

US federal prosecutors rely on ultra-right propagandist group's recordings in trial of inauguration day protesters

Nick Barrickman
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On Tuesday, prosecutors for the US Department of Justice (DoJ) introduced undercover video footage taken by the far-right media group Project Veritas as evidence to be used against political activists associated with Disrupt J20, a protest group charged with rioting and property destruction on the day of Trump's inauguration last January.

The Trump DoJ has charged 194 individuals, most of whom were swept up indiscriminately by Washington DC police for being in the vicinity of the alleged acts, with conspiracy to riot and other charges that carry combined sentences of as much as 60 years in prison. Police fired on the crowd with mace, pepper spray, rubber bullets and stinger grenades.

Prosecutors are pressing for maximum sentences, even for those who did not participate in alleged acts of violence. The prosecution has begun examining a Facebook page associated with J20 that was used to discuss the group's plans, exposing to government scrutiny thousands who expressed opposition to Trump.

DC Superior Court Judge Lynn Leibovitz ruled as admissible Project Veritas's video of a Disrupt J20 planning session, taken weeks before the inauguration, despite the right-wing propaganda group's history of falsifying and misrepresenting the targets of its sting operations. In 2009, the group, run by the "conservative political activist" and Breitbart News contributor James O'Keefe, sent two of its members to the offices of the community activist group Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), claiming to be seeking advice from the liberal group on how to conceal prostitution money.

Project Veritas filmed and selectively edited ACORN employees giving unserious "advice" to the duo in

order to scandalize the community activist group, which was forced to disband soon after. O'Keefe was later forced to pay a \$100,000 fine for his organization's egregious misrepresentation of ACORN's employees.

Project Veritas continues to rely on such deceptive and unprincipled methods. On Monday, the *Washington Post* revealed that the group had sent an operative, Jaime T. Phillips, to plant a false story at the publication about Roy Moore, the right-wing Alabama Republican candidate for Senate currently facing accusations of sexual abuse. According to the *Post*, Project Veritas had intended to solicit and then record *Post* reporters making derogatory statements against Moore. The *Post* denounced Project Veritas's efforts as "a scheme to deceive and embarrass" the newspaper that was "solicited in maliciously bad faith."

Assistant US Attorney Jennifer Kerkhoff introduced the group's right-wing propaganda video of the Disrupt J20 protesters as credible evidence from a "third party provider" the day after the *Post*'s story ran.

When the credibility of the film's source was questioned, Judge Leibovitz ruled that, because the Disrupt J20 planning session had also been infiltrated by police independently of Project Veritas, the police would be in a position to vouch for the video's accuracy.

The federal government's inclusion of the footage was denounced by the J20 defendants' legal counsel, with Sam Menefee-Libey, a spokesperson for the group, telling the *Huffington Post*, "[T]he judge has allowed the US Attorney's Office to get away with something that is incredibly questionable... Veritas has been roundly denounced by every reputable journalistic

organization on the planet as being deceptive.”

“Fundamentally, this shows that the state doesn’t have very much to go on,” said anti-Trump activist James Anderson to the *Guardian* about the prosecution’s move.

The federal government’s use of material from Project Veritas in its case against anti-Trump demonstrators further signifies the latter’s increasing reliance on far-right and even fascistic forces as it faces increasing social tensions that threaten to explode into a movement of mass popular opposition to Trump and the capitalist system as a whole.

The Trump administration has frequently sought to curry favor with such forces. Trump has doled out numerous high-level cabinet and advisory positions to fascistic and far-right ideologues. On Wednesday, Trump re-tweeted several anti-Muslim YouTube videos from a social media account owned by a member of the fascist group Britain First.

In October, US prosecutors moved to include video footage taken of the January 20 protests by the right wing extremist militia group known as the Oath Keepers as evidence in the current trials.

The government’s collaboration with Project Veritas in the prosecution of the J20 defendants is a further indication that the Trump administration is determined to use this case to intimidate and silence all opposition.

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