

Why does Jacobin Magazine downplay the danger of fascist violence?

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On Tuesday, *Jacobin Magazine* published an article by Branko Marcetic on the fascist plot to kidnap and kill governors Gretchen Whitmer and Ralph Northam. The article, titled, “We Shouldn’t Trust the FBI’s Narrative on the Gretchen Whitmer Kidnapping Scheme,” is *Jacobin’s* first since the plot was exposed on October 8. It argues that the Michigan plot is “exaggerated,” that the media is engaged in “sensationalism” and that there is no real threat of far-right violence today.

In reality, the danger of fascist violence on a large scale has never been greater in modern American history.

The October 8 arrest of 13 militiamen, followed by the arrest of a 14th man in Wisconsin last week, exposed part of a national plot to kill governors and overthrow state legislatures. The conspirators, who claim the ability to mobilize “hundreds” of people, planned to intercept Whitmer at her vacation home, stage a trial and execute her. They planned to descend on the state Capitol in Lansing, take control of the legislative chambers and disband the elected government. Further testimony revealed that the conspirators saw their plot as part of a national effort by Trump to remain in power regardless of the outcome of the November 3 election.

Far from disavowing the conspirators, Trump continues to encourage them, calling Whitmer a “dictator.” Last weekend, Trump traveled to western Michigan and led a crowd in chants of “lock her up!” He added, ominously, “Lock them all up.” Police across the state are now in semi-rebellion, refusing to follow orders from elected officials barring militia from bringing guns to polling places.

The Democratic Party, fearful of provoking mass social opposition to the threat of dictatorship, has downplayed the danger. The Democrats’ line, put forward in an official position paper released by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer last week, is that it is “unfortunate” that “Trump and his allies are attempting to stoke fear and chaos,” that Trump is merely sowing “disinformation” and that the population must “be patient.”

Jacobin’s only article on the Michigan conspiracy is in line with the Democratic Party’s strategy. The article attacks the media and the FBI for blowing the danger of fascist violence out of proportion. Socialists, according to *Jacobin*, must “not allow officials and security services to exaggerate the threat of terrorism for their own purposes.”

Jacobin concocts three bizarre arguments as to why skepticism is needed in “this case specifically.”

Jacobin reassures its readers that far-right violence “remains a statistically minor threat to life” in general. It then cites the fact that Americans are more likely to be killed by wild animals than by fascists. Were this argument actually taken seriously, the reader might legitimately draw the conclusion that grizzlies and mountain lions represent a greater threat to democratic rights than armed fascists.

Second, *Jacobin* writes that lending legitimacy to the plot only feeds hysteria over “terrorism” in general and helps Trump’s “threats to designate ‘antifa’ as a terrorist organization.” In other words, the only way to fight fascism is to not fight it at all because exposing fascist plots only leads to state repression. This demoralized and complacent attitude is a guaranteed recipe for defeat.

Third, in a section titled “It’s all about entrapment,” *Jacobin* asserts the conspiracy was likely provoked by the FBI, writing, “There are more than enough warning signs that, with this case, the FBI may be up to its old Obama-era tricks, helping manufacture the very terrorist plots it ends up thwarting and publicizing.”

In fact, the FBI has not exaggerated the threat. It has hardly publicized *any* details of the plot and is itself engaged in a cover-up for the same reasons as the Democrats. FBI Director Christopher Wray said in September that there are presently 1,000 investigations into far-right groups in America, and they have released only minor details about part of the Michigan plot.

The article never mentions any evidence as to what the “warning signs” of an FBI frame-up might be. Nevertheless, *Jacobin* concludes that the FBI is concocting far-right plots because it has “found it hard to get the Trump White House to take [fascist violence] seriously” and wants to compel Trump to address the matter.

This is politically absurd. Does *Jacobin* expect anyone to believe the FBI invented the plot so that it could force Trump to crack down on fascist violence? If that were the case, then why is the Democratic Party playing down the danger and ignoring the threat against Whitmer and Northam? Beyond the statements of the conspirators’ lawyers, *Jacobin* again cites no information that undermines Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel’s claim that the plot was “serious and credible.”

Jacobin’s article then blames the media for giving *too much* attention to the plot:

“Unfortunately, rather than applying some measured skepticism

and caution to the story, the press has largely treated it with sensationalistic bombast.” *Jacobin* adds, “So it’s up to not just the press, but the Left, too, to treat this case with the skepticism that all such FBI-involved terror plots deserve.” *Jacobin* attacks the *Guardian*, CNN and the *New York Times* for “giving the story a salaciously ominous framing” by calling it a “plot to overthrow Michigan’s state government.”

But that is exactly what it was. The Democratic Party-aligned press has worked to hide the most ominous details—yes, ominous!—from the population in line with the Democratic Party’s efforts to downplay the danger and prevent social opposition from below. No reference to the plot is presently made on the online front-page editions of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or the UK or US editions of the *Guardian*.

The purpose of the article is to reassure *Jacobin*’s readers that there is “nothing to see here.” This even takes the form of defending the plotters by presenting them sympathetically, and asserting, without any proof, that they were the victims of “entrapment.” *Jacobin* describes fascist plot ringleader Adam Fox, Michigan state leader of the fascist Three Percenters, as an impoverished loner who is “not unlike” the Muslim immigrant victims of FBI entrapment.

In fact, the transcript of the preliminary hearing in federal court last week shows that the FBI’s first informant was a militia member who voluntarily approached local law enforcement in March “based on concerns about some of the directions that the group was headed and the potential violence that they were discussing.” By that time, the plan was already so far advanced that the group moved on to actively training, performing reconnaissance at the governor’s house, and recruiting an army to storm the Capitol.

It may well be the case that informants and undercover agents were more actively involved than the FBI is admitting. But this would not be a reason to dismiss the plot, as *Jacobin* does. Rather, it only further shows why it is urgently necessary to demand a full release of all the evidence. Are the intelligence agencies involved in the conspiracy to kill a sitting governor? Were FBI agents actually involved in the plot, like in the 1965 murder of civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo or the 1979 Greensboro, North Carolina massacre of radicals by the KKK?

The exposure of a plot to assassinate Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer has uncovered the existence of a nationwide underground far-right terror network.

This danger is very real. In this case, it is not even clear that the FBI in Michigan informed national headquarters about the raids. CNN reported that Attorney General William Barr was not given prior notice that the investigation was even underway. Did a section of the FBI fear the president and his attorney general would tip off the fascists and help them escape detection?

Jacobin does not raise such questions, nor do they call for the release of additional evidence or the holding of public hearings to question officials as to the possible ties held by Trump allies to the plotters and the fascist right. Instead, they attack the legitimacy of the investigation and tell their readers to disregard the events in Michigan.

Why has *Jacobin*, an ostensibly left-wing publication, written an

article that so blatantly denies the danger of right-wing violence?

Jacobin and the Democratic Socialists of America are merely a faction of the Democratic Party. They exist for no other reason than to block the development of a socialist movement independent of the Democratic Party.

Their role is to draw attention away from anything that undermines confidence in the Democrats or threatens to politically radicalize workers and young people. For the same reason, the article ignores the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed nearly 225,000 people in the US and over 1.1 million worldwide. *Jacobin* views the pandemic as an event of no great importance or consequence.

The Michigan coup plot emerged out of the protests against Whitmer’s coronavirus-related restrictions. The protests were instigated by powerful sections of the ruling class in support of Trump’s “herd immunity” policy, aimed above all at forcing workers back to work to fuel corporate profits regardless of the risk of death. The main reason the plotters planned to kill Whitmer, after all, is because she imposed limited restrictions on business to stop the virus’ spread.

It is worth recalling that earlier in October, *Jacobin* published an interview with Martin Kuldorff, a major figure who has directly collaborated with Trump on his “herd immunity” policy. The article favorably gave Kuldorff space to promote “herd immunity” and the deadly “Swedish model.” In April, *Jacobin* also published an article titled “The Left Can’t Just Dismiss the Anti-Lockdown Protests,” which called for an orientation to the same fascist anti-lockdown protests in Lansing that the plotters used to plan their assassinations.

Everything *Jacobin* writes exudes complacency and indifference. Its approach is guided by the need to subordinate all left-wing sentiment toward the election of Joe Biden, the right-wing former senator from Delaware, the shell company capital of the world. Its chief aim is to contain the growing social opposition from below within the framework of the Democratic Party and its election campaign. In this process they are playing a despicable political role.



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