002
Chicago IL 60608

Jared Chase
2012 - 0519003
PO Box 089002
Chicago IL 60608

Mark Neiweem

released!

Sebastian Senakiewicz

released!

South Chicago ABC
Zine Distro
P.O. Box 721
Homewood, IL 60430

Donate to the Legal and Commissary Fund Online:

https://www.wepay.com/donations/nato-5-defense

Or to make a tax-deductible donation, send checks or money orders to:

8th Day Center for Justice
205 W. Monroe St. Suite 500
Chicago, IL 60606

Please write "8th Day Center/Nato 5 Defense Fund" in the memo line.