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Updates for June 27th

14 Jun - Why Is Biden's DHS Spying On the Activists Fighting "Cop City"?

For months, environmental and racial justice activists in Atlanta have challenged the destruction of a local forest for a police training facility.

MORE:

by Spencer Reynolds (*Slate*)

Following an extended draconian crackdown, the Atlanta Police Department on May 31 arrested three people who operated a bail fund providing legal support to demonstrators. This escalatory action directly targeted constitutional rights to free speech and legal representation, drawing widespread criticism from civil rights groups such as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, which called the arrests a "discretionary misuse of law enforcement" to intimidate activists.

In its justification for the arrest, the state of Georgia cited the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)'s characterization of Atlanta activists as "domestic violent extremists." DHS has denied that it made the decision to "classify or designate" protestors as domestic violent extremists, relying on a hypertechnical distinction that the U.S. government does not "designate" domestic groups as terrorist organizations in the way that it does with foreign groups. Yet DHS's counterterrorism work is littered with reports where it has nonetheless described Americans as domestic violent extremists.

DHS's own recent public terrorism bulletin does just that, asserting that violent extremists (its euphemism for terrorists), for a year have attacked the training facility construction site and its backers with "criminal activity" inspired by "anti-law enforcement sentiment" and various left-wing "extremist" views. Indeed, understanding DHS's intent despite its technical maneuvering, the Atlanta Police Department appears to rely on this rhetoric in its arrest warrants, yet the warrants predate the public bulletin. (Recently revealed reports from DHS's infrastructure agency also come after the initial arrests and use different labels.) So who is feeding Atlanta this DHS "extremist" branding?

The reference to the activists as domestic violent extremists most likely comes from DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A), a troubled element of the U.S. Intelligence Community with a big impact on American policing. I&A shares intelligence nationwide with tens of thousands of government officials through online platforms and a network of fusion centers. Although this intelligence is often unverified and sometimes outright false, it bears the imprimatur of the federal government, which recipients rely on to justify policing actions. I&A's authority to acquire information is mostly limited to what is publicly available—such as social media—or through overt exchanges with human sources. But this seemingly limited information, taken out of context and amplified, can result in exaggerated fears about social movements and serve as a justification for the unconstitutional or politicized suppression of activists and protestors.

During the 2020 racial justice demonstrations in Portland, Oregon, I&A officers shared dossiers on protestors with law enforcement, assembling them from social media and immigration, travel, and undisclosed databases. Then I&A wrote intelligence reports on journalists covering its illicit activities. And the unit claimed authority to surveil activists protesting confederate monuments based on a hyperbolic decree issued by President Trump depicting vandalism as a threat to "domestic tranquility."

Under President Joe Biden, I&A has surveilled Americans discussing abortion after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and broadly monitored online "narratives and grievances"—people talking politics—in the name of thwarting domestic terrorist attacks.

Overbroad mandates and flimsy safeguards allow I&A to help facilitate arrests like those in Atlanta, as my colleague Faiza Patel and I explained in a recent report for the Brennan Center for Justice. Guidelines meant to ensure that I&A cannot abuse its authorities or violate constitutional rights have broad exceptions for proposed actions that advance I&A's missions. But its missions are so vast—covering terrorism, threats to infrastructure, undefined "significant" threats to public safety, and more—that they can give cover for a range of illegitimate government activities, as occurred most notably in Portland. On top of that, DHS stretches the meaning of terrorism to include, in the case of Atlanta, any "criminal activity" such as "property damage" to a construction site.

I&A easily overcomes safeguards for constitutional rights. Its guidelines barely mention the First Amendment and allow I&A to monitor core political speech and activity so long as it asserts a mission purpose. It is all too easy for I&A officials to concoct a pretext for scrutiny, such as civil disobedience to block construction of a police facility. Once it has collected information, I&A may retain it indefinitely – so long as it continues to assert the information supports one of its sweeping mandates – and share this intelligence with thousands of federal, state, and local police who use it to justify investigations, crackdowns, and the prosecution of dissidents. This is what seems to be happening right now in Atlanta.

Policymakers should take urgent action to address these problems. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas should strengthen protections for Americans' First Amendment rights to prohibit this type of targeting, throttle I&A's reliance on Americans' social media, and establish an independent oversight office to enforce these and other changes. Congress, for its part, should narrow I&A's vast intelligence mandates. Those can serve as pretexts for illicit operations that generate material used to justify abusive crackdowns like those happening in Atlanta.

Today's sprawling network of homeland security organizations injects federal spy agencies into local political matters, often without meaningful restrictions. Systemic change is necessary; the federal government must not be allowed to use its vast intelligence resources to enable local prosecutions of activists with the courage to take on the police and their corporate backers.

15 Jun - The FBI Groomed a 16-Year-Old With "Brain Development Issues" to Become a Terrorist

An undercover FBI agent befriended the teenager online. When he turned 18, he was arrested for supporting ISIS.

MORE:

by Murtaza Hussain (*The Intercept*)

Last week, the Department of Justice announced the arrest of a teenager in Massachusetts on allegations of providing financial support to the Islamic State group.

A flurry of reports picked up on the arrest of Mateo Ventura, an 18-year-old resident of the sleepy town of Wakefield, echoing government claims that an international terrorist financier and ISIS supporter had just been busted in the United States. The Department of Justice's own press release on the case likewise trumpeted Ventura's arrest for "knowingly concealing the source of material support or resources that he intended to go to a foreign terrorist organization."

The only problem with the case and how it has been described, however, is that according to the government's own criminal complaint, Ventura had never actually funded any terrorist group. The only "terrorist" he is accused of ever being in contact with was an undercover FBI agent who befriended him online as a 16-year-old, solicited small cash donations in the form of gift cards, and directed him not to tell anyone else about their intimate online relationship, including his family.

The arrest has shaken his family, who denied allegations that their son was a terrorist and said that he had been manipulated by the FBI. Ventura's father, Paul Ventura, told *The Intercept* that Mateo suffered from childhood developmental issues and had been forced to leave his school due to bullying from other students.

"He was born prematurely, he had brain development issues. I had the school do a neurosurgery evaluation on him and they said his brain was underdeveloped," Ventura said. "He was suffering endless bullying at school with other kids taking food off his plate, tripping him in the hallway, humiliating him, laughing at him."

Contrary to the sensational narrative fed to the news media of terrorist financing in the U.S., the charging documents show that Ventura gave an undercover FBI agent gift cards for pitifully small amounts of cash, sometimes in \$25 increments. In his initial bid to travel to the Islamic State, the teenager balked — making up an excuse, by the FBI's own account, to explain why he did not want to go. When another opportunity to travel abroad arose, Ventura balked again, staying home on the evening of his supposed flight instead of traveling to the airport. By the time the investigation was winding down, he appeared ready to turn in his purported ISIS contact — an FBI agent — to the FBI.

There is still much that remains to be known about Ventura's case, which remains in its early stages. More information may still come to light as it moves to discovery and trial, including about his dealings with the FBI and other activities online.

Yet based on the government's own account of what led to Ventura's arrest, there is reason to believe that his case is less a serious terrorism bust than one of the many instances in which a troubled or mentally unfit young man was groomed by undercover FBI agents to commit a crime that would not have otherwise happened.

This law enforcement tactic has been criticized by national security researchers who have scrutinized the FBI's role in manufacturing terrorism cases using vulnerable people who would have been unable to commit crimes without prolonged government assistance and encouragement. A 2014 Human Rights Watch report criticizing the use of informants in terrorism investigations said, "In this way, the FBI may have created terrorists out of law-abiding individuals."

This FBI tactic was a mainstay of terrorism prosecutions for roughly two decades. While its use lately has waned, the Ventura case may indicate that authorities are still open to conjuring terrorists where none existed.

"There is still significant use of informants and undercover agents in FBI investigations who aren't just gathering information about potential crimes but are actively suggesting ideas for crimes or making it easier for people to do the things that they claim they want to do," said Naz Ahmad, acting director of the Creating Law Enforcement Accountability and Responsibility, or CLEAR, project at the City University of New York School of Law. "There are documented cases where the government has provided people everything that they needed to execute a plot. Informants and undercover agents have often been used as a tool in these investigations to prod things along."

Paul Ventura said that in 2021 armed FBI agents from visited his home, informed him that his son had been browsing websites "that he shouldn't be looking at," and connected him with what they said was a counselor. After the initial visit, he said he had no knowledge of his son's ongoing communications with the FBI undercover agent online.

"Two years ago, the FBI came to my house and they took his computer and said he's on these sites he shouldn't be on. We said OK, and he wasn't arrested at that time or anything. I didn't hear from them again after that, but I guess over time things escalated," said Paul Ventura. "I wasn't home a lot because I work,

and he wasn't at school because of the bullying. Instead of them telling me that he's doing what he's doing online and to take his computer away, they let him keep doing it."

The facts of the case against Mateo Ventura laid out in the government's criminal complaint detail how his relationship developed with the FBI.

In August 2021, when he was 16 years old, Ventura began communicating with an undercover FBI agent online. He told the agent of his desire to make "hijrah," or migrate to territories under control of the Islamic State.

By the time of the discussion, ISIS had been largely vanquished in its home territories of Iraq and Syria, though it is not clear whether Ventura had been aware of this. According to the Department of Justice's complaint, an undercover FBI agent impersonating an ISIS member communicated to the 16-year-old in broken English, encouraging his decision and expressly telling him not to inform anyone else about their online conversations, including friends or family. The criminal complaint in the case describes the exchange between Ventura and "OCE," or the "FBI employee acting in an undercover capacity":

VENTURA: *I reached out to brother [A.D.] for hijrah [migration] I dont know if it is still possible but if it is I know it will take sometime.*

OCE: *Ahh*

OCE: *Inshallah [if Allah wills it] I help u, but before talk have rule my brother.*

OCE: *U must no talk about what said here or intention to anyone. No tell family.*

No tell friend. No tell ikhwan [brothers] at masjid [mosque]. No one. This for both are safety.

OCE: *Intention stay between U and Allah azzawajal [the mighty and majestic].*

Ventura continued chatting with the undercover agent about what he could do for ISIS, including potentially fighting for them in a foreign country. The two settled on him buying a \$25 Google Play gift card and sending the redemption code to the FBI agent. At the FBI's direction, the 16-year-old also recorded an audio file of himself elaborately pledging allegiance to the leader of ISIS and transmitting the audio recording over the chat.

Over the next year two years, Ventura continued sending small amounts of cash through gift cards to the FBI agent, mostly through gaming stores like Steam, PlayStation Network, and Google Play. The amounts of his small transactions, which spanned over roughly two years, added up to a total of \$965 during the time that he was a juvenile, and another \$705 after he became a legal adult.

All the while, Ventura's conversations with the FBI undercover operative online continued, including promises to make a passport and assurances that he would teach himself Arabic "very fast" in case he traveled to Egypt on behalf of the group.

In the end, Ventura appeared to get cold feet. In September 2022, when he was 17 years old, he told the agent that he could no longer "go for hijrah," because he had been "hurt very bad in fall and can no longer walk." The injury was an excuse that the FBI — which, according to the affidavit in the case, interviewed Ventura six days thereafter — concluded had been made up by the teen.

In January 2023, just after his 18th birthday, Ventura got back in touch with the FBI agent on the encrypted messaging platform. Apologizing for not being communicative in previous months after his supposed injury, Ventura again said he wanted to travel to the Islamic State. The pair discussed the possibility of him dying in an attack by ISIS fighters somewhere in the world or attending a training camp.

At the FBI undercover operative's direction, Ventura took a video of himself and sent it over the chat, telling the agent that he had a beard now. The FBI agent praised the performance, saying Ventura was "strong" and "Look (sic) like lion."

Ventura sent the FBI operative another \$25 Google Play gift certificate, which he was assured would be used for jihad, before trying and failing to book several flights due to apparent lack of access to a credit card. On April 10 this year, Ventura finally succeeded in booking a Turkish Airlines flight to Egypt.

But instead of boarding the flight, or even leaving his residence on the night it was scheduled, Ventura contacted the FBI's National Threat Operations Center and reported a tip, stating in a rambling message that he wanted "10 million dollars in duffel bags" in exchange for information on future terrorist attacks. "I known (sic) you thought I am retarded fool but jokes on you I will not admit I sent this or communicate until the cash is delivered," the message said, according to the criminal complaint in the case.

By this time in the investigation, Ventura had not only seemingly developed cold feet about joining the group, but appeared eager to sell out his supposed ISIS contact to law enforcement.

Ventura called the FBI again several times in the coming days, telling them that he wanted to help with "terror" and again offering to help stop a future ISIS terrorist attack and to provide information about people who were facilitating travel for the group, in exchange for cash and legal immunity for himself.

On April 20, according to the affidavit, he was informed in a phone call from the FBI that the information he had provided was "not specific and therefore not actionable."

Meanwhile, as his attempts to blow the whistle on the FBI's own informant in exchange for millions of dollars of cash appeared to stall, Ventura also continued communicating with their undercover operative online, apologizing for missing his flight to Egypt and inquiring about other ways he might travel to join ISIS. On May 16, he sent another Google Play gift card to the agent, with a value of \$45.

These interactions continued until Ventura was arrested in early June and charged with one count of "knowingly concealing the source of material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization" — reference to the gift card donations he had spent years sending to the FBI during their chats online.

Although news reports echoed the Justice Department's portrayal of the arrest as the foiling of a nascent Islamic State funding operation in the U.S., there is no indication in the allegations against him that Ventura had ever been in touch with the terrorist group.

Following his arrest, Ventura's father told reporters outside the courthouse that his son was being "railroaded" and is "100 percent a loyal American."

Ventura now faces up to 10 years in prison, if convicted of the charges of providing material support to a terrorist group.

Cases of ISIS operatives being arrested in the U.S. have become increasingly rare following the group's defeat several years ago in Iraq and Syria. Even at the peak of the ISIS's influence, many terrorism cases have been criticized for utilizing entrapment and grooming tactics against people that seemed to cross the line into both encouraging and facilitating them to break the law. Despite growing scrutiny from the public and civil rights groups, those tactics have never been reformed.

More information may still come out in Ventura's case about his own actions leading up to his arrest. Based on the FBI's own account of what took place, however, depictions of Ventura as a dangerous terrorist fundraiser currently spreading in the press are hard to deem credible.

The picture that emerges in the charging documents is, instead, the more familiar tale of an impressionable, vulnerable young man, legally a child at the point the investigation began, groomed by FBI undercover agents online to break the law and generate flashy headlines in the aftermath.

“That kid has special needs, he got bullied out of school,” Ventura’s father told *The Intercept*. “He needed help.”

15 Jun - The FBI Has Found A New Threat: "Pro-Abortion Terrorism"

After GOP pressure, FBI abortion “terrorism” investigations increased tenfold, government data shows.

MORE:

by Ken Klippenstein (*The Intercept*)

Following a concerted effort by Republicans to pressure law enforcement agencies to target activists supporting the right to abortion, the FBI dramatically increased its caseload on abortion-related “domestic terrorism.”

Last year, as the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* sparked major protests nationwide, the FBI opened nearly 10 times as many investigations into cases of abortion-related domestic terrorism as it had in 2021, a new internal report reveals. While the report doesn’t say how many of these incidents were motivated by support for reproductive rights and how many were anti-abortion, the uptick follows calls by top Republicans in Congress for the bureau to pursue “pro-abortion terrorism.”

“Pro-abortion terrorism is sweeping our nation,” Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., wrote in a column last June, lamenting that “only after the outcry from the pro-life community did the FBI announce an investigation” into Jane’s Revenge — a small group of activists that firebombed an anti-abortion pregnancy center on June 7, 2021 — and that the attorney general “has yet to launch a wider DOJ investigation.” While conceding “no one has been killed or seriously injured,” Rubio said, “Things will only get worse before they get better.” (Facebook later quietly designated Jane’s Revenge a terrorist organization, as *The Intercept* reported.)

Rubio’s column cited roughly 50 attacks on anti-abortion activists and institutions, linking to a list posted by the anti-abortion Family Research Council. Apart from the actions of Jane’s Revenge, most of the cases enumerated describe simple vandalism.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, similarly urged the bureau to go after so-called pro-choice extremists. “Responding to the current threat of pro-abortion violent extremism will require the FBI to continue its efforts to identify and investigate cases of abortion-related violence across our country at a high rate,” Grassley wrote in a June 27 letter to FBI Director Christopher Wray last year.

As vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee and then-ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, respectively, both of which oversee the FBI, Rubio and Grassley were both in a position to influence bureau leadership, and it appears the bureau listened.

The FBI’s abortion-related terrorism investigations jumped from three cases in the fiscal year 2021 to 28 in 2022, a higher increase than any other category listed, according to an audit published by the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General on June 6. The number of abortion-related cases in 2022 far exceeds that of all previous years included in the audit, going back to 2017.

In the same time frame, FBI investigations into “racially or ethnically motivated extremists” decreased from 215 to 169; investigations into “anti-government / anti-authority” declined even more sharply, from 812 to 240. In fact, the only other category to see an increase in cases was “animal rights / environmental,” which underwent a modest increase from seven to nine cases.

Again, the report does not specify what proportion of the cases are motivated by support for reproductive rights or anti-abortion views. Asked about the specific breakdown, the FBI did not respond to a request for comment. But in testimony before the Senate on November 17, 2022, Wray revealed that the vast majority of the bureau’s investigations are focused on violence against anti-abortion individuals or organizations.

“Since the Dobbs Act decision, probably in the neighborhood of 70 percent of our abortion-related violence cases or threats cases are cases of violence or threats against pro-life,” Wray said. “Now we have quite a number of investigations as we speak into attacks or threats against pregnancy resource centers, faith-based organizations, and other pro-life organizations.”

But experts say the vast majority of serious violence in abortion-related cases is carried out by individuals trying to stop people from having abortions. From 1993 to 2016, 11 murders and 26 attempted murders were carried out by anti-abortion advocates, according to NARAL Pro-Choice California. In contrast, Michael German, a former FBI agent and a fellow with the Brennan Center for Justice’s Liberty and National Security Program, said that he was not aware of a single case of serious bodily injury caused by abortion rights advocates.

“There is a long history of deadly anti-abortion violence in this country,” German said. “The FBI should not devote counterterrorism resources to vandalism cases that don’t threaten human life out of some flawed notion of parity.

“Counterterrorism resources should be directed to the most serious threats,” German told *The Intercept*. While the Department of Homeland Security defines domestic terrorism such that it “must be dangerous to human life” or critical infrastructure, the FBI does not have this requirement. “Mere vandalism and property damage, while crimes that might deserve state and local police attention, should not be treated as terrorism.”

Since the bureau collapses both anti-abortion and abortion rights into the same abortion-related threat category and doesn’t collect data on specific incidents, they exercise considerable discretion in determining which side to investigate.

“That’s part of why the FBI resists collecting data on domestic terrorism incidents: it frees them to target by bias and ideologies they oppose rather than the data regarding actual acts of violence,” German said.

As the global war on terror draws down, the FBI is increasingly focusing its attention domestically. In 2021, the bureau more than doubled its domestic terrorism caseload according to Senate testimony by Wray, who warned that domestic terrorism was “metastasizing across the country.”

While the January 6 uprising is an obvious driver, as the bureau’s focus on individuals supporting reproductive rights makes clear, its domestic terrorism investigations are targeted at both the right and left alike. Wray’s Senate testimony noted that the uptick in their domestic terrorism investigations began in the spring of 2020, when civil unrest arose in response to George Floyd’s murder.

“I think there has been a big push in right-wing media to drum up a fear of pro-choice violence, like they did with ‘Antifa,’” German said. “Agents are probably influenced by it.”

15 Jun - Caso Susaron Prisoners Release a Communique After Seven Months in Jail

Below is the collective communique published by the folks jailed after the arson at a meat packaging plant in Chile. It was machine translated, but you will get the essence of what they're saying.

MORE:

Remember that you can support them by sending letters to: solidaridad.antiespecista4@gmail.com and that you can donate to their fund on [paypal.me/solidaridad4](https://www.paypal.me/solidaridad4)

“On November 3, 2022, we are detained by the BIPE in different territories, our houses are raided, accusing us of arson in an inhabited place, with danger to people. Due to the fire that affected the Susaron branch on

September 19, 2022, resulting in the burning of its sales room, refrigerators and trucks, causing millions of dollars in damages.

On November 4, we went to detention control, where we were charged with the crime of arson and possession of ammunition, the butcher shop and the Public Prosecutor's Office filed a complaint.

We were remanded in custody for 70 days while the investigation lasted.

Time that has been extended by the prosecutor until today, almost 7 months, due to the seriousness of the crime and the penalty that this deserves according to the penal code, which is around 15 to 20 years.

In these long months, we have gone through various emotions and feelings. Confronting the reality of every prisoner, facing the blow that prison generates in your habits and close circle. Keeping indeclinably the conviction and courage that led us to these cages. Living in our own flesh what millions of animals around the world live. A forced and arbitrary captivity. Violence and aggression. Based on the decision of a judge. In their case; the judge is the accepted human logic that sees them as things or inferior.

We do not regret our ideas and the steps that lead us to our becoming. There is no wall, gendarme or bar, that makes us stop sustaining that animal liberation is a fundamental pillar of any anarchic or libertarian conception. And that in that glow, the active hands of those who embrace the idea against authority are primordial.

Yesterday, today and tomorrow...We are still at war! For the fall of this and any society! Social-anti-social war! Animal liberation! Total liberation! Under any consequence and affected. Tony hermanx peluditx presenté!!!"

20 Jun - RAPP Campaign: The Struggle Continues, Together We Can Win

We are writing with a summary of the last few weeks of the New York State legislative session, which ended on June 10th.

MORE:

Collectively, we have a ton to be proud of: While our two bills did not make it to the floor for a vote, and have yet to make it to the agendas of committees beyond the corrections committees in both chambers, the People's Campaign for Parole Justice was a lively presence in Albany, and made some strides toward the ultimate passage of our initiatives.

Here are a few highlights:

Parole Legislation

Over the last two weeks of the session, with all of you, we kept up the pressure and awareness of the need for the legislature to pass Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole. We decked the Capitol with a banner drop, held pop-up rallies outside the State Senate and Assembly chambers, held a press event with members of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus, and had conversations with almost every state legislator about the need to end the racist punishment system.

On the final day of session, during the Assembly's debate and voting on Clean Slate (more on that later), some ten to twelve Assembly Members made statements uplifting the examples of some of our Community Leaders and their incarcerated loved ones, and reminding their colleagues of the need for our two bills, saying "criminal justice reform" necessitates #ParoleJusticeNY.

Despite all that, the legislative leaders did not advance our bills. Both bills were voted out of the Assembly Committee on Correction, and Fair and Timely Parole was voted out of the Senate Crime Victims, Crime,

and Corrections Committee. As we advance the bills next session, the bills numbers will remain the same. So we can all contact our legislators at any time to remind them: New York Wants Parole Justice!

Parole Commissioners

In the final weeks of session, Governor Kathy Hochul nominated several people to become parole commissioners. Her initial list of nominees consisted solely of people with law enforcement backgrounds. Community pressure succeeded in getting her to remove from consideration one particularly dangerous nominee, and to add two nominees from legal defense and social service backgrounds. In the end, four new commissioners were approved by the Senate: Donna Henken, Brandon Stradford, Ana Enright, and Erin McCabe. The governor also nominated an unacceptable candidate to head the State Commission of Correction (with jurisdiction over jails statewide), and community pressure succeeded in having that nominee rescinded as well.

Clean Slate

The Clean Slate Act passed both chambers and awaits the governor's signature. This act will seal the records of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers with previous misdemeanor and felony convictions, after a certain time period (see details [HERE](#)). The original bill excluded anyone whose case mandated registering as a sex offender upon release. But in the final negotiations, another exclusion was added: Now the bill does not apply to anyone with most Class A felony convictions—anyone who served a life sentence. While the passage of the act is good news for so many people and family members, allowing access to employment and many other opportunities needed to live life on the outside, these exclusions not only make many people ineligible—for life—for full inclusion in outside-the-wall society, but also work to divide our movement and dilute our collective power. We recommit ourselves to building a movement that honors every individual's right to be viewed for themselves, not for a category they may fit into—whether race, sex, or criminal conviction. We don't want to build a "new society" from which some of our community are excluded.

All of which is to say: The struggle has an impact every day, and continues as we work to build a powerful movement not just to pass #ParoleJusticeNY but to dismantle the racist punishment system that harms Black and Brown communities across the state. Together, we can win—and we will.

20 Jun - 'Their Overreach is Sowing the Seeds of Their Undoing'

Over seven weeks after they were arrested while distributing fliers in a small suburb of Atlanta, Charley Tennenbaum continues to be held in the Bartow County Jail for actions they say are protected by the First Amendment.

MORE:

via *Unicorn Riot*

On April 28, Charley and two other individuals were arrested in the city of White, Georgia and slapped with felony charges for distributing fliers containing information about Jonathan Salcedo, a Georgia State Patrol trooper who has been linked to the killing of Manuel 'Tortugueta' Esteban Paez Terán. Tortugueta was killed by police during a raid on the Weelaunee Forest on January 18.

The three are charged with "Intimidate Law Enforcement officer/family in retaliation to discharge of duties by force," a felony, and misdemeanor stalking.

The felony intimidation charge GA Code § 16-10-97 (2018) carries a sentence of up to 20 years in prison depending upon which section of the statute prosecutors plan to apply. The part of the statute that is specific to law enforcement officers carries a minimum sentence of one year and a maximum sentence of five years as well as a \$5,000 fine. Warrants filed in the case do not specify which section they are applying.

Despite the pending felony charges and the weeks they've spent in jail, Charley remains convinced that their actions were justified and fully legal.

"Yes, I did flier. I think it's protected by the First Amendment," said Charley. "I think that Georgia State Patrol officer should be charged with murder... I have the right to raise awareness about this. One hundred percent. And so I think it's clear, it's unfortunately clear really, that if we don't continuously exercise our rights, our civil liberties, like the ability to legally protest and to dissent, the state will attempt to erode that."

Over the course of the last six months, authorities in the state of Georgia have continually ratcheted up repression in the face of an increasingly powerful movement to stop their planned Cop City project.

The Atlanta City Council voted 11-4 in favor of funding Cop City on June 12, despite a public comment session that lasted more than 16 hours in which over 300 people expressed their opposition to the project and hundreds more packed into the building and gathered outside in protest.

The approved plan includes \$31 million to pay for the project, plus another \$1 million per year to pay back the Atlanta Police Foundation's debt for the construction, according to reporting by the Atlanta Community Press Collective.

Ramming through an infrastructure project amidst popular opposition isn't easy, and getting away with it requires increasingly ruthless tactics of state repression. Since mid-December, 42 people have been charged under a rare Georgia state-level domestic terrorism law for their alleged participation in the movement.

On May 31, police raided the home of three activists and board members of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, a group that offers jail support for those in Atlanta who are arrested during protests, bails activists out of jail, and helps provide legal representation for activists charged with crimes.

"Their overreach is actually sowing the seeds of their undoing," said Charley. "We have the opportunity to further enshrine in case law that all of our activities are perfectly legal and should be defended in court."

The flier the trio are accused of distributing contained information informing neighbors that a Georgia State Patrol trooper, Jonathan Salcedo, had "murdered" Tortuguita. After the incident, Salcedo told prosecutors that he "felt harassed and intimidated by individuals handing out these fliers," according to documents.

In criminal arrest warrants, prosecutors accused all three arrestees of "providing fliers in the neighborhood that Jonathan Sacleo [sic] on mailboxes [sic] that were claiming Jonathan was a murderer due to an incident that occurred in Atlanta." (Salcedo's name is misspelled by prosecutors throughout the warrant).

During an April 15 hearing before Bartow Superior Court Judge Suzanne H. Smith, Deputy Attorney General John Fowler used evidence of reimbursements he attributed to Charley from the Forest Justice Defense Fund to allege that they had participated in crimes. Those reimbursements were for art supplies for a community event at the Weelaunee Forest and "power packs and lighters," for outdoor cooking and for charging phones, according to Charley.

"I will say that the Forest Defense Fund is so above-board with all of their transactions that it is ludicrous that anything less than 110% above-board was ever possible to be done through them....," said Charley. "They required receipts, and they required documentation and they required reimbursements to go to people's PayPal account, which means it had to be a verifiable identity."

The Forest Justice Defense Fund is run by Open Collective, a nonprofit offering legal and financial tools to grassroots projects. The group's website boasts "transparent and open finances."

The mission of the fund is to "provide and promote education of the public on subjects relevant to racial justice and environmental sustainability," according to their website. (Open Collective did not respond to a request for comment.)

Prosecutors also used proof of reimbursement from the Forest Justice Defense Fund to arrest and jail the three Atlanta Solidarity Fund members who were arrested last week. Reimbursed expenses cited as proof of "money laundering" in the warrants include payments from April 2021 to March 2023 totaling less than \$7,000 for expenses such as "forest clean-up," "covid rapid-tests," "media" and "yard signs."

"Paying for camping supplies and the like — I don't find it very impressive," said DeKalb County Magistrate Court Judge James Altman during a bond hearing for the Solidarity Fund members. "There's not a lot of meat on the bones of the allegations that thousands of dollars are going to fund illegal activities."

Charley says their attorneys are hoping to negotiate a consent bond, which would allow them to return home while their charges move through the court. In the meantime, Charley says they're working on taking care of themselves and keeping their head up.

"I think gratitude is one of the keys for cultivating a sense of individual resiliency against hardship," said Charley. "Being able to practice equanimity is extremely important, especially as the state's use of scare tactics continues to escalate."

Charley is also trying to keep the focus on Manuel 'Tortuguita' Terán, whose memory they were trying to honor when they were arrested. More than five months after police killed Tortuguita during a forest raid to clear tree-sitters from the proposed 'Cop City' site on January 18, officials still refuse to name the officers responsible for their death or take any steps toward bringing them to justice.

"All verifiable information shows that Tort was killed as a nonviolent environmental activist who was not resisting," said Charley. "So when you ask, why do I feel passionately about this? Because Tort died in a barrage of 57 bullets. No one deserves a death like that. And, I think it's really important that we don't yield when acts of police brutality like this happen. So I'm using my right to raise awareness about that. And I think that's the right thing to do."

22 Jun - Reflections on the Campaign Against the Turning Point USA/BLEXIT

Report on recent antifascist organizing campaign in New York City against Turning Point USA.

MORE:

From Monday, June 12th to Friday, June 16th, 2023, we — an informal coalition of NYC antifascists — launched a targeted campaign to shut down a Turning Point USA and BLEXIT event in our city. While the event ultimately did happen, we forced TPUSA to move to a less prominent venue, educated many people, and raised the stakes for any other venue that may ever consider hosting far-right groups in the future.

Why We Did It

BLEXIT, an affiliate of the far-right group Turning Point USA (TPUSA), was scheduled to have a show at Music Hall of Williamsburg on Saturday, June 17. The event was set to feature a panoply of alt-right, anti-abortion, and anti-LGBTQ+ pundits such as Candace Owens, Charlie Kirk, and Brandon Tatum.

Despite its claim of "uplifting minority America," in reality BLEXIT caters primarily to wealthy white conservatives — from whom it receives the bulk of its support. BLEXIT does not stand for Black liberation. It stands for capitalism and Christian nationalism, and against abortion, critical race theory, and LGBTQ+ rights.

TPUSA, BLEXIT's parent group, pushes far-Right and reactionary politics on high school and college campuses. TPUSA is affiliated with Alt-Right and far-Right actors, including the Proud Boys. The

organization has a documented history of racism and homophobia, and played a role in the January 6th insurrection.

Both groups spread violent rhetoric that endangers the LGBTQ+ community, and trans folks in particular. Providing them with a platform in NYC means giving fascists a space to meet, network, and organize — it means expanding their local visibility and reach. We did not want to let this happen under our watch. Deplatforming this event — and all far-Right events in NYC — means hindering the spread of fascism in our city. It means creating a safer space for our trans and gender non-conforming comrades. It means building a united front against those who seek to eradicate entire groups of people.

How We Do It (and How You Can Too!)

- *Stay vigilant:* Early spring 2023, antifascist researchers flagged a flyer circulating in local far-Right circles announcing an upcoming event under the banner of BLEXIT and TPUSA.
- *Learn from the past:* Comrades involved in past deplatforming campaigns shared their experiences and best practices. As a general rule, it is best to wait until only a few days before the event is set to occur so as to force the event organizers to scramble to find an alternate location (the hope is that they don't find one at all).
- *Work together with a few people:* It doesn't take many people to launch a campaign (but it will take many many more to take action!). Start a small Signal or Wire chat with 3-5 people you trust. Create a working document to share research, messaging, potential partners, and other ideas.
- *Do your research on the event:* Research the event, its speakers, its agenda, etc. Find out what circles have been circulating the flyer, as well as which individuals within those circles. Are there any potential attendees who would look especially bad for the venue, e.g. neo-Nazis, Proud Boys, or militias? If tickets are free, get as many as possible (use a fake name, burner phone number and email address).
- *Do your research on the venue:* What kind of venue is the event supposed to be at? Has it hosted far-right events in the past? If so, it may be difficult to get them to cancel (but still worth trying). Do they have a website or mission statement that shows they promote inclusiveness and tolerance? In that case, you can expose their hypocrisy. What neighborhood is the venue in? Identify potential partners in that area, including community groups, businesses, electeds, local news outlets, etc. Who owns the venue? Is it an individual, or a corporation? (In the case of Music Hall of Williamsburg, it turns out its parent group Bowery Presents is owned by the large corporation Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG). This knowledge gave us even more to work with.) Is any contact information for the venue, or specific employees, publicly available? If not, can it be obtained? These are all things you should be finding out and adding to your working doc in an organized fashion.
- *Save your receipts:* Have screenshots and links for all of the above.
- *Make graphics with background info and action items:*
 - Lay it out in simple terms. Don't exaggerate, be straight up about the threat. Have some consistency in the graphics, make sure everything is legible and accessible (with alt text!).
 - Include action items! Before you post, test emails and phone numbers that you include in the graphics! Ask people to report back what happens when they call.
 - Spread the graphics far and wide.
- *Use all the contacts you have:* This means making a concerted effort to reach out to local media contacts, local and/or relevant unions, collectives, non-profits, Signal and Telegram chats, newsletters, "influencers", electeds (council members, assembly members), etc. When reaching out, be sure you include a short, tailored message about why this should be of concern to them and their community.
- *Keep pushing!* Send out reminders for people to keep calling, keep emailing, and keep applying pressure on the venue until they have no choice but to cancel.

Pressure Campaigns Can Work

We made it clear to Music Hall of Williamsburg/Bowery Presents that it would be more expensive for them in the long-run to have the BLEXIT than it would be to cancel it. This relates to Devin Zane Shaw's point

that “antifascism seeks to raise the cost of fascist organizing.” If the venue had proceeded with the event, artists would have cancelled their shows, patrons would have boycotted the venue, and New Yorkers would never let the venue forget its enabling of a far-Right gathering. Corporate venues like Music Hall of Williamsburg are, and will always be, driven by profit. Threatening to hit them where it hurts — their pockets — is often the most effective way of getting them to change their behavior.

It is also worth noting that one of the ways in which the far-Right attempts to make itself socially acceptable is by having a physical presence in locations that are more mainstream. In fact, conservative billionaires such as AEG owner Philip Anschutz intentionally launder their own reputations through spaces that cast themselves as “progressive” (Coachella, Bowery Presents, etc.). Revealing these multi-billion dollar corporations for who they truly are — behind the rainbow profile pictures and DEI initiatives — can also help apply pressure.

What Happened

On the morning of June 14th, 2023, a mere three days before the BLEXIT event was set to happen, Music Hall of Williamsburg finally put out a statement declaring it had cancelled the event rental contract. The venue claimed the TPUSA/BLEXIT organizers presented themselves as “a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of urban and minority communities.” Whether this is true or not (TPUSA claims they were very upfront about who they were), the venue booker should have done their own research. Or perhaps they did, knew the group was harmful, and proceeded anyway thinking no one would pay attention to the event. Either way, this cancellation only happened because of persistent pressure from the community. We did this, and we should be proud.

On the morning of June 16th, 2023, a day before the scheduled event, BLEXIT/TPUSA announced they had secured another location: Triplex / Tammany House in Long Island City, part of Motif Studios. We then shifted our pressure onto the owner of Tammany House. Unfortunately, the owner was not movable, citing money as the main factor (BLEXIT/TPUSA offered him \$25,000 for the event).

On June 17th, 2023, BLEXIT’s event proceeded at Triplex. While the space has a capacity of 800 people, the event was attended by less than two hundred, half of which have since been identified. Many attendees belonged to known far-Right groups in NYC — members of Guardians of Divinity (who harass Drag Story Hour attendees), the New York Young Republicans Club, NY Freedom Rally and New York de Jure. It was altogether a bizarre assortment of anti-vaxxers, far-Right pundits, City Council candidates, conspiracy theorists, anti-abortion Christian nationalists, Alt-Right press, ex-cops, and shitty rappers. Neither Candace Owens nor Charlie Kirk showed up in person.

While we were not able to get the second venue to cancel, we pushed TPUSA/BLEXIT to a less prominent location, and forced them to scramble for two days to find the latter. (Also, we lived rent-free in Charlie Kirk’s brain.) We want to thank to everyone who participated in this hectic, thrilling, and community-building campaign.

We will never stop showing up against fash and showing them NYC will forever be an antifascist town.

Where We Go From Here

We’re not done here yet. Despite presenting itself as a queer-friendly space, Music Hall of Williamsburg continues to host queerphobes, including C3 Church. Every Sunday, C3 Church has its mass at the venue. C3 Church holds deeply homophobic values, as noted on its website: “Marriage was instituted by God, ratified by Jesus, and is exclusively between a man and a woman.” How can Bowery Presents ever provide safer spaces for the LGBTQ+ community when it continues to platform to groups who spew bigotry?

It is vital we continue to apply pressure to MHWB and get it to cease hosting C3. Email them at info@bowerypresents.com and lschamis@bowerypresents.com, and call 917.363.7462. Encourage your friends and others in your community to do so as well!

It is also important for us to note that Music Hall of Williamsburg is, and will likely continue to be, owned by a large multi-billion-dollar corporation. As we mentioned previously, the owner of this corporation donates generously to right-wing causes, including the same groups behind the legal assault on abortion and trans rights. It's unlikely there will ever be fundamental changes to the way Bowery Presents venues operate, so long as they are, at the very top, controlled by conservatives. With the crushing cost of real estate in New York City, it's very difficult for independent, artist-run, and community-minded spaces to compete with these corporate-owned venues. Long-term, we can only do our best to divest from them and focus on supporting independent venues instead. Again, hit the corporations where it hurts: their pockets.

In this vein, we encourage New Yorkers who might go to Music Hall of Williamsburg to support local DIY, queer-owned, and/or artist-owned alternatives.

To conclude:

Keep fighting fascism locally with the tools you have, and together we'll crush it globally. Solidarity with everyone across the world engaged in this crucial struggle!

2 Jul - Tattoo Fundraiser for Greek political prisoners

WHAT: Fundraiser

WHEN: 2:00pm, Sunday, July 2nd

WHERE: Message Outlive Them NYC (@outlivethemnyc) on Instagram for location

COST: Varies, but it's a fundraiser so open those wallets!

MORE:

Come join us for a Tattoo Fundraiser for Greek political prisoners from Revolutionary Struggle.

Revolutionary Struggle is an anarcho-communist organization that has faced extreme repression by the Greek state. In light of this reality, they are in need of our solidarity.

Come get a tattoo, a t-shirt, other merch, or just come and hang out and donate. Free them all!

For more info, or if you choose to donate immediately, check their site: firefund.net/eamaziotisroupa

2 Jul - MACC Care Assembly

WHAT: Assembly

WHEN: 3:00pm, Sunday, July 2nd

WHERE: PIT Records & Books, 411 South 5th Street, Brooklyn

COST: FREE

MORE:

SCHEDULE:

- o Fight (3pm) Martial arts training - no experience necessary!
- o Enlight (4pm) Accountability and Restorative Justice
- o Bite & Invite (5pm) Care exchange while we share a community meal

What is the care exchange? As we sit down to share a meal we check in and exchange our requests and offers, in the spirit of mutual aid. Requests – do you need help with anything? Offers – do you have any skills, time, or resources to offer? This is a conversation to help facilitate building and maintaining relationships among us by identifying needs and sharing what we can in solidarity.

For COVID safety: masks required; please test within 48 hours ahead of the meeting if possible; free tests will be provided at the door.