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Guilty! Until Proven Innocent - A New COINTELPRO?

30 June 2018, by Malik Miah

CONTELPRO came to light only when a group of heroic resisters broke into FBI offices and found the incriminating documents. Is a similar program underway today? "Democracy Now," a progressive radio and television news broadcast, has been pursuing the story. An article by Amy Goodman and Dennis Moynihan discussed the evidence. [1]

On the May 23 program, Goodman and co-host Juan Gonzalez interviewed a Black activist, Rakem Balogun, about his arrest at his apartment by the FBI and subsequent months of detention. [2]

As Amy Goodman explained, Balogun is a founding member of the groups Guerrilla Mainframe and the Huey P. Newton Gun Club. The groups coordinate meals for homeless people, organize youth picnics, run self-defense classes, protest police brutality and advocate for the rights of Black gun owners.

Investigators began tracking him after he was part of a 2015 police brutality protest, which the FBI learned about from a video on InfoWars, the far-right website run by Alex Jones. He was arrested following a leaked August 2017 report from the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, claiming that "it is very likely Black Identity Extremist perceptions of police brutality against African Americans spurred an increase in premeditated, retaliatory lethal violence against law enforcement and will very likely serve as justification for such violence."

Goodman pointed out that "Many have also noted the FBI memo was dated August 3rd — only a few days before the deadly white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where white supremacists, Ku Klux Klan members and neo-Nazis killed an anti-racist protester, Heather Heyer, and injured dozens more. The FBI does not seem to be surveilling and targeting white people who post violent things to social media, including multiple white men who have recently carried out mass school shootings."

Goodman and Gonzalez spoke with Rakem Balogun, following his release from nearly six months detention, and with Malkia Cyril, co-founder and executive director of the Center for Media Justice and a Black Lives Matter Bay Area activist.

Balogun told "Democracy Now," "on December 12th, around 6 a.m. in the morning, me and my son was at home resting, when FBI agents rammed our door and immediately rushed us outside in our underwear, you know, under gunpoint, to be arrested and for me and my son to be separated and, overall, me be hauled off to jail.

"I was charged with [Federal law] 922(g), which is prohibited possession of a firearm."

Under Texas law no permit for the gun is required. "[T]he reason why I was held is because the FBI was pretty much surveilling me for over two-and-a-half years as a domestic terrorist. And from surveilling me for being a domestic terrorist, you know, they overreached and tried to use a previous charge from 2005 to say that this charge made me prohibited of having a firearm, which the elements of that charge didn't.

"But the reason I was able to be detained for so long is because, when

I initially got locked up, I went to a magistrate hearing with a magistrate judge for a bond, and the judge denied me bond based off me using my First Amendment right to criticize police officers on Facebook."

Asked how the case was ultimately resolved, Balogun explained: "It was dismissed. You know, we filed pretrial motions stating that I am not a prohibited person and forcing the United States government to prove that I'm a prohibited person not to have firearms. And the government failed to prove that. And so, therefore, they had to release me, after holding me over five months."

It may have been a miracle that Balogun wasn't shot multiple times, like the Detroit Black imam Luqman Ameen Abdullah who was entrapped and gunned down in a 2009 raid. [3]

Response to Open Racism

African Americans have always lived under the reality of "guilty until proven innocent" by white America and its legal system. While progress has occurred in 400 years from slavery to today, assumptions about "Blackness" as a negative haven't changed.

The Trump Era, "Make America White Again," is a rerun of what Black people have faced, with inherent bias openly acted upon. Calling Blacks "apes" is not new. The dehumanization of Africans has been and remains a way to make Blacks less than human beings.

It was not a surprise when comedian Roseanne Barr called former President Obama's chief domestic adviser Valerie Jarrett a combination of the "Muslim Brotherhood" and "Planet of the Apes." Ironically, only Muslims denounced Barr's attack on them, which was largely ignored by the media.

Even some on the right condemned Barr's tweet — but not President Donald Trump. He demanded instead an apology from ABC/Disney for others who attacked him for his bigotry. His White House demanded that comedian Samantha Bee be fired for using the "C-word" for Ivanka Trump's failure to defend undocumented children snatched by ICE and separated from their parents seeking asylum at the U.S. border.

Trump's greenlighting of below-the-surface racism enabled for many whites the "freedom" to call cops on Blacks sitting in a Starbucks in Philadelphia, or a Black female graduate student taking a nap in a common dorm area at Yale University.

The New York Times) African-American columnist Charles Blow wrote what many of us agree with:

"You see, racism is a moral corruption built on an intellectual fallacy and exists as a construction invented for the very purpose of violence. So, when people demonstrate that they subscribe to theories of racism, they have shown their hand, and I am immediately roused by the euphoric understanding that they are compromised, diminished and assailable.

"Instead of reducing me, their racism reduces them. That is the ironic, poetic justice of it.…

"Although it doesn't hurt my feelings, it does enrage me when racists are granted power in society to allow their idiocy to have a negative impact on other people, whether that be culturally, psychologically and spiritually, or materially and physically.

"It enrages me when ignorance is elevated and empowered, when historical truth is eschewed, when current realities are denied.

"But this moral rage is separate and apart from emotional distress, the former being active and energetic while the latter is passive and plaintive.

"In this context, Roseanne Barr's recent racist tweets, including one suggesting that the Obama-era White House official Valerie Jarrett was the offspring of apes, were not emotionally injurious, but were rage-inducing." ("On Race: The Moral High Ground," May 28, 2018)

Obama Too Early?

Barack Obama supposedly told former aide Ben Rhodes that his presidency was maybe "10 to 20 years" too early. Rhodes' memoir *The World as It Is* (released June 5, 2018), Rhodes quotes Obama as saying, "Maybe we pushed too far. … Maybe people just want to fall back into their tribe."

"I couldn't shake the feeling that I should have seen it coming," Rhodes wrote. "Because when you distilled it, stripped out the racism and misogyny, we'd run against Hillary eight years ago with the same message Trump had used: She's part of a corrupt establishment that can't be trusted to bring change."

Obama's observation reflects a long truism of anti-Black racism in the country. While all peoples have histories of oppression and super-exploitation, former slaves have had a unique place in the formation of the United States.

Thus, the genocide of Native American peoples was worse than slavery, and the white settlers never saw natives as deserving recognition even after the Civil War and the passage of the 14th Amendment conferring citizenship on the former slaves.

Native peoples had their lands stolen; their children kidnapped, and were placed in reservations. (The Bureau of Indian Affairs still exists.) They could not vote in elections since they were not citizens. Only the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924 granted citizenship to all Natives born in America. That's when Native Americans were finally granted free travel in the United States.

Slaves and later freed Blacks were the backbone of the economy. Yet they were dehumanized and treated as animals. This only changed briefly at the end of the Civil War.

By the 1880s, when the former ConfedÂerates reclaimed what they considered their lands, African American were violently put back in third-class status, losing the right to vote among other Constitutional privileges.

It took another 80 years to adopt the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts in the 1960s to begin to reverse that structural racism. Obama's presidency was a result of these radical social changes, but the white supremacist backlash was so determined it brought the white "silent majority" herd behind Trump, who continues to have broad support among both working class and wealthy whites.

The truth is that some 30 to 40 years -- — of the 400 years of African Americans living in North America — of significant progress toward achieving full equality can be quickly and/or steadily reversed by legal and extra-legal means.

What to Do: Fight Back

The key lesson is what a clear majority of Black Americans know: white supremacy cannot be defeated by elections or education alone. *It will require mass fightback.*

From slavery to civil rights, the decisive winning resistance was extra-legal. For an oppressed minority, first came self-organization, then a reach out to others for a united front.

Until slaves were freed and became legal citizens, the First, Second and other Amendments meant nothing to Black people. July 4 was not celebrated. It was a white settlers' holiday.

Black people, not surprisingly, tend to be indifferent on demands about the Second Amendment. Ronald Reagan, when governor of California, was for the Second Amendment until the Back Panthers armed themselves and stood up at the state capital. The National Rifle Association (NRA) supported Reagan's gun control law.

Texas has the least restrictive gun laws in the country. You don't need a permit for a handgun. Yet the FBI raided and charged Rakem Balogun under a gun law for alleged "domestic terrorism," while white mass shooters are labeled "mentally ill."

During the resistance in the South after the Civil War, and during the Civil Rights movement, African Americans had guns at home to protect themselves from racists. Today it is just as important. (The debate over military assault weapons is different if it doesn't restrict the right to bear basic defensive arms.)

Justice in America has primarily been about skin color. Blacks must always be aware of white reaction wherever you live, work, walk, drive or even go to a coffee shop and waffle house. Whites don't live with that daily anxiety — an unearned "privilege" all African Americans would like to have.

No wonder the reality of the criminal justice system remains what it has been: Guilty! Until proven innocent.

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Footnotes

[1] https://bit.ly/2JuH0bN

[2] https://bit.ly/2JhB7LQ

[3] https://bit.ly/2LmhOl0

The mixed fortunes of Argentina's 2005 and 2010 debt restructurings

29 June 2018, by Éric Toussaint

And Argentina? After the biggest suspension of payments in history, in 2001 the Argentine government renegotiated its sovereign debt. What were the conditions?

Yes! In 2005 and in 2010 Argentina's debt was restructured through an exchange of bonds: old bonds were exchanged against new ones. This was the situation: in December 2001, the Argentine authorities, under the interim President Adolfo Rodríguez Saá, unilaterally suspended debt repayments amounting to $80 billion to private creditors and the Paris Club ($6.5 billion). Notice that they did not suspend payments to multilateral organisms such as the World Bank, the IMF and others.

This action came about in a situation of economic crisis and popular revolt against the policies that had been followed for years by successive neoliberal governments, of which Fernando de la Ruas was the most recent. It was thus under pressure from the street at a time when the treasury was empty that the Argentine authorities suspended debt repayments.

Argentina's suspension of payments of sovereign debt bonds lasted from December 2001 to March 2005. This was beneficial for the Argentine economy and population. Between 2003 and 2009, Argentina's economic growth was between 7% and 9%. Some economists claim that this growth was due to the rise in the prices of Argentina's raw materials exports, but it is clear that if Argentina had continued paying off its debt, the increased exports income (in other words, the taxes levied on the exporting companies) would have been used for the debt repayments.

Between 2002 and 2005 the Argentine authorities negotiated with their creditors to convince a majority of them to agree to exchange the bonds they held for new ones, written down by 60%, but with a stronger guarantee and a favourable interest-rate indexed on Argentine GDP growth. This was debt restructuring by exchange of bonds: by March 2005, 76% of outstanding bonds had been

exchanged, a majority that was considered sufficient protection against the 24% who refused the exchange. The authorities announced, at the time, that those who refused the exchange would have no further occasion to negotiate.

So why did Argentina restructure its debt again, in 2010?

Indeed, in contradiction with previous declarations and despite the protests of Roberto Lavagna, the minister of economic affairs who had taken part in the 2005 negotiations, the government of Argentina did open a new round of negotiations with the remaining 24% of the creditors. A new agreement was reached with 67% of that 24% in 2010. In all, 8% of all the bonds whose payment had been suspended since 2001 "held out" against both agreements. Both agreements contained clauses stipulating that in case of litigation involving the new issues, US courts would be the competent jurisdiction.

In the end, can this restructuring be considered a success? Can other governments follow the Argentine strategy?

The Argentine authorities claim success because of the 50% to 60% reduction of debt stock. But, in return, big concessions were made: high interest rates; indexation to Argentina's GDP growth, which means that the country actually agreed to hand over a share of its growth profits to the creditors; renouncing sovereignty in case of litigation.

In fact, Argentina's example is not the one to follow, but it is a source of inspiration. It shows the interest of suspending payments and the limits of a negotiated deal that makes big concessions to the creditors. The current situation is evidence enough:

1. Firstly, the amounts in fact reimbursed to creditors are considerable; Argentina itself acknowledges that it has reimbursed $190 billion since 2003.
2. Secondly, although Argentina's debt was certainly lower between 2005 and 2010, today the amount of Argentine debt is higher than it was in 2001.
3. Thirdly, Argentina is under heavy and unwarranted pressure to reimburse the Vulture funds that refused to accept the exchange offers, after not only a New York judge but the US Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Vulture funds.

Eventually, Mauricio Macri, who became president of the republic in December 2015, decided in 2016 to fully compensate the vulture funds, thus humiliating Argentina and provoking a strong increase in the country's public debt [1].

[2].

Footnotes

[1]