

Thirteen arrested in far-advanced pro-Trump conspiracy to murder Michigan's governor and overthrow the state government

Patrick Martin
8 October 2020

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and Michigan State Police have arrested more than a dozen men across the state in connection with well-developed plans to kidnap and kill Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer, seize power in Lansing and install a pro-Trump regime.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel announced the raids and search warrants at a 1 p.m. Thursday press conference. She listed more than a dozen towns and cities where raids were carried out overnight, including Sterling Heights, Belleville, Cadillac, Canton, Charlotte, Clarkston, Grand Rapids, Hartland, Luther, Munith, Orion Township, Ovid, Shelby Township and Waterford Township.

Both Nessel and Governor Whitmer put the political blame for the right-wing terrorist conspiracy on President Trump and his open alignment with ultra-right and white supremacist groups.

Initial statements as well as the indictment filed by the attorney general indicate that the Michigan conspiracy is just one element of a historically-unprecedented plot inspired and very possibly directed by a sitting president to violently overthrow the Constitution and establish a dictatorship.

“We have a president who seems to condone these actions,” Nessel told MSNBC, citing his “tweets to ‘liberate Michigan,’” which followed armed right-wing protests at the state Capitol. She argued that Trump’s statements were “not a dog whistle, but a command to action.”

Six men face federal charges of terrorism and conspiracy: Brandon Caserta, Adam Fox, Kaleb Franks, Ty Garbin, and Daniel Harris, all of Michigan, and Barry Croft of Delaware. Seven more, all of Michigan,

and all linked to the militia group Wolverine Watchmen, face felony state charges of terrorism, material support to terrorism, gang membership, and possession of firearms during the commission of a felony: Paul Bellar, Shawn Fix, Eric Molitor, Joseph Morrison, Pete Musico, Michael Null and William Null.

Garbin and Franks made a court appearance in Grand Rapids on Thursday morning and asked for court-appointed attorneys, based on their financial status.

According to the press conference and the charging document, the FBI initially learned of discussions about the violent overthrow of the state government over social media. Federal agents recruited at least two informants within the group and sent in several undercover agents. Both the informants and the agents made recordings of conversations and entire meetings, which will comprise much of the evidence in any future trial.

The plans to kidnap and kill Whitmer were carefully prepared. The charged individuals allegedly conducted surveillance of Whitmer’s vacation home on two occasions in late August and early September, having concluded that this location offered the best opportunity to seize her. They prepared maps showing the location of nearby police stations and state police barracks and calculated how long it would take police to respond to an emergency.

One of the participants built an improvised explosive device, which they detonated to test its effectiveness. A similar device was to be placed on a highway underpass to be used against police pursuit in the event of a successful kidnapping. Another participant purchased an 800,000-volt Taser to be used in the attack on the

governor. There were discussions about removing Whitmer to the state of Wisconsin where she would be put on “trial” for treason and then executed.

The state charges include preparations to attack and kill policemen and state troopers involved in protecting Whitmer or in enforcing various aspects of the statewide lockdown that she imposed last spring in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The plans included seizing control of the state Capitol.

Michigan was at one point the third-worst state in terms of deaths and infections, but the lockdown and other restrictions have had a significant effect in recent months. It now ranks 10th in total deaths and 17th in terms of infections.

Whitmer, in a prepared statement delivered at the statehouse, said “Trump has spent the past seven months ignoring science, giving comfort to those who spread fear, hatred and division.”

Trump “stood before the American people just last week and refused to condemn white supremacist groups,” she continued, referring to Trump’s debate with Democrat Joe Biden. “Hate groups heard the president’s words not as a rebuke but as a call to action.”

It was noteworthy that three federal officials stood with Nessel at the announcement of the arrests and backed her claims that the armed right-wingers were seeking to overthrow the state government. FBI assistant special agent Josh Hauxhurst said that the FBI’s “primary mission is to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution.”

US attorneys Matthew Schneider and Andrew Birge made similar declarations, which in the context of Trump’s threats to defy the results of the November 3 election seemed to pit them directly against the president who appointed them.

“All of us standing here today want the public to know that federal and state law enforcement are committed to working together to make sure violent extremists never succeed with their plans, particularly when they target our duly elected leaders,” Birge said.

The fascist conspirators were planning to attack Whitmer just before the election. The timing strongly indicates direct coordination with the plans by Trump to incite violence, declare martial law, suspend the voting and arrest his political opponents. Given the scale of the effort in Michigan, whose designation as a

“battleground” state now seems ominously apt, the obvious question is what plans are ongoing in similar states: Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Ohio, North Carolina, Florida and Arizona, among others. Two other states were targeted, like Michigan, by Trump’s tweets: “Liberate Virginia” and “Liberate Minnesota.”

There are many more questions than answers about this conspiracy. It is not clear whether the FBI even informed Trump or the White House, or even their Justice Department boss, Attorney General William Barr, about the ongoing Michigan operation. Certainly, Trump himself seems to have been unaware of the impending raids. Only hours before the FBI and state troopers began rounding up his armed supporters, Trump was tweeting venom against Whitmer, praising last week’s ruling by the Michigan state supreme court that the 1945 law under which Whitmer issued her lockdown orders was unconstitutional.

There was a public conflict between the FBI and the White House two weeks ago after FBI Director Christopher Wray testified before Congress on September 24 that there was no evidence of widespread fraud in mail balloting, and that white supremacist groups were the largest threat of domestic terrorism in the United States, not Antifa, which he described as an ideology rather than an organization. White House chief of staff Mark Meadows denounced these claims in a vitriolic rebuke of the FBI director.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact