**A Letter from the Four Survivors of the 1979 Greensboro Massacre Currently Residing in Greensboro to the City Council of Greensboro**

October 17, 2017

**Group 2. Bullet point 2.**

**“Egregious Actions in Police Handling of WVO Parade Permit by Violating the Law in Support of Klan and Nazi Plans and against the Demonstrators and the Community: Issuing a parade permit with the stipulation of a ban on all firearms, concealed or unconcealed--a violation of North Carolina and United States constitutional law--and in disregard of a municipal ordinance that required notifying the permit applicant about the permit within three days; and only granting the permit to the WVO nearly two weeks after application was made; and giving the permit, with its weapons’ ban, to the Klan at virtually the same time that it was delivered to the WVO.”** (p.1)

For some of the most important factual evidence, we go to the Greensboro Police Department’s own report of Nov. 19, 1979, “An Administrative Report of the Anti-Klan Rally, Greensboro, North Carolina November 3, 1979.” On October 19, 1979, Nelson Johnson, a well-known civil rights leader, an A&T student in the late 1960s, and the main organizer of the 1979 anti-Klan rally, applied for a parade permit on behalf of the Workers Viewpoint Organization (WVO). Appendix E of the police report contains the Application for Parade Permit, the Permit to Conduct Parade, and a description of the parade route with the starting point at Everitt St. and Carver Dr. and the termination point at Florida St. and Freeman Mill Rd. The purpose of the parade, Johnson wrote on the application, was “political and educational: To educate and organize political opposition to the KKK and their secret supporters.” (p.3)

The parade permit had an unusual stipulation without which it would not be granted: “NO WEAPONS TO BE CARRIED IN PLAIN VIEW OR CONCEALED. SIGN POSTS NO LARGER THAN 2” x 2”. Captain L. S. Gibson signed the agreement for the City of Greensboro and Nelson Johnson signed for Workers Viewpoint. However, Johnson was concerned and inquired about the weapons’ ban, asking the police if they were expecting any trouble on November 3rd. “Captain Gibson looked me straight in the eye,” the rally organizer said, “and assured me that the police would take care of security and protect the march.” (p.3)

Although a City ordinance mandated a three-day period in which permit applicants were to be notified one way or the other, and the application had been filed nearly two weeks earlier, Johnson did not receive the permit until November 1st.... (p.3)

The parade permit was of critical importance as workers and community residents would be coming from Danville VA, Martinsville VA, Rocky Mount NC, Durham NC, Haw River NC, Kannapolis NC, as well as from the textile mills and community of Greensboro. It was at the press conference [on Nov. 1st] that Johnson was given the parade permit, with its unusual stipulation of a weapons’ ban, authorizing the WVO parade two days hence. (p.3)

Johnson took the opportunity at the November 1st press conference to warn against what he saw as possible police tactics of interference with the upcoming anti-Klan rally, saying “to the Police Department and to [Mayor] Jim Melvin, stay out of our way. The march will go on.” (Johnson’s statement, taken out of context, was one of the “excuses” later offered for the lack of a police presence on November 3rd; namely, that Nelson Johnson told the police to stay away!) (p.4)

“During that same day, Thursday, November 1, 1979,” the police administrative report on page 5, states that: “a man came to the Police Department and requested a copy of the parade permit which had been issued to the Workers Viewpoint Organization…The man said he was a member of the Klan and his name was Dawson.” …(p.4)

Of course, the permit was a public document available to anyone. Now here is the back story--facts not included in the police report but documented elsewhere. What did the police know prior to November 3, 1979, that they did not share with the public? **Did that knowledge inform, or should it have informed, all their decisions and plans for protecting the November 3, 1979 parade?** (p.4.)

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So far we have established that the GPD deliberately disarmed the Workers Viewpoint as a condition for granting a parade permit. Two points need to be mentioned: *In 1979, it was constitutional and legal to be visibly armed in public, so that the weapons ban laid on the WVO was a most unusual departure from the law. Also, the police put no parallel weapons restrictions on Klansmen and Nazis nor did the Greensboro Police bother to stop Klan cars seen loading weapons into the trunk of one of the Nazi/Klan caravan cars that would be going to the parade starting point*. (p.5)

We have established that the police had a Klan informant whose intelligence revealed that the Klan and other violent groups were organizing a counter-demonstration and were planning to confront the November 3rd marchers. That means that the police not only disarmed the WVO but did so knowing about a planned assault on the anti-Klan demonstration by groups that typically are armed. If not a set-up to trap and harm the WVO, it certainly had that potential. (p.5)

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After five people were killed and ten wounded in the Greensboro Massacre, police faced many questions about their absence from the parade origin. They had to scramble to account for their actions and omissions in their administrative report and to the news media. Their claims are flimsy and fall apart under the scrutiny of the facts: nothing is offered that is much better than the… [suggestion] that the reason they weren’t there was that rally organizer Nelson Johnson told them to stay away. Given that the police knew from multiple sources of the impending danger, **staying away was outrageous**. Being told to “stay away” is contextually untrue. But even it was true, it is like being told that a bank was to be robbed and someone told the police to stay away and the police stayed away! Yes, such a position is outrageous. But, given the weight of demonization, fear, confusion, and anti-communism promoted largely by the City of Greensboro and the Police with the help of the press, people were simply blinded to the truth. (p.9)