

Right-wing Facebook groups threaten to assassinate Michigan Governor Whitmer

By Kevin Reed
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Threats to assassinate Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer have been widely discussed over the past week within several extreme right-wing Facebook groups. This is occurring in the lead-up to a protest against her “stay home, stay safe” executive order scheduled for Thursday morning in the state capital, Lansing.

According to a report on Monday, journalists from the *Metro Times* gained access to four Facebook groups where these discussions were taking place. The groups, which can be viewed only by approved members, included numerous posts and comments calling for the governor to be beaten, lynched, beheaded or shot.

In one such group called “People of Michigan vs. Governor Gretchen Whitmer,” a member posted, “We need a good old fashioned lynch mob to storm the Capitol, drag her tyrannical ass out onto the street and string her up as our forefathers would have.”

Another post said, “Drag that tyrant governor out to the front lawn. Fit her for a noose,” to which a user responded, “Either President Trump sends in the troops or there is going to be a midnight lynching in Lansing soon.”

One said Whitmer “needs to eat lead,” and that this would send a message to other Democrats “that they are next.” When another user wrote, “She needs her ass beat,” a user responded, “Good ol’ fashioned bullets work better, but I like the enthusiasm.” Another requested, “Can we please just take up a collection for an assassin to put that woman from Michigan down?”

When the *Metro Times* notified Facebook of these exchanges, the social media platform shut down the group, which was reported to have 9,000 members, for violating its policy against inciting violence.

Another group called “Michigan United for Liberty,” which is organizing the “Judgement Day” demonstration in Lansing on Thursday, was also shut down at least temporarily by Facebook on Sunday.

Of the other two other groups referenced in the *Metro Times* report, “Michiganders Against Excessive Quarantine” and “Whitmer Recall Movement,” only the former has been terminated by Facebook. In all, the *Metro Times* reported that the four groups had a total following of 400,000 Facebook

members.

The Facebook dialogue among extreme right-wing, fascist and neo-Nazi groups about assassinating Governor Whitmer comes less than two weeks after the April 30 protest in Lansing that included individuals who entered the Capitol armed with assault rifles.

On the grounds that Michigan is an open-carry firearm state, the armed protesters—including members of the Michigan Liberty Militia—were permitted by state police to enter the government building, although they were blocked from entering the floor of the legislature. However, other armed demonstrators were allowed onto the gallery that overlooks the legislature. One state representative tweeted that she and others feared for their lives and some wore bullet-proof vests.

A photo widely circulated in the media showed a group of armed militia members standing outside the door to the governor’s office.

Some of the protesters at the rally displayed Nazi insignia, carried Confederate flags and brandished nooses.

There have thus far been two protests in Lansing against the Michigan governor’s executive order: the April 30 “American Patriot Rally” and an earlier “Operation Gridlock” demonstration on April 15. They and the upcoming event set for Thursday have been organized with the support of the national leadership of the Republican Party and the Trump administration, as part of the nationwide campaign to end all restrictions and resume economic activity in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

Several days after the April 15 demonstration, Trump tweeted “Liberate Michigan,” “Liberate Minnesota” and “Liberate Virginia, and save your 2nd Amendment.” The last of these was an open encouragement to far-right gun rights and militia groups, including the Michigan militia forces that showed up two weeks later in Lansing. The day after the armed Michigan protesters entered the capitol—most of whom ignored social distancing and face covering requirements—President Trump tweeted his approval of the demonstrators, calling them “very good people.”

The groups involved in organizing the demonstrations have been set up within the past few weeks and are being coordinated by front organizations with connections to the

Michigan Republican Party establishment. According to a report in *Mother Jones*, “The whole charade was facilitated by the Michigan Conservative Coalition, a conservative political group that doubles as a front for Michigan Trump Republicans and is promoted by the Michigan Freedom Fund, a conservative group with ties to Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, a Michigan billionaire philanthropist power broker before she joined the Trump administration.”

In response to the serious threats on her life, Governor Whitmer has turned to these very Republicans, who control the state legislature, to support her effort to get the State Capitol Commission to ban guns in the statehouse. This endeavor has so far fallen flat, as Republicans have stated opposition to the threats of violence against the governor while refusing to block guns from being brought into the Capitol.

Without mentioning the words neo-Nazi or fascism, Whitmer issued a statement saying, “I’m increasingly concerned about the violent nature of the extreme comments that are being made around these organizations and groups that are coming together—the violent, racist, extreme rhetoric that has already been connected to Thursday’s rally.” Whitmer then called on GOP legislative leaders to denounce the threats.

Whitmer on Monday called on Vice President Mike Pence to raise concerns with protesters about the spreading of the coronavirus back into the rural areas where they come from following the rally on Thursday. She said, “If discouraging protests is something you could consider doing, I’d really be grateful.”

In an entirely predictable statement, Michigan Republican Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey said of the discussions about assassinating Whitmer, “It is never OK to threaten the safety or life of another person, elected or otherwise, period.” Shirkey would not support a ban on guns in the Capitol because, he said, the onus is on authorities to arrest anyone who brandishes a firearm in a threatening way.”

Thursday’s protest is also taking place amidst a developing conflict over the refusal of Karl Manke’s Barber & Beauty Shop to stop operating his business in Owosso, Michigan. The 77-year-old Karl Manke has defied the Michigan “stay home” order and continues to serve customers despite two citations from state police.

The barber shop has become a lightning rod for Facebook groups, and Michigan militia members have pledged to block police from forcing the closure of the business. The Michigan attorney general asked the Shiawassee County Circuit Court to issue an injunction against Karl Manke, but on Tuesday Judge Matthew J. Stewart turned down the request.

Under conditions of the unprecedented economic, social and political crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration and the sections of the corporate-financial aristocracy it represents are deliberately encouraging the growth of far-right and fascist forces. This is part of the preparation of the capitalist state to deal with the

growth of social opposition centered in the working class.

These forces have little popular support, but their “back-to-work” demonstrations in Michigan and other states, despite being relatively small, have received outsized coverage in the corporate media. It has used them to create a false narrative of a popular drumbeat to end social distancing measures and “reopen the economy” even as the pandemic rages out of control and infections and deaths continue to rise. This is despite the fact that every reputable poll has shown that a large majority favors continuing the lockdowns, despite the economic disruption, until the pandemic is contained.

At the same time, the refusal of the Democrats to advance any policy to safeguard the jobs and livelihoods or provide real relief to the tens of millions of workers and small business owners being bankrupted by the economic impact of the pandemic provides an opening to Trump and the far-right to make an appeal to backward and disoriented layers of the ruined middle class.

The Democrats voted unanimously with the Republicans to pass Trump’s multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street at the end of March, while providing no serious relief for the tens of millions who have lost their jobs and are struggling to pay their rent and put food on their family’s table.

The response of Democratic governors to the ruling class’ “back to work” drive is to begin reopening without any protection for workers against the virus. Whitmer has already acceded to the demands of the Detroit Three automakers to reopen manufacturing, and similar moves are underway in other states controlled by the Democratic Party, from California and Washington to New Jersey and New York.

The ruling class in the US, as in Germany and Europe as a whole, as well as Brazil, India and other countries, is promoting fascist and far-right forces in response to the global crisis of capitalism. It would be a grave mistake for the working class to ignore or belittle this danger, even though at this point these forces lack significant popular support.

It poses the urgent necessity for the independent mobilization of the working class in the struggle for socialism against the financial oligarchy and the entire capitalist system.

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