



Chairman Omali Yeshitela of the Uhuru movement via Facebook live July 29.

Call for solidarity after FBI raids African People's Socialist Party and Uhuru movement

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The specter of a Biden administration-authorized Department of Justice (DOJ) initiated McCarthy-era witch hunt was posed in bold relief last week as FBI agents took aim at a Black liberation organization that has been a sharp critic of the U.S./NATO-backed war in Ukraine and a defender of poor

nations threatened with U.S. sanctions, coups, embargoes and blockades. These include Cuba, Syria, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Iran.

Replete with flash/bang grenades deployed at 5:00 am on Friday, July 29 to startle African Peoples Socialist Party (APSP) leader Omali Yeshitela and his wife at their home in St. Louis, Missouri, FBI agents, carrying federal search warrants, ordered them to come out with their hands up. They were handcuffed and ordered to sit on the curb. The armed agents, accompanied by local police, proceeded to ransack their home, confiscating their files, computer equipment and cell phones.

The FBI raid is connected to a federal indictment of a Russian man, Aleksandr Ionov, who the U.S. government alleges orchestrated a “political influence campaign” targeting local U.S. elections with the direct assistance of the APSP and its associated group, the Uhuru Movement. FBI and local police also raided the Uhuru Solidarity Center in St. Louis and APSP headquarters in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Ionov, a Russian national, is a leader of the Anti-Globalization Movement in Russia that the DOJ alleges worked on behalf of the Russian Federal Security Service to use U.S. political groups “to spread pro-Russia propaganda and interfere with local elections.”

APSP founder and chair Yeshitela and Uhuru Movement representatives denied being part of any Russian conspiracy campaign or receiving money from the Russian government.

African Peoples Socialist Party press conference

See the complete APSP press conference on the day of the FBI raid here:

The U.S. Department of Justice indictment charges Ionov with working with at least three other Russian officials in a “malign influence campaign” against the U.S. over the past seven years. Ionov and his collaborators, according to the DOJ, used various U.S. groups to advance Russian government goals in several states.

“Through these influence operations,” said U.S. Attorney Roger Handberg during a Florida press conference on the day of the raids, “Russia attempts to shape foreign perceptions and to influence populations in a number of ways.” He added, “Their goal is to further the interests of Russia.” The federal indictment asserts that the Russian “conspiracy” started in 2015 when APSP representatives attended a 2015 Moscow “anti-globalization” conference that included a range of U.S. and international antiwar organizations. The conference was billed and organized as an *independent* antiwar gathering. In addition to the APSP several U.S. antiwar groups attended, including representatives from the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), which includes some 150 associated groups. A number of the conference participants participated in a separate peaceful protest at the U.S. embassy in Moscow decrying the 2014 U.S.-backed fascist-led coup that overthrew the elected government of Ukraine.

False charges: “Unindicted co-conspirators”

Yeshitela and the other July 29 FBI raid victims were not arrested. The DOJ press release characterized them as “unindicted co-conspirators,” presumably facing future court action and persecution as the DOJ continues its “investigations” and evaluates the contents of the sequestered files, computers and cell phones. One of the three “co-conspirators” was a 2017 APSP candidate for the St. Petersburg City Council, Akilé Anai, the party’s director of agitation and propaganda. Anai ran again in 2019 focusing on APSP’s traditional demands for reparations for U.S. slavery and in opposition to U.S. colonial and imperialist policies around the world.

The presumption of innocence

An italicized footnote to the DOJ press release states, “*An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.*”

This constitutional presumption of innocence notwithstanding, the FBI agents had no qualms about employing terror tactics against a longstanding Black liberation group.

According to FBI Special Agent David Walker, the three Florida search warrants were aimed at “collecting evidence for their indictment.” Walker added: “The facts and circumstances surrounding this indictment are some of the most blatant violations we’ve seen by the Russian government in order to destabilize and undermine trust in American democracy.” That the APSP participated in a local election campaign—where they received some 18 percent of the vote—and advocated freedom and reparations for oppressed people in the U.S. and worldwide, in the twisted logic of the FBI and DOJ, constitutes, a threat to the “stability” of the U.S. and “undermines trust in American democracy.”

Challenging U.S./NATO Ukraine war is a crime

Walker unwittingly reveals today’s near-unanimous mindset of the U.S. government, which today exercises a virtual media blockade of all views that criticize the Biden administration’s war policies. The message is unmistakable: Challenging U.S. imperialist policy on Ukraine, or for that matter, anywhere in the world, can subject antiwar opponents to persecution, if not imprisonment! Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division in a related statement was explicit: “The Department of Justice will not allow Russia to unlawfully sow division and spread misinformation inside the United States.”

Return to McCarthy era persecution

Declaring the APSP as essentially an agent of a foreign power because of its political ideas, not to mention running for political office and campaigning for their ideas, smacks of the reactionary methods employed against socialists and communists during the 1950s and 60s McCarthy-era witch-hunt. During that decades long horror a compliant U.S. Supreme approved the infamous Felix Frankfurter doctrine that held that the

constitutionally protected rights of free speech and free association had to be “balanced” against the “national security interests” of the U.S. government. During that period these so-called national security interests, that is, the right of the capitalist class to persecute dissidents who opposed U.S. wars, racism and political repression, triumphed and the First Amendment was largely obliterated.

Thousands of individuals and scores of organizations accused of Communist Party or other socialist organization association were subject to being fired from their jobs if not outright imprisonment. Thousands were blacklisted; loyalty oaths were imposed as a condition of employment, especially in the public sector; Hollywood was purged of dissenting writers, directors and actors. Bending to reactionary legislation regarding Communist Party union leaders holding office, union bureaucrats purged their ranks. Dissident unions were expelled from the AFL-CIO. Fear prevailed. An intimidated ACLU refused to defend Communists in the courts, a decision that today’s ACLU leaders regard as its gravest mistake.

The threat of government persecution, humiliation, and isolation caused much of the radical and socialist movements to retreat to a near underground existence.

Preclude to the witchhunt

The government’s earlier witch-hunt persecution of the Socialist Workers Party in 1941 under the provisions of the anti-communist Smith Act saw 18 central leaders of that Trotskyist party imprisoned for almost two years for their Marxist ideas alone! No illegal acts were required! The SWP had been central to the leadership of the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strikes that opened the door to the mass labor upsurge that gave rise to the formation of the CIO.

Are you now or have you even been a Communist?

The government’s official witch-hunt institutions, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and the Senate Internal Security Committee, paraded the country, holding well-publicized “investigative” hearings.

Subpoenaed witnesses were virtually forced to answer the Grand Inquisitors' repeated question, "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party or any other organization that advocates the violent overthrow of the U.S. government?" When the subpoenaed victim declined to answer, citing the First Amendment right to freedom of association, the interrogator persisted and threatened the accused and pilloried "witness" with punishment.

"You are in contempt of congress, Sir!" The interrogators were vindicated soon after with the notorious Supreme Court Frankfurter decision cited above. A First Amendment refusal to answer and admit Communist Party membership, as well as refusing to name other party members, guaranteed a prison sentence. Thereafter, and for more than a decade, beleaguered HUAC subpoena victims who courageously refused to "name names" of their friends and associates, were compelled to cite the Fifth Amendment's provision against self-incrimination, that is, "I refuse to answer on the grounds of my right against self-incrimination," a virtual admission of party membership that employers and others often used against them. But at least it kept most HUAC subpoena victims out of jail.

America's experiment with fascist repression

The McCarthy era was America's initial experiment with fascist repression, brought on by the post-WWII unprecedented strike wave that brought millions of angry union workers into the streets, closing down major portions of U.S. industry and winning major victories. For a few years the U.S. ruling class feared that a radicalized U.S. labor movement, with revolutionary forces often in the leadership, would be capable of winning the kind of major social changes that were won by fighting European workers who had lived under fascist occupation and threatened to challenge capitalist rule itself. The leadership of these European struggles was largely Communist Party militants, who had won great respect during the war based on their central role in the underground Resistance and due to the Soviet Union's decisive role in the military defeat of Hitler, at a cost of 27 million Russian dead.

Post-WWII background to the McCarthy era

The Communist Parties in France and Italy emerged at the end of the war as the largest in the nation, at a time when most of the major capitalist parties were tainted by their wartime collaboration with the Nazis occupiers. Tragically, however, the CPs' subservience to Stalin's "peaceful coexistence" policies led them to participate in "coalition capitalist governments" that subordinated class struggle to preserving capitalist wealth and rule. In the U.S. Stalinist-oriented trade union leaders, who had achieved major influence or control of one-third of the militant CIO unions, followed suit and aimed at cooling the mass labor upsurge with their unpopular proposal to "continue the wartime No Strike Pledge into the distant future." This single act of betrayal allowed the posturing anti-communist labor bureaucracy to effectively isolate the CP and foster the government's witch-hunt of the union movement.

New worldwide relationship of forces

But the initially frightened U.S. ruling class soon came to understand that a new relationship of forces had dramatically emerged in the post-WWII world. While U.S. industry was virtually untouched and qualitatively expanded during the war, all of Europe stood in ruins and in unprecedented debt to the U.S. and its banking institutions. With near-zero competition U.S. capitalism had a virtual monopoly in the world market place. U.S. wartime allies in Europe, including Russia, stood in ruin as did U.S. enemies, Germany and Japan. In this context, U.S. corporations were able to grant some important concessions to worker militancy. They had no need to turn to fascist repression to enforce their rule. Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy himself was called to task before congress in hearings presided over by top U.S. military leaders—the famous "Army-McCarthy hearings." The now discredited demagogue McCarthy proved incapable of presenting his alleged lists of "thousands of Communists" that he had repeatedly asserted were employed by the U.S. government itself. He was finished! But the U.S. elite saw no need to erase the reactionary anti-Communist legislation and court rulings that had been put in place during that period.

Civil rights and Vietnam War mass protest turn back

witch-hunt

It was only the mass radicalization attendant to the 1960s and 1970s mass civil rights and Vietnam War antiwar movements that obliterated or made moot much of the reactionary McCarthy-era legislation. That is, freedom of speech and association and the right to protest were won in struggles that engaged millions and never by the largess of the capitalist parties or their “liberal/progressive” politicians.

U.S.-imposed media ban on criticizing Ukraine war policy

Today’s witch hunters, armed with a corporate media monopoly that exceeds any other in modern history, operate under the premise that an Orwellian-like media blackout can be largely imposed to eliminate virtually all dissent. If cracks appear in their imposed wall of silence, a bit of repression is always in order, aided by an unprecedented surveillance system, as Edward Snowden so dramatically revealed.

Tightening the government’s screws of repression often begins with concerted attacks on small groups of dissidents as with the recent blatant attack on the APSP. If left unchallenged, however, the cancer of criminalizing political dissent can only metastasize. At a time when U.S. capitalism has proved incapable of addressing one after another of its major crises—systemic racist oppression and police violence, endless war, a growing debilitating inflation, global warming/climate catastrophe, a raging pandemic that has taken the lives of more than a million people, deepening attacks on women and LGBTQI people and a generalized assault on steady work at a living wage—a ruling class resort to McCarthy-era persecution when faced with mass forces in the streets aimed at fundamental change, cannot be ruled out. Indeed, it is to be expected.

Trump’s initial fascist foray

Donald Trump's moves to steal the 2020 elections, or turn to fascist-like groups or to the military to bolster his presidency when 25 million took to the streets during the Black Lives Matter mobilizations, was a harbinger of things to come. He was rebuffed for the moment by the majority sectors of the U.S. elite who insured that the military, the FBI, CIA and police, as well as Congress itself, would not back his moves toward a virtual coup on January 6 or earlier.

Fascist-like currents on the rise

For the time being, in the absence of broadly-organized and consciously-led mass forces on the scene aimed at challenging capitalist rule in its fundamentals and posing socialist solutions that align with the aspirations of the vast majority, the ruling rich are content with the electoral arena to try to resolve their crises and differences. To date, however, in a world saturated with unprecedented inter-imperialist rivalries for markets and resources, ever declining average rates of profit, and ever-deepening and multiple crises with no solutions in sight, no sector of U.S. capital has ruled out playing the fascist card when it is deemed necessary to quell mass content that threatens to breach the boundaries of the tightly-controlled billionaire dominated electoral process. That fascist-like currents are on the rise the world over is no accident. They reflect the deepening crises of the capitalist system itself, including its endless wars, offshoring U.S. industrial jobs—28 percent of all jobs since 1990—to low wage countries around the world and the deepening immiseration of billions around the world. Mass repression or threats to that effect have become the new norm from India to Brazil to Hungary and Poland to Italy and in the U.S. with Trump.

Cuba anti-embargo activists threatened with repression

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio last week urged the FBI to open an “immediate” investigation into a U.S. anti-embargo group whose members recently met with Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel. Rubio charged in effect, as with the FBI agents who raided the APSP, that opponents of the U.S. embargo of Cuba, in this case the Bridges of Love coalition, were acting as “unregistered foreign agents of the Cuban government.” He insisted that they be investigated under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. It is no coincidence

that his Florida press conference followed shortly after the FBI's public attack on the AFSP, also headquartered in Florida.

Defending against government repression

A united front effort to defend against all government attacks is a prerequisite to turning back today's witch hunters.

The United National Antiwar Coalition has initiated an important online petition to solicit solidarity with the APSP and the Uhuru Movement. The petition defends their right to freely associate with people around the world, to hold any political beliefs it may choose, and to express them without fear of intimidation, persecution, or prosecution.