

Anti-inauguration protests infiltrated by provocateurs with ties to Trump administration

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Groups planning to protest the inauguration of Donald Trump last Friday were infiltrated by right-wing provocateurs with ties to the new administration. Project Veritas, a group headed by ultra-right activist James O’Keefe, sent operatives into various protest groups to encourage the commission of acts that could be used to smear protesters as violent.

Last week, Project Veritas released highly edited videos on YouTube purporting to show protest organizers involved in the “DisruptJ20” anti-Trump group discussing plans to commit acts of vandalism and violence against Trump supporters. One video, filmed at a restaurant in northwest Washington, D.C., shows organizers saying they might attempt to trigger the sprinkler system at the National Press Club, where on January 19 a pro-Trump gathering was occurring.

Another activist suggests the group spread butyric acid, a highly noxious substance, through the building’s ventilation system as a means of forcing the partygoers to exit the building, where they would be confronted by protesters. There is no evidence that any of the protesters intended to follow through with these suggestions.

The release of the video days before the inauguration led to the arrest of one of the supposed conspirators, Scott Charney. Police are currently looking for other individuals filmed in the video. “I’ve spent years trying to fight the mainstream media that doesn’t view me as a journalist. ... This is the first time that a video we shot has led to an arrest. It legitimizes what we’re doing. It’s a new era for us,” said O’Keefe to the *Washington Post*.

The film is highly edited and, according to the *Post*, Project Veritas has refused to allow the unedited

footage of the gathering to be reviewed.

O’Keefe is notorious for his right-wing antics. In 2009, O’Keefe and an associate posed as a pimp and prostitute in the offices of the liberal community activist group Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), supposedly seeking advice on how to hide their illicit gains. Through selective editing, O’Keefe manipulated video footage of ACORN employees giving “advice” to the duo to create a scandal against the community activist group.

ACORN was forced to disband despite being exonerated of any wrongdoing. O’Keefe later paid a \$100,000 fine for misrepresenting the ACORN employees’ actions.

In 2010, O’Keefe pleaded guilty to charges of entering the New Orleans offices of Louisiana Democratic Senator Mary Landrieu under false pretenses by posing as a telephone repairman with the intention of damaging the senator’s phone system. O’Keefe was required to pay a fine of \$1,500, serve 100 hours of community service and spend several years on probation for his action.

More recently, O’Keefe was involved in efforts to trap Democratic Party activists into making statements condoning violent acts against Trump supporters.

Trump made reference to O’Keefe’s doctored footage on the campaign trail, falsely asserting that his Democratic Party rival Hillary Clinton had paid protesters to commit acts of violence. Trump said during one of the debates, “I was wondering what happened with my rally in Chicago and other rallies where we had such violence. She’s the one and Obama that caused the violence.” A report later came out revealing that O’Keefe’s organization received

funding from the Trump Foundation prior to the latter's presidential run.

O'Keefe has also worked as a contributor to *Breitbart News*, the far-right news site that until recently was run by Stephen Bannon, Trump's current chief strategist in the White House.

The revelations from the "sting" operation engineered by O'Keefe are highly dubious. In addition to O'Keefe's unwillingness to release the raw footage of the conversation, there is the possibility that operatives of Project Veritas played a role in encouraging acts of violence and vandalism. There is a long history of such infiltrations being used to discredit and shut down protests.

Prior to the inauguration, the left-leaning *The Undercurrent* news show revealed that Allison Maass, a Project Veritas operative, had approached protest organizers offering "unlimited resources" to disrupt the inauguration and related proceedings with acts of vandalism and violence, saying "[we] just want to see the biggest impact. ... Put a stop to the inauguration...interrupt the parties." Maass had also attempted to infiltrate the campaigns of Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Wisconsin Senate candidate Russ Feingold.

Activist Ryan Clayton, who recorded Maass's proposals, told the *Inquisitr* website, "Normally, they would take that video and cut it up deceptively and edit it. They would say something, and then I would agree, and they would leave that out, that they had been the ones that had said it in the first place. That's kinda their M.O."



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