

Trump pardons all January 6 far-right foot soldiers and commutes sentences of high-level fascist militia leaders

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In one of his first official actions as the 47th US president, Donald Trump issued sweeping pardons and commutations to all of his far-right supporters who participated in the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol aimed at overturning the 2020 presidential election.

The attack on Congress, intended to delay or block the Electoral College certification, was not a peaceful plebeian protest, but the culmination of a multi-pronged strategy organized from the Trump White House aimed at overturning the last remnants of democratic rule in the United States. It resulted in hundreds of injuries and multiple deaths.

Throughout the 2020 presidential election campaign, and immediately following the attack, Trump incited and then sympathized with the fascist mob that stormed Congress on his behalf. Trump and many other Republican politicians referred to those imprisoned as “hostages,” who, like Trump, were being unfairly prosecuted by the Democrats and the “deep state” for “peacefully and patriotically” protesting the election results. Speaking at the White House on Monday, Trump again referred to the convicted criminals as “hostages.”

Researchers from the University of Maryland documented over 50 far-right groups that answered Trump’s call to come to D.C. on January 6 to “stop the steal,” including the Proud boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and various neo-Nazis and white supremacists who made up a sizable portion of the more than 1,500 people who were charged with federal crimes.

The neo-Nazis pardoned Monday by Trump include Tyler Bradley Dykes, a former Marine, who had been previously convicted of a felony for his role in the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. In July 2024, Dykes was sentenced to nearly five years in prison for assaulting police with a riot shield. Prosecutors alleged that during the attack Dykes gave a Nazi salute and yelled “Seig Heil!” (Hail to victory!)

Over 1,200 people have been convicted for actions in furtherance of Trump’s coup. Nearly every defendant was charged with obstructing an official proceeding. Over 160 individuals were charged with crimes related to using a deadly or dangerous weapon to cause serious bodily injury to a police officer. Hundreds more were convicted of low-level misdemeanors, such as disorderly conduct, trespassing or parading, and sentenced to probation or house arrest.

At his first major campaign rally for the 2024 election, in March 2023, held in Waco, Texas, Trump began by playing a video that featured convicted militia members singing the insurrectionist anthem “Justice for All.” As the song was played, Trump held his hand over his heart while images of fascists storming the Capitol and fighting with police were displayed.

In an official Monday, January 20 statement from the White House, Trump called the prosecution of his fanatical supporters “a grave national injustice that has been perpetrated upon the American people over the last four years,” adding that his action “begins a process of national reconciliation.”

Following Monday’s order, the Department of Justice stopped pursuing cases against roughly 300 people, including some who were currently on trial. While the vast majority of those facing charges were pardoned, 14 high-level members of the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys militia groups had their prison sentences commuted.

This includes admitted F.B.I. informant Henry “Enrique” Tarrío, former chairman of the Proud Boys, and Elmer Stewart Rhodes, co-founder of the Oath Keepers. Rhodes and Tarrío were both convicted of several felonies, including seditious conspiracy, for their roles in the attack. Rhodes had been sentenced to 18 years in prison while Tarrío had been sentenced to 22 years.

Speaking to media in Washington outside the D.C. jail on Tuesday, Rhodes thanked Trump for “doing the right thing,”

claiming that he and his fellow convicted insurrectionists “did not get a fair trial.”

Rhodes said that January 6 was “Patriot’s Day.” He continued: “We stood up for our country because we knew the election was stolen. Biden did not get 81 million votes... I don’t need to see evidence of the fraud.

“I believe the election was stolen, I believe President Trump has always been right about that, that’s why he has not backed down,” Rhodes added.

The former Army paratrooper and Yale-educated lawyer added, “John Eastman, his attorney, was correct in his legal analysis. I don’t care how many establishment judges tell us it was not so.”

Rhodes said the Supreme Court “ducked its responsibility when Texas sued Pennsylvania, that goes to the Supreme Court... just like *Bush v. Gore* they could have taken that case, and should have taken that case and [Samuel] Alito and [Clarence] Thomas said so. But the rest of them, kind of, what’s the right word—squished out.”

Rhodes’ top lieutenants were also released on Tuesday, including Kelly Meggs, leader of the Florida chapter of the Oath Keepers, who had been previously sentenced to 12 years in prison. Oath Keeper Jessica Watkins, previously sentenced to eight years in prison, along with Kenneth Harrelson, David Moerschel, Joseph Hackett, Edward Vallejo and US Navy veteran Thomas Caldwell also had their sentences commuted.

Top level Proud Boys commuted by Trump include Roberto Minuta, Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl, Dominic Pezzola and Jeremy Bertino. Biggs, like Tarrío, is an admitted police informant and a fascist who enjoys close connections with Roger Stone, a long-time Republican political operative. In addition to being an honorary member of the Proud Boys, Stone has frequently employed Oath Keepers as “private security,” including on January 6.

While Trump had repeatedly promised to commute and/or pardon many of his loyal foot soldiers, leading Republicans, including Trump’s vice president, JD Vance, speaking earlier this month on Fox News, said that those who “obviously” committed violence “shouldn’t be pardoned.”

Trump, taking stock of the Democrats’ obsequiousness and pledges of loyalty following the election, and the media’s dropping of all references to his fascistic politics, decided to pardon or commute them all.

Capitalizing on the complicity of the Democrats and the media, Trump is releasing his fascist foot soldiers in order to build up his base of paramilitary support. He has been aided in these efforts by complicit pseudo-left elements who have downplayed the threat of dictatorship while at the same time

defending Trump’s fascist followers.

Among those released following Trump’s order was Guy Reffitt of Wylie, Texas. A member of the Texas Three Percenters militia group, Reffitt was sentenced to over six years in prison for his actions on January 6. He traveled to the Capitol with a handgun, body armor and zip ties with the aim, according to prosecutors, of taking then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi hostage.

At Reffitt’s trial, his teenage son Jackson Reffitt testified against his father, saying that his father told him and his sister that if either of them turned him in to the police they would be “traitors, and traitors get shot.”

Reffitt was one of several fascists given sympathetic treatment in a column last year by nominally left-wing journalist Chris Hedges, who argued, like many disoriented middle-class elements, that the greatest injustice concerning January 6 was not the putsch by Trump and the Republicans, but the supposed over-prosecution of Trump’s most fanatical supporters.

In his column, “Lynching the Deplorables,” Hedges neglected to inform his readers that Reffitt was a member of a fascist militia group. He also downplayed the charges against him, writing that Reffitt’s “obstruction of justice charge came from ‘threatening’ his two teenage children to prevent them from reporting him to law enforcement.”

Speaking to CNN on Monday, Jackson Reffitt admitted he was “honestly flabbergasted that we have gotten to this point.” He added, “I mean, I’m terrified. I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

Jackson said his dad “is still involved with these militias, he still talks with a martyr status, he has not changed. He’s more galvanized than ever, that I have seen.”

The pardoning and commuting by Trump of his fascist followers underscores that the working class cannot rely on capitalist parties, the capitalist state or its “justice system” to protect democratic rights and suppress the fascist threat.



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