FBI frame-up overturned  
three of Newburgh 4 freed

By Otis Grotewohl

In a partial victory, three members of the “Newburgh 4,” Black Muslims from Newburgh, New York, who were wrongly framed by the FBI in a 2009 “bombing plot,” were finally released from prison. This came after a recent ruling by a federal judge. Three of the Newburgh 4 are African American, and one is a Haitian immigrant.

Otha Williams, David Williams, and Laguerre Payen were happy to be released after being unjustly incarcerated for 12 years, based on an obvious FBI frame-up and entrapment scheme.

The situation stems from a 2009 arrest and a 2011 conviction that claimed four individuals—all of whom are of the Islamic faith—were plotting to use stinger missiles to shoot down military airplanes flying out of an Air National Guard base in Newburgh, New York, and blow up two synagogues in Riverdale. (New York Times, July 27)

Evidence now suggests that the FBI, along with an informant named Shahed Hussain, was responsible for the whole fiasco. Hussain is a Pakistani businessperson who had been working with the FBI prior to the sting operation. Records show that he was paid a generous salary of $100,000 by the FBI to “seek out Muslim radicals” at local mosques. (The Guardian, Dec. 12, 2011)

Hussain’s provocative rhetoric and flashy appearance raised suspicion among the Islamic clergy at Masjid al-Ikhlas, the Islamic Learning Center in Newburgh infiltrated by Hussain, where he met the four individuals who became FBI scapegoats.

Masjid Imam Salahuddin Muhammad was leery of Hussain’s reactionary and forceful demeanor from the time he first stepped foot into the Newburgh community mosque. “This guy said ‘women should not be heard, not be seen.’ I thought that was strange,” Muhammad told The Guardian. Hussain presented himself in a cartoonish manner, reinforcing negative stereotypes, and that raised suspicion among several members of the Mosque.

Findings of facts

U.S. District Judge Colleen McMahon’s 28-page decision concludes that “all four men were caught up in a scheme in 2009 to attack the synagogues, community center and launch stinger missiles at military aircraft. Each was driven by overzealous FBI agents and an ‘unsavory’ confidential informant.” (Reuters, July 28)

Judge McMahon is the same judge who originally ruled to place the Newburgh 4 behind bars in 2011. Allegedly, she did so reluctantly, and her arbitrary “catch and release” style rulings in the case are an example of why the working class and oppressed cannot rely on bourgeois courts to seek any type of sincere justice.

Despite evidence of his innocence, James Cromitie, the individual considered by FBI informant Hussain to be the “ringleader,” remains unfairly incarcerated. Testimony and court exhibits visibly demonstrate that none of the Newburgh 4 would have been associated with the situation had it not been for the FBI’s instigation and provocation.

Conclusion of the case, from a Marxist view

The FBI has a history of infiltrating and attempting to disrupt political and religious organizations, notably those led by oppressed peoples. In this situation, the FBI took advantage of four working, poor and nationally oppressed individuals who were falsely promised an escape from pov-

erty. None of the Newburgh 4 had any interest in carrying out violent actions, but the idea of breaking free of constant hardship sounded appealing, understandably so.

The FBI plot was also an effort on their part to divide the Muslim and Jewish communities. The arrest came at a time when U.S. politicians, military leaders and the corporate media were constantly pushing Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry.

The release of Otha Williams, David Williams and Laguerre Payen is only a partial victory, however, because James Cromitie remains behind bars and his future is uncertain. Communists and anti-racist activists need to demand freedom for all the Newburgh 4 and for a complete abolition of the FBI!
Eighteen primarily Republican-led states have passed laws or enacted policies restricting what educators can say about race, history, and racism since 2021. Every day brings another report involving book banning, or new legislation censoring access to knowledge and history.

Across the U.S., books containing racially inclusive and LGBTQ2S+ references are being pulled from school library shelves. High school teachers are told to remove Pride flags and other support for trans youth from their classroom or be fired. For presenting anti-racist lessons or making classroom remarks, college professors are chartered, massed, also face dismissal.

In February 2023, the state of Florida threw out a prom- ising law curtailing curriculum in African American History pilot, claiming it lacked “educational value.” The “Stop Woke” legislation in Florida, Texas, and several other states represents an effort to purge U.S. history of any refer- ences to violence against Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian people by white supremacists.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis’ “anti-woke” campaign would revise how history is taught, including omitting or minimiz- ing the contributions of civil rights Leaders like Rosa Parks. DeSantis is under fire for suggesting enslavement ben- efits and claiming discomfort over learning about the brutally racist his- tories of gains and benefits won by hard-fought struggles by insurmountable student debt, if they even make it to college. A headline digest is available via e-mail subscription.

The answer: multinational working-class unity

The anti-woke crusade of today cannot be ignored. But rather than cause alarm, they should be seen as a call to action.

In the U.S.
- In the U.S. Ruling frees three framed-up prisoners ........ 1
- Justice for Jalen Randle! ....................... 1

In the U.S.
- Online articles
- The anti-racist legacy of Tony Bennett —- LINK
- No tech for Israeli apartheid! ............... LINK
- Donate to the West Virginia Workers’ Party —- LINK
- The answer: multinational working-class unity —- LINK
- Tear Down the Walls
- Rally against “Moms for Liberty” convention, Philadelphia, July 2.

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Capitalism and imperialism threaten the peoples of the world and the planet itself in the neverending quest for ever- increasing profits.

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repres- sion, attacks on im/migrants, misogyny, LGBTQ2s+ oppression and mistreatment of people with disabilities. It means joblessness, increasing homelessness and impoverishment and lack of hope for the future. No social problems can be solved under capitalism.

The U.S. is the richest country in the world, yet no one has a guaranteed right to shelter, food, water, health care, edu- cation or anything else — unless they can pay for it. Wages are lower than ever, and youth are saddled with seemingly insurmountable student debt, if they even make it to college. Black, Brown and Indigenous youth and trans people are gunned down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

The ruthless ruling class today seeks to wipe out decades of gains and benefits won by hard-fought struggles by people’s movements. The super-rich and their political representatives have intensified their attacks on the multi- national, multigendered and multigender working-class. It is time to point the blame at — and challenge — the capi- talist system.

WWF fights for socialism because the working class pro- duces all wealth in society, and this wealth should remain in the hands of workers, not be stolen in the form of capitalist profits. The wealth workers create should be socially owned and its distri- bution planned to satisfy and guarantee basic human needs.

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