



# **Bounty Hunters & Child Predators:**

**Inside the FBI  
Entrapment  
Strategy**

Perhaps, gentle reader, you've never been part of a social body targeted by the US government. Imagine undercover agents infiltrating your community with the intention of setting people up to be framed for illegal activity. Most of your friends and family would have the sense to keep themselves out of trouble, of course—but can you be absolutely sure *everyone* would?

What if someone fell in love with the agent and was desperate to impress him or her, and the agent took advantage of this? Every community has people in it that may sometimes be gullible or vulnerable, who may not display the best judgment at all times. And what if the agent provocateur is a person everyone trusts and looks up to? Government agents aren't always outsiders—the FBI often recruit or blackmail long-time participants, or even well-known leaders.

Perhaps you're still saying to yourself "It would never happen—all of *us* are law-abiding citizens." Sure you are, every last one of you. The US has 2.3 million people in prison, and over 5 million more on probation and parole—if there isn't a single person in your whole community who has ever broken a law, you're exceptional, and probably exceptionally privileged. Anyway, it doesn't matter—your unfortunate friend or neighbor doesn't even have to *do* anything illegal to get framed by the government. He just has to end up in a situation in which it's possible to make it appear that he could have *considered* doing something illegal.

Often the evidence is so tenuous that it takes the government multiple attempts to obtain a conviction. In an entrapment case resulting from the protests against the 2008 Republican National Convention, defendant David McKay received a hung jury at trial, only to be coerced into pleading guilty afterward behind closed doors. In another entrapment case, it took two hung juries before a third jury finally convicted some of the defendants—prompting a law professor quoted by the *New York Times* to say, "It goes to show that if you try it enough times, you'll eventually find a jury that will convict on very little evidence."

Agents provocateurs pick on the most vulnerable people they can find: the lonely, the trusting, the mentally or emotionally unstable, people who lack close friendships or life experience. This is easier than messing with shrewd, well-connected organizers. The point is not to catch those who are actually involved in ongoing resistance, so much as to discredit resistance movements by framing somebody, anybody, as a dangerous terrorist. If this means destroying the life of a person who never would have actually harmed anyone, so be it—honest, compassionate people don't become infiltrators in the first place.

This is not to blame the victims of entrapment. We all have moments of weakness. The guilt lies on those who prey on others' weakness for their own gain.

## **The Latest Trend in Repression**

Not so long ago, it seemed that the FBI focused on pursuing accomplished anarchists: Marie Mason and Daniel McGowan were both arrested after lengthy careers involving everything from supporting survivors of domestic violence to ecologically-minded arson. It isn't surprising that the security apparatus of the state targeted them: they were threatening the inequalities and injustices the state is founded upon.

ular with the general public than the tactics infiltrators push them towards. Smashing bank windows, for example, may be illegal, but it is increasingly understood as a meaningful political statement; it would be difficult to build a convincing terrorism case around broken glass.

Well-known activists also have much broader support networks. The FBI threatened Daniel McGowan with a mandatory life sentence plus 335 years in prison; widespread support enabled him to obtain a good lawyer, and the prosecution had to settle for a plea bargain for a seven-year sentence or else admit to engaging in illegal wiretapping. Going after disconnected young people dramatically decreases the resources that will be mobilized to support them. If the point is to set precedents that criminalize anarchism while producing the minimum blowback, then it is easier to manufacture “terror” cases by means of agents provocateurs than to investigate actual anarchist activity.

Above all, this kind of proactive threat-creation enables FBI agents to prepare make-to-order media events. If a protest is coming up at which the authorities anticipate using brutal force, it helps to be able to spin the story in advance as a necessary, measured response to violent criminals. This also sows the seeds of distrust among activists, and intimidates newcomers and fence-sitters out of having anything to do with anarchists. The long-range project, presumably choreographed by FBI leadership rather than rank-and-file agents, is not just to frame a few unfortunate arrestees, but thus to hamstring the entire anti-capitalist movement.

“The individuals we charged are not peaceful protesters, they are domestic terrorists. The charges we bring today are not indicative of a protest movement that has been targeted.”

– Illinois state attorney Anita Alvarez,  
quoted in the *New York Times*





— WHY WASN'T THE STING OPERATION BEFORE MAY DAY 2012 SET IN OAKLAND? SURELY THERE ARE PLENTY OF ANARCHISTS PLOTTING ILLEGAL ACTIVITY THERE, AND EVEN A FEW IMPRUDENT ENOUGH TO BE SET UP IN A TERROR PLOT?

BUT THERE'S ALSO A POWERFUL MOVEMENT IN OAKLAND THAT WOULD SUPPORT ARRESTEES. THE LAST THING THE FBI WANTS IS TO RISK LOSING A CASE—THE POINT IS TO SET PRECEDENTS FRAMING ANARCHISTS AS TERRORISTS, STARTING WHEREVER IT'S EASIEST. THE ONLY WAY TO BLOCK THE ENTRAPMENT STRATEGY WOULD BE TO SPREAD A COMBATIVE MOVEMENT ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY.



## What Comes Next

We can expect more and more of these unsportsmanlike entrapments in the years to come. In the aforementioned Fox News article—“The Men in Black with a Violent Agenda”—the authorities explicitly announced that there are to be more “sting operations” at the 2012 Republican National Convention in Tampa.

For decades now, movements have defended themselves against surveillance and infiltration by practicing security culture. This has minimized the effectiveness of police operations against experienced activists, but it can't always protect those who are new to anarchism or activism, who haven't had time to internalize complex habits and practices—and these are exactly the people that the FBI entrapment strategy targets.

In a time of widespread social ferment, even the most collectively-oriented security culture is not sufficient to thwart the FBI: we can't hope to reach and protect every single desperate, angry, and vulnerable person in our society. Infiltrators need only find one impressionable young person, however peripheral, to advance their strategy. These are inhuman bounty hunters: they don't balk at taking advantage of any weakness, any need, any mental health issue.

If we are to protect the next generation of young people from these predators, our only hope is to mobilize a popular reaction against entrapment tactics. Only a blow-back against the FBI themselves can halt this strategy.

Withdrawing, hiding, and behaving won't stop them from entrapping people. Retreating will only embolden them: we can only protect ourselves by increasing our power to fight back.

**Never undertake or discuss illegal activity with people you haven't known and trusted for a long time. Don't trust people just because other people trust them or because they are in influential positions. Don't let others talk you into tactics you're not comfortable with or ready for. Be aware that anything you say may come back to haunt you, even if you don't mean it. Always listen to your instincts; if someone seems pushy or too eager to help you with something, take some time to think about the situation. Reflect on the motivations of those around you—do they make sense? Get to know your comrades' families and friends.**

