

J20 Defendants

Despite Court Defeat, Government Plans to Continue Trials for Fifty-nine

Fifth Estate Collective

anon.

2018

Federal prosecutors announced in January the dismissal of charges against 129 J20 defendants for actions against the Trump inauguration in Washington DC on January 20, 2017.

Fifty-nine people are still facing seven felony charges each, punishable by over 60 years in prison. While the government alleges that these people damaged property, planned the protests, or had knowledge of the black bloc tactic, the case has always been about political repression and expanding the state's ability to stifle resistance.

The dismissals follow the acquittal of the first six defendants in December of all charges, including felony destruction of property, felony riot, and conspiring to riot, stemming from the anti-fascist, anti-capitalist protests.

The December acquittals came after a nearly four-week jury trial in Washington.

The group of six on trial included two people operating as street medics and an independent journalist and were typical of the people trapped at the intersection of L and 12 streets in DC after the march was attacked by police.

Prosecutors argued that the six were among the J20 protesters who smashed windows causing \$100,000 in damages although they presented no direct evidence against them.

Along with the acquittals, much was revealed about the state's response to the Inaugural anti-capitalist protest. According to testimony, planning meetings before the protest were infiltrated by Washington Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) undercover agents.

While officers admitted they did not uncover evidence of planning for violence or destruction, the cops nonetheless pursued an aggressive plan in dealing with the march. Testimony showed that the police commander in charge of crowd control was preoccupied with the actions of "anarchists" and went to great lengths to distinguish between them and "protesters."

Instead of following their usual crowd control procedures, within a few minutes of the march leaving its starting point, police declared it a "riot" and began herding the crowd into a trap, eventually kettling the crowd and making indiscriminate arrests of those trapped inside.

A considerable chunk of government evidence was drawn from far right sources. A secret recording of a J20 planning meeting came from the discredited Project Veritas, a fact that the prosecution tried to downplay in court. Other videos and evidence came from the far-right wing Oath Keepers militia and alt-right personality Lauren Southern. This demonstrated the collusion between the government and far-right operatives, given that shortly after the arrests, the MPD leaked the names and addresses of those arrested to an alt-right website which facilitated a doxxing campaign against the defendants. It was also revealed that the lead detective in the case had regularly tweeted anti-activist sentiments, especially against Black Lives Matter protests.



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During the recent trial, the prosecution charged that basic planning—for example, the creation of flyers or the appearance of people on a podcast talking about the protests constituted a conspiracy. Moreover, political slogans, signs, and other expressions, such as wearing the color black, were cited as examples of criminal activity and intent.

Just as the anti-capitalist march was brutally attacked by police in the streets, the government is attacking dissent by leveraging the so-called justice system to break people's spirits.

The dropping of some prosecutions must be seen for what it is: a renewed effort to try to secure as many convictions as possible. The government is making a calculated choice to single out this group as they further their efforts to redefine basic political organizing as conspiracy and to set the terms of what is acceptable protest.

It is important that the broader radical milieu support the J20 defendants since any decisive prosecution victory will embolden the government to pursue similar repression against anyone who resists in the future.

The remaining 59 J20 defendants need our support and solidarity. Funds are badly needed for defendant travel expenses to and from DC, housing during trials, and legal assistance. Donate at fundrazr.com/j20resistance.

Updates at DefendJ20Resistance.org

Anonymous was one of the defendants who had his charges dismissed.



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