

Glenn Greenwald downplays fascist plot to kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer

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On July 16, BuzzFeed News published an article detailing the FBI infiltration of the Wolverine Watchmen, a fascist militia group that planned to kidnap and kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer last fall. The article shows that the FBI had undercover agents and informants in the group and that informants facilitated meetings, established connections and helped provide paramilitary training to the conspirators.

This has been seized on by far-right, pro-Trump elements and libertarian journalist Glenn Greenwald to exonerate Trump in both the Michigan plot and the January 6 attempted coup, as well as to downplay the growing fascist threat generally.

Far from supporting the claim that the danger of a fascist dictatorship has been overblown, the fact that at least a dozen informants and undercover agents played a role in the plot against Whitmer serves as a warning of the intimate connections between the state and far-right militia groups, such as the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys and Three Percenters, all of whom participated in the attack on the U.S. Capitol this past January.

On July 24, Greenwald wrote a column titled “FBI Using the Same Fear Tactic From the First War on Terror: Orchestrating its Own Terrorism Plots.” Citing the BuzzFeed article, Greenwald claims: “Questioning the FBI’s role in 1/6 was maligned by corporate media as deranged. But only ignorance about the FBI or a desire to deceive could produce such a reaction.”

He adds: “The idea of kidnapping Gov. Whitmer came from the FBI. It was a plot designed by the agency, and they then went on the hunt to target people they believed they could manipulate into joining their plot.”

Greenwald cites the FBI’s use of informants and undercover agents to entice and entrap disorientated young Muslims into alleged terror plots following September 11, 2001. He then draws the conclusion that the Michigan plotters were no less victims of state provocation and should be legally exonerated and released from jail.

Equating the fascist plot with the half-baked plots of confused young Muslims eliminates the most important difference: The threats against Whitmer came from the president of the United States himself, on behalf of powerful sections of big capital who demanded a lifting of all pandemic-related restrictions on business. In his defense of the fascists, which Greenwald routinely recites on Fox News appearances with Tucker Carlson and Maria Bartiromo, he ignores the entire context of both the Michigan plot and the storming of the U.S. Capitol.

In the plot against Whitmer, Wolverine Watchmen militia members chatted and shared memes extolling their desire to murder “communist tyrants” and police officers months before the FBI

infiltrated the group. As a factual matter, no evidence has emerged showing the FBI or its accomplices coerced indicted militia members to participate in the storming of the Lansing Capitol on April 30. Trump had appealed to his fascist supporters to “LIBERATE” Michigan from Whitmer, whom he routinely denounced as a “tyrant.”

Greenwald argues that since the FBI knew about the plot and evidently helped move it forward, there is nothing to fear. He ignores the federal police agency’s long history of cultivating far-right elements to carry out assassinations and bombings in order to bludgeon the working class and implement the policies of the ruling elite.

One of the more well-known examples of the FBI facilitating and overseeing violent attacks against civil rights activists in the 1960s is that of Gary Thomas Rowe Jr., a member of the KKK’s Eastview Klavern #13 and a paid informant for the FBI.

As an informant for the FBI, Rowe worked in close coordination with local police and notorious racist Birmingham Commissioner of Public Safety Bull Connor. In 1961, he helped plan and lead a violent attack against the Freedom Riders. Rowe is also suspected to have helped perpetrate the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, which killed four young African American girls, and he was in the vehicle that participated in the drive-by murder of Viola Liuzzo in 1965.

In another example, documents released in 2017 and 2018, as a result of the JFK Records Act, showed that the agency had over 11 years paid \$26,266.01, or over \$200,000 adjusted for inflation today, to George Dorsett, an “Imperial Kludd” or national chaplain of the United Klans of America. In a 1990 oral history for UNC Greensboro’s archival project, Civil Rights Greensboro, Dargan Frierson, Dorsett’s FBI handler, described Dorsett as “one heck of a speaker” who “could really fire up a crowd.”

In 1979, two government informants, KKK member Edward Dawson and neo-Nazi Bernard Butkovich, helped perpetrate the deadly assault on Maoists participating in an anti-Klan rally. Five Maoists were killed in the assault.

It is a historical fact that capitalist governments around the world have and continue to make use of far-right informants and agent provocateurs to further their political agendas and suppress the class struggle. The *World Socialist Web Site* has written extensively on the infiltration of German police and intelligence agencies by fascists and the role of agents of state intelligence agencies working within fascist movements. The relationship between the state and fascist groups is close and symbiotic.

In a more recent example, when pro-Trump Patriot Prayer member Aaron Danielson was killed in Portland in August, the full attention of

the US police state came bearing down on antifascist activist Michael Reinhoehl. Within a week a federal fugitive task force assassinated Reinhoehl, who days before told Vice News, “They’re out hunting me.” The state-sanctioned murder was carried out on the orders of Trump, who demanded the police, “Do your job and do it fast. Everybody knows who this thug is.”

While the capitalist police and intelligence agencies are more than willing to look on, offer money and/or transportation to far-right militias as they commit murder or foster and incite terrorist violence, when it comes to antiwar, socialist and left-wing groups, the FBI has taken a decidedly different tack. Martin Luther King Jr., long a subject of FBI surveillance, was murdered in Memphis in 1968. Black Panther leader Fred Hampton was assassinated in Chicago in 1969 with the help of a police informant.

None of this factors into Greenwald’s calculations, who downplayed the coup in a January 7 column titled “Violence in the Capitol, Dangers in the Aftermath.”

In the article, Greenwald bemoans the fact that Donald Trump’s social media accounts had been disabled after employees at Twitter and Facebook demanded action be taken to stop the would-be Fuhrer’s ongoing attempts to incite fascist violence and overthrow the government. Greenwald then calls for “rational restraint” and “sober language” in describing the fascist coup, declaring that the words “insurrection,” “coup” and “sedition” are exaggerations.

Ignoring ongoing revelations that confirm the fact that the defense of the Capitol was purposefully sabotaged by elements of the state (such as the U.S. Capitol Police emergency response team, trained by former U.S. special forces soldiers with an affinity for Adolf Hitler, which refused to deploy or fire “less-lethal” rounds during the attack), Greenwald claims there was “zero chance” that the US government could have been overthrown by Trump-aligned paramilitaries, “nor did they try,” he added.

In his defense of the fascist militia members, Greenwald ignores that the leaders of the militia groups that spearheaded the assault on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, such as Elmer Stewart Rhodes of the Oath Keepers and admitted FBI informant and Proud Boys leader Henry “Enrique” Tarrío, have yet to be charged in the attack. Of the over 535 arrested in the siege of the Capitol, roughly 10 percent have a military background. At least 30 police officers have been publicly identified in the attack, along with nearly a dozen current or former Republican lawmakers.

The cozy relationship between fascist militias, the Republican Party and Donald Trump is a matter of public record. In the first televised campaign debate with Joe Biden, in September of 2020, Trump refused to commit himself to a peaceful transition of power should he be declared the loser of the election. Asked by the moderator to condemn violent extremists and white supremacists, he declined to do so. When Biden offered up the Proud Boys as a group to repudiate, Trump instead advised them to “stand back and stand by.”

At least 37 Proud Boys have thus far been indicted in connection with the January 6 attack.

Trump and his most ardent “stop the steal” supporters in Congress, including Arizona Representatives Paul Gosar and Andy Biggs, continue to claim that the election was stolen. They maintain that the low-level fascist thugs who have been arrested for storming the Capitol are “political victims,” who have been unfairly targeted by the FBI, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the “radical left” Democrats for being Trump supporters. Oath Keepers leader Stewart Rhodes, credentialed guest at the most recent CPAC conference, likewise

called for the release of “35 Oath Keepers, Proud Boys ... Patriots” during a recent podcast appearance.

January 6 was “a mostly peaceful affair,” said Gosar at Trump’s rally in Phoenix this past Saturday. He demanded the release of “14,000 hours of tape so that we can hold the people accountable for their wrongdoing, even if it’s insiders from the FBI and DOJ.”

From Greenwald’s pen to Trump’s lips, the arguments are the same. Oath Keepers, Three Percenters and Proud Boys militia members intent on kidnapping and executing lawmakers for having the audacity to certify the presidential election are the “real” victims of an FBI entrapment plot.

Socialists are well aware that the FBI and state agencies are using the events of January 6 to justify further attacks on democratic rights. Backed by the Democrats, the state uses any opportunity to seize on events to prepare future attacks against the left. But socialist opposition to state repression does not mean downplaying the danger of the far right. Socialists do not rely on the state to crush fascism. That is the task of the working class. But for the working class to stop the far right, it must have a sober understanding of the dangers.

In both the Michigan plot and the January 6 attack, the police and domestic intelligence agencies were very aware of the deadly threat to life and democratic rights weeks before the attacks were supposed to commence. That the Michigan plot was revealed by the FBI while the January 6 assault was allowed to proceed is not proof that Trump was “set up,” or that his fascist supporters are being unfairly targeted for their political beliefs. It is, rather, further evidence of an ongoing internecine conflict within the ruling class, which has not lessened with the election of Biden.

Biden and the Democrats are desperately seeking to contain this conflict, endlessly appealing for “unity” with a party dominated by co-conspirators who defend the plot to overthrow the election and install Trump as a dictator. In this pursuit, the Democrats are engaged in a cover-up of the vast scope of the conspiracy headed up by Trump and his accomplices in the military, the police, the intelligence agencies and the Republican Party.

They aim to conceal from the working class the very real danger of fascism and dictatorship, for fear of the revolutionary social and political consequences of mass opposition from below. They are aided and abetted by rightward lurching, quasi-anarchist and libertarian elements like Greenwald, as well as sections of the pseudo-left, who represent privileged sections of the middle class. For all his denunciations of the Democratic Party, Greenwald only ends up apologizing for its own efforts to downplay the danger of the far right.

The events of the past year underscore the basic fact that working people can place no confidence in any section of the ruling class or either of its parties to defend democratic rights. There can be no democracy outside of the struggle of the working class against capitalism, the root cause of ever greater social inequality, repression and war.



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