

Stop government attack on COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party
10 December 2020

The Socialist Equality Party condemns the fascistic police raid on the home of data scientist Rebekah Jones, which came in response to her work exposing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Florida and in schools across the US.

Florida state police barged into Jones' home Monday with guns aimed at her and her family. They seized her phone, computer and several hard drives, preventing her from continuing to publish data on COVID-19 outbreaks. After the raid Jones tweeted: "They pointed a gun in my face. They pointed guns at my kids... This was DeSantis. He sent the gestapo."

Jones tweeted Friday that she has learned that Circuit Judge Joshua Hawkes was appointed by Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis in September, and one of his first acts as a judge was to sign the search warrant that led to the seizure of her technology. DeSantis is among the most prominent backers of US President Donald Trump, who has spearheaded the ruling class policy of "herd immunity" through the opening of non-essential businesses and schools.

Jones told CNN that flash drives seized by the police contained proof that Florida officials "were lying in January about things like internal reports and notices from the CDC," as well as "evidence of illegal activities by the state."

This brazen act of suppression of the rights to free speech and access to information must be opposed! The working class in the US and internationally must come to the defense of Jones and all whistleblowers, and fight for the full transparency and reporting of all data on COVID-19!

A former employee at the Florida Department of Health, Jones is among the most prominent data scientists in the US. Using advanced geographic information system (GIS) technology, Jones helped create Florida's COVID-19 dashboard to carefully track the spread of the pandemic in the state. Shortly thereafter, she was fired in May for refusing to manipulate data to support DeSantis' escalating back-to-work and back-to-school campaigns.

After being fired from her position, Jones went on to help create and oversee Florida COVID Action and The COVID Monitor, the most comprehensive databases for tracking COVID-19 infections and deaths in Florida and in K-12 schools across the US, respectively.

Jones was targeted due to her role with these projects, and for being an outspoken critic of DeSantis and Trump. She has consistently warned against the reckless policy of reopening schools amid the raging pandemic.

The specific allegation made against Jones that led to Monday's police raid was that she was responsible for an email being sent to Florida's Department of Health employees imploring them to "speak up before another 17,000 people are dead," which Jones denies having sent. She asserts that, in part, officials seized her devices to determine what contacts she has within the Department of Health, who will in turn likely be victimized in the near future.

The raid on Jones' home is intended to facilitate the homicidal policies of keeping schools and nonessential businesses open while the pandemic rages out of control. It is meant to intimidate critical and outspoken scientists who warn against the dangers facing workers and youth.

Jones and two colleagues at The COVID Monitor published an article in *US News* on December 2 titled, "Should Schools Stay Open? Not So Fast." They noted the fact that over 1 million children have been infected with COVID-19, concluding, "Our data demonstrates that schools are not the safe havens or silos some believed they would be, and that they in fact contribute to the spread of COVID-19 in a number of ways... In our opinion, the data suggests schools are NOT safe and DO contribute to the spread of the virus—both within schools and within their surrounding communities."

The COVID Monitor documents that at least 187,351 students and 80,689 educators have been infected in K-12 schools across the US. Florida COVID Action reports 1,178,703 total cases and 19,716 deaths in Florida, including 101,264 cases and nine deaths among children.

The police raid took place on the same day that schools reopened in New York City, the largest school district in the US. This reckless reopening was promoted relentlessly by the *New York Times* and spearheaded by Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio and United Federation of Teachers (UFT) President Michael Mulgrew, exemplifying the bipartisan and union-backed character of the back-to-school drive.

As with the nationwide campaign to reopen schools spearheaded by the Trump administration, the drive to open New York City schools is not based on science but rather the profit interests of the financial oligarchy.

Opening schools is central to the strategy of the ruling class. In order to compel parents to return to unsafe workplaces where they face brutal exploitation, schools must be opened as holding pens for their children. The Democrats, a party of Wall Street and finance capital, are as equally culpable as the Republicans in reopening schools.

President-elect Joe Biden has issued no statement in defense of Jones or the right of access to data on the spread of the pandemic. Instead, in a speech Tuesday, Biden stated, “It should be a national priority to get our kids back into school and keep them in school,” adding that he “will work to see that the majority of our schools can be open by the end of my first 100 days.”

Roughly half of all K-12 students in the US presently attend schools that offer only online learning, 32.5 percent attend schools with fully in-person learning, and nearly 17 percent attended hybrid schools. If Biden succeeds in his goal, tens of millions more students will return to unsafe classrooms by the end of April, well before the population is fully vaccinated.

In his speech, Biden promoted the lie that schools can be safely reopened in the coming months simply by providing some additional funding for cosmetic safety measures. American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, a member of the Democratic National Committee and potential pick for secretary of education, gave her fulsome support to this fraud, tweeting, “Hallelujah! Unlike Trump, President-Elect Biden gets what we need to reopen schools safely.”

The seizure of Jones’ equipment and attempts to censor her reporting of COVID-19 infections and deaths is the latest in the decades-long war against whistleblowers by the American political establishment.

The COVID Monitor compiles data on K-12 school outbreaks through anonymous submissions, akin to the cables provided to WikiLeaks that have exposed countless crimes by American and world imperialism. When Chelsea Manning was uncovered as the source of nearly 750,000 cables on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, she was imprisoned for seven years, where she was psychologically

tortured. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been relentlessly hounded for the past decade and is presently locked up in London’s Belmarsh prison awaiting a verdict on his extradition to the US, where he likely faces a 175-year prison sentence.

Both of these courageous whistleblowers, along with Edward Snowden and many others, were equally persecuted under the Obama-Biden administration as under the Trump administration, and the incoming Biden-Harris administration will only deepen the assault on free speech.

The ruling class strategy of developing “herd immunity” without a vaccine has been predicated on the suppression of data and the falsification of science. It is a policy that can be implemented only through police state measures such as the raid on Jones’ home.

The only social force capable of defending basic democratic rights, and whose objective interests demand full transparency on COVID-19 cases, is the international working class.

The SEP calls on all workers and youth to oppose the assault on Jones and all whistleblowers, and to fight for a comprehensive plan to contain the pandemic.

Non-essential businesses and schools must be closed immediately. All workers must be provided with full income protection, housing, medical care and high quality food until the pandemic is contained and the population is safely inoculated, as determined by trusted medical experts. To fund these social programs requires the expropriation of the vast wealth hoarded by the ruling elites, who have amassed over \$1 trillion since the start of the pandemic and trillions more in recent decades.

The fight to defend democratic rights and contain the pandemic requires a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and the fight for socialism. The pandemic has laid bare the need for a complete reorganization of society to meet the needs of the vast majority, based on the principle of social equality. Those who support this program and recognize the need to fight for its realization should make the decision today to join and help build the SEP.



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