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Durham anti-racist activists: 'Be a witness in our defense!'



Some of the eleven stalwart anti-racist Durham activists after their court hearing, Dec. 5.

Activists and community and family members gathered here the morning of Dec. 5 to show their support and solidarity for 11 anti-racist activists who were returning to court to face charges related to their militant challenges to white supremacy. The Dec. 5 hearing was the first time all 11, who have had several court hearings since August, appeared in court together.

Inside the court, the cases of nine of the activists, who were charged in relation to the Aug. 14 removal of a Confederate statue in front of the old Durham courthouse, were continued by a judge to Jan. 11. The cases of the other two, who face charges related to an Aug. 18

community mobilization against an announced KKK march, were continued to Feb. 8. After the hearing, a rally and press conference were held.

The defendants are inviting community members across Durham to sign up to be witnesses for the defense for the Jan. 11 trial. Elena Everett, a Workers World Party member who faces charges relating to the statue removal, said: “We invite all those who believe that Durham is a better place without the monument, that the monument had no value to our community, and was in fact a liability, to sign up to be a witness. We will set up an online form and email to collect your testimony.”

At the rally, the #DefendDurham group also launched a community contest for Durham residents to submit ideas of what should replace the pedestal where the Confederate monument once stood. Markers were supplied and ample paper unrolled so that community members could write and draw their ideas for a replacement.

Speaking from the mic, community activist Rafiq Zaidi asserted that the Confederate monument should be replaced with a monument in tribute of “those who were bold enough to put a rope around the neck of that Confederate statue. We have suffered under this injustice and racism for far too long.”

Thousands of people across North Carolina and the U.S. have signed petitions and participated in three call-in days to drop the charges — the most recent on November 30. The case has garnered national and even international attention, with many unions and other progressive organizations submitting statements to the arrestees that noted the significance of their actions and pledged support to beat the charges.

In a press release prior to the hearing, Workers World Party member Loan Tran stated: “The events of Aug. 14 and 18 were an act of community service and defense. We have to remember what happened just a few days before in Charlottesville, Va., when white supremacists and neo-Confederates terrorized, occupied and brutalized its residents. Heather Heyer was murdered, and many other anti-racist activists were injured.” Tran asserted that “the eleven facing charges have done their service to the community. We call on D.A. [Roger] Echols to immediately drop the charges.”

“Removing symbols of white supremacy from our community is not a crime,” said WWP member Jess Jude, one of those facing charges regarding the statue removal. “What happened on Aug. 14 was a service to the Durham community and an example of taking righteous action, a small step to correct centuries of injustice.”