

Occupy organizer acquitted of assault charges at Freddie Mac law firm

Written by Sunny

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Last week a Ramsey County jury found Anthony Newby, executive director of Neighborhoods Organizing for Change, not guilty on assault charges. An employee of a law firm representing Freddie Mac, a primary target of the housing justice movement, pressed charges after a peaceful protest March 1, 2012. Newby was charged after attempting to help the law firm employee, who fell as dozens of supporters demanded justice for Minneapolis homeowner Monique White. White was then facing imminent eviction at the hands of Freddie Mac, the government- sponsored mortgage giant known for its enormous taxpayer bailout and consistent refusal to negotiate with struggling homeowners. After a national public pressure campaign, White ultimately won a negotiation and was able to stay in her home.

Around 40 supporters packed the courtroom to support Newby, a founding member of Occupy Homes MN. When asked if he had any final words for the court Newby said: "I look forward to the day when the executives who crashed our financial system receive the same degree of scrutiny I did over the past week."

This trial is part of an aggressive trend of prosecutions by the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul targeting the non-violent Occupy Homes movement. It comes on the heels of the outrageous riot charges leveled by the city of Minneapolis at the peaceful protesters arrested defending the Cruz family home last spring. These charges all represent attacks by elected officials on those working to prevent foreclosures and evictions in the Twin Cities.

"The only assault I see happening here is the assault on our right to protest," said Nick Espinosa, who testified on Anthony's behalf this week. "Our tax dollars should be keeping people in their homes and prosecuting the criminal acts of the banks, not peaceful protesters."

On Friday, February 1 the judge threw out the disorderly conduct charge based on a lack of evidence. On Monday, February 4 the jury acquitted Newby of assault and found him guilty of trespassing. He will pay a small fine, and the charges will drop from his record within a year if he complies with the terms of his sentence.

"Today's victory in court has renewed my commitment to stand against the corruption and greed of the financial industry," said Newby. "I'm ready to get back to work building a more just and equitable world for hardworking families across Minnesota."