Virginia declares state of emergency barring guns at State Capitol ahead of far-right rally

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17 January 2020

On Wednesday afternoon, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency ahead of a gun rights rally set for this Monday in Richmond, the state capital, temporarily barring anyone from carrying a firearm on the grounds of the Capitol building.

According to the governor's executive order, to take effect today at 5 p.m., there is "credible intelligence," gathered by the state's law enforcement agencies, that thousands of "advocates" will be descending on the city, many armed, with the intent to engage in "violence, rioting, and insurrection."

The anti-gun control group Virginia Citizens Defense League is organizing the event, which takes place on the national holiday honoring slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. The group's Facebook page reports more than 5,700 people plan on attending, with over 9,900 "interested." Some commenters on the Facebook page say they will not abide by the weapons ban. *GQ* reports that armed militia groups, including the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, plan to attend.

In Virginia, along with controlling the governor's seat, Democrats recently took control of both houses, marking the first time since 1994 that the Democratic Party controls both the executive and legislative branches. Democrats in Virginia campaigned largely on promising stronger gun control, sparking Monday's planned rally by far-right and neo-Nazi groups.

The governor's order provides that no weapons will be allowed on the Capitol grounds and surrounding state property from 5 p.m. today through 5 p.m. Tuesday. At his press conference announcing the state of emergency, Northam referenced the August 2017 events in Charlottesville, Virginia, where fascists rampaged through the city, beating protesters, and James Fields, a neo-Nazi, intentionally drove his car into an anti-fascist demonstration on the city's downtown mall, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer. Northam stated, "No one wants another incident like the one we saw in Charlottesville. We will not allow that mayhem and violence to happen here."

The 2017 anti-fascist demonstration was called in response to a "Unite the Right" rally, in which fascist slogans such as "Jews will not replace us" and "Blood and soil" were shouted during a far-right torch-light march on the campus of the University of Virginia. The Unite the Right rally also saw right-wing demonstrators openly carrying weapons, including semi-automatic firearms. In response to the far-right violence in Charlottesville, President Donald Trump infamously stated that the far-right thugs were "very fine people."

On Twitter, Northam added that the intelligence gathered by the state "includes extremist rhetoric similar to what has been seen before major incidents, such as Charlottesville in 2017. This intelligence suggests militia groups and hate groups, some from out of state, plan to come to the Capitol to disrupt our democratic process with acts of violence." In the press conference, Northam went further, stating that officials believe that "armed militia groups plan to storm the Capitol" during the rally.

Underscoring the potential for violence at Monday's rally, on Thursday the FBI announced the arrest, in the nearby state of Delaware, of three alleged members of the neo-Nazi group The Base. According to the FBI, the three had discussed traveling to Monday's rally in Richmond.

Arrested were 27-year-old Patrik Jordan Mathews, a former Canadian soldier dismissed from the military after his white supremacist views came to light; 33-year-old Brian M. Lemley Jr., a former US Army soldier; and 19-year-old William G. Bilbrough. Lemley and Bilbrough allegedly helped smuggle Mathews across the Canadian border into the United States.

According to the FBI, Mathews was trained as a combat engineer and considered an expert in explosives. An affidavit filed with the federal complaint states that

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Lemley and Mathews bought about 1,650 rounds of ammunition. The three were indicted on various weapons charges, while Lemly and Bilbrough were charged with transporting and harboring an alien for facilitating Mathews' entry into the US.

According to the Counter Extremism Project (CEP), The Base describes itself as an "international survivalist and self-defense network," which seeks to train members to fight a race war that will overthrow the government. The CEP further reports that The Base has organized training camps around North America on weaponry and military tactics and has also distributed manuals for "lone-wolf terror attacks, bomb-making, counter-surveillance and guerrilla warfare." In addition to North America, The Base is active in Europe, South Africa and Australia. It is unclear if the neo-Nazi group takes its name and/or tactics from Al Qaeda, the Arabic phrase for "The Base."

According to the CEP, The Base draws inspiration and membership from the fascist Atomwaffen Division (AWD). Back in October, two Washington state police departments seized a cache of firearms from a suspected leader of AWD. Implicated in at least five murders since 2017, AWD has been tied to plots to bomb synagogues and nuclear power plants. Its members include active and retired US military. It gained prominence in 2016 when it distributed a flyer urging students to "Join Your Local Nazis!"

In September 2019, The Base member Richard Tobin from New Jersey allegedly orchestrated the vandalism of synagogues in Michigan and Wisconsin. The FBI charged him in November. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported after Tobin's arrest that he told federal investigators that he envisioned the synagogue attacks as part of a wider nationwide campaign he termed "Operation Kristallnacht," a chilling reference to the notorious operation carried out by German Nazis against Jewish synagogues, homes and businesses in 1938, which prefigured the Holocaust.

According to court documents, Tobin also plotted violent actions against African Americans outside a shopping mall in New Jersey, waiting in the parking lot with a machete to "let loose" on black shoppers. "Tobin said that he was triggered by the state of the country, such as when he saw a Pride parade or a large number of African Americans in one location," FBI Special Agent Jason D. Novick wrote. "There were so many African Americans around [the mall] that enraged him."

The international links of The Base are consistent with the activities of neo-Nazi Brenton Tarrant, the Australian who murdered 50 people in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March of 2019. Prior to carrying out the massacre of Muslims, Tarrant met openly with neo-Nazis all over Europe and Asia. Additionally, in 2018, Tarrant donated €1,500 to the Austrian extremist Identitarian Movement. The Identitarians emerged 16 years ago in France and have connections with neo-Nazi groups across Europe.

Tarrant, in his manifesto, estimated that there are "hundreds of thousands" of European soldiers and police who belong to "nationalist groups," a contention that comports with the presence of US and Canadian military veterans in AWD and The Base.

While there currently is no large movement or mass constituency for fascism, workers must be warned that the ruling elite all over the world is vomiting up reaction. From Bolsonaro in Brazil to the growth of the AfD in Germany, to Macron's rehabilitation of Vichy Nazi collaborator Marshal Pétain, to Modi in India, the ruling class is prepared to answer the deepening crisis of the capitalist system with authoritarian forms of rule.

In the US, Trump seeks to build an extra-constitutional movement linking fascist elements within the state with isolated far-right elements, such as those who will be gathering in Richmond on Monday, promoting the growth of such movements.

No support can be given to the Democratic Party in the fight against the far right. It opposes Trump on the right-wing basis that he is insufficiently ready to carry out war with Russia, while doing nothing to oppose the drive to war with Iran or his attacks on immigrants and the working class as a whole. The Democrats' fecklessness and complicity enable Trump.

The fight against fascism instead requires attacking it at its source: the rotting capitalist system. To defeat the rise of the far right, workers of all races and nationalities must unite in a political struggle against capitalism and for social equality.

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