

Who are the New York Watchmen?

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18 October 2020

The New York Watchmen are a recently formed right-wing militia based in Western New York. They have chapters in Buffalo and Rochester and have reported interest as far away as Westchester County.

The New York section is part of a larger organization headquartered in North Carolina. It is unclear how large the national organization is, but the New York Watchmen are reporting around 200 members with the aim to reach 500 by election day. While they publicly claim to not be a militia, they have been organizing pistol permits and training, and have set up a GoFundMe page to fund the purchase of weapons, equipment and medical supplies.

The Watchmen hold a pro-government and pro-police stance, describing their main missions as supporting the police and protecting property and “innocents.” While Charles Pellien, the founder and director of the group has claimed that they are not partisan, he and other leading members of the group have publicly expressed their support for President Trump on social media.

The leaders of the Watchmen have organized appearances at Black Lives Matter and Antifa protests. They have also organized marches in support of the police that Republican government officials have attended. New York Assemblyman David DiPietro has attended their rallies, as well as Assistant Director of Health and Human Services Michael Caputo, who worked for the Reagan administration with Oliver North to pursue the interests of US imperialism in Central America.

Caputo is a close friend of Charles Pellien. In a rant posted on Facebook, Caputo called on New Yorkers to stock up on ammunition and to contact his “friend Charlie” and join the Watchmen. He has also given him “words of wisdom from the Roger Stone tree of coaching” according to Pellien.

They worked together in 2014 to organize 12th Man Thunder, a fan group of the Buffalo Bills football team

that worked to block Jon Bon Jovi’s attempts to purchase the team. It was revealed in 2017 that Donald Trump was behind the organization as part of his own attempt to buy the Bills.

The extent of the New York Watchmen’s connections to Caputo and Trump are not known. Pellien has stated that Caputo is not a member, but their close relationship and Caputo’s connections to the Trump administration raise questions about what influence the President or his close affiliates may have in such an organization.

What is more clearly understood is the political orientation of the New York Watchmen and its leading members.

Charles Pellien is a former police and corrections officer who formed the New York Watchmen in August of 2020 in response to the wave of protests against police violence that have swept across the country.

By September 10, he claimed that they had organized “80 former Law Enforcement Officers, Corrections Officers, Special ops Veterans, Marines, Martial Arts Black Belts, Body Builders, Bikers, Patriots, and some very tough women all ready to Back the Blue if needed.”

By “Back the Blue” he means intimidate protesters as an auxiliary wing of the police department. On October 9, after the Watchmen organized an appearance at a protest in Tonawanda, a suburb of Buffalo, he stated on his Facebook page that “this was only a dress rehearsal, a dry run, and a learning experience. And everyone better realize that we are not going to tolerate this [rioting] in our communities. We promise you that.”

He proceeded to then direct a post at the Tonawanda police, who did not respond to the protests as aggressively as the Watchmen would prefer, stating that they must “Do your fucking job or we will do it for you!”

It is clear that the Watchmen wanted a confrontation

with the protesters. Pellien claimed that the Tonawanda police were “holding us back so Antifa can terrorize the town with no resistance.” In this sense, the group serves to mobilize fascists within the police to violate orders from elected officials in the Democratic Party-run city.

The most aggressive expression of this comes from Pete Harding, a leading organizer for the Watchmen and several other right-wing and anti-mask groups.

Harding has taken to posting regular Facebook livestreams in which he rants against the “Marxist radicals” that he believes have infiltrated the state and are sponsoring terrorism. He frequently refers to BLM and Antifa as “terrorist organizations” and has argued that “any business that donates to Black Lives Matter should be arrested and criminally charged because they are supporting a terrorist organization at this point.”

In an unhinged rant, Harding accused the town of Tonawanda supervisor and police chief of being BLM and Antifa sympathizers who should be “locked up.” This came as a correction to his prior call for the town supervisor to be lynched. He quickly backtracked, saying it was not the right word, but the word “lynch” is not one that is used accidentally.

Harding’s hostile attitude towards Democratic politicians is a common thread in his social media posts. On October 8, following the revelations of the plot to kidnap and execute Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Harding posted the following on Facebook:

So let me see if I understand this right. If you murder thousands of the people in your state that you govern, if you destroy the lives of millions in your state with treasonous and unconstitutional decisions, if you bring your state down to its knees with you [sic] terrorism and terrorist decisions, if you invite violent terrorists into your state and cities who destroy those cities and you do nothing about it to arrest, charge or try those terrorists, law enforcement will do nothing to you.

If you are an actual terrorist burning, destroying, occupying, assaulting, murdering property and people in Michigan, you are protected and you will not be charged arrested

or prosecuted. If you commit acts of hate, terror and violence and hold cities hostage for weeks, nothing will happen to you.

If you plot to unseat these terrorists and hold them accountable for their actions, you will be arrested and face up to life in prison.

Harding’s support for the coup plot of 14 fascist militiamen to kidnap and murder a government official is telling and raises concerns about how many people with possible ties to the Trump administration share his views. He has accused Dianne Feinstein, Nancy Pelosi and Maxine Waters of being “psychopaths who are inciting riots,” further stating that “I don’t know why that isn’t treason, I don’t know why they aren’t being arrested.”

Harding has directed his vitriol towards protesters as well. He has claimed to have informants in protest groups that allow the Watchmen to “show up to events even before they do.” In a Facebook video posted on October 16 he began reading out the names of protesters to his audience before informing them that they “better put that helmet on. .. because we know who you are.. . I’m not giving your last names guys, but we got ‘em.”

The possibility of the New York Watchmen violently clashing with protesters is not out of the question. Neither is the possibility that their connections to the Trump administration go beyond cordial relations with Michael Caputo.

The working class must be wary of groups like the New York Watchmen. As they grow and as the political crisis deepens, they may very well be welcomed by police to join in violent clashes with protesters and striking workers.



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