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

Oct. 17, 2017

**Group 5. Bullet points 6 & 7.**

**“City and Police Promotion of a False Narrative Scapegoating and Demonizing Victims: For the City and the Police being partners in forging a false narrative that demonized CWP/WVO members, especially those that remained in Greensboro, who have endured enormous suffering and hardship growing from such demonization.”** (p.2)

**“City Council’s Racially Biased Vote Opposing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: The City Council’s racially biased vote (all whites voting against the TRC and all Blacks voting for it) served to continue the demonization and to continue to block sincere efforts to seek truth, reconciliation, justice, and healing related to the events of November 3, 1979.”** (p. 2)

As Greensboro residents who survived the deadly assault of November 3, 1979 and remained active in the struggle for racial, social, and economic justice in Greensboro, we applaud the Greensboro City Council for the significant step it took on August 15, 2017, in apologizing for the Greensboro Massacre. Thank you. (p.1)

…

Mayor and Council Members, many people in Greensboro have told us that the apology, as stated at the August 15th City Council meeting, was good but lacked content. They wondered why council members did not name specifically that for which the council was apologizing. We assumed that the council was intending to put forth a more complete statement of apology later. (p.1)

We understand that none of you were on the Council in 1979 and some were too young or maybe not even in the city during that period, so the level of knowledge that the Council members have about the roles played by the Greensboro Police Department (GPD) and the City of Greensboro in the 1979 attack on an authorized public rally might make it hard to connect it with its actual history… You are now our elected representatives and it is you, the sitting City Council, that can most authoritatively offer a sincere apology with specifics on behalf of our City and the Greensboro Police Department; such an apology can open new doors and bear good fruit in years to come. (p.2)

**…**

We are focused here specifically on the *police responsibility for the Greensboro Massacre and why Greensboro residents are owed an apology (with specifics) from the City and the police*. As we discuss police foreknowledge about the *likelihood of violence on November 3rd*, keep in mind one very important fact that burns in the soul of everyone who suffered loss of a loved one, bodily injury, or mental trauma due to the decisions the police made about what to do, what not to do, where to be and where not to be on November 3, 1979. (p. 6)

***Not once did the police warn the demonstrators of the impending danger they faced***. The police knew, and they did not tell us so that we might do something different, like cancel our rally, rather than walk into a deadly ambush. (p. 6)

As it happened, a great many people knew or heard rumblings about a violent encounter that would ensue at the anti-Klan rally, including police officers, city officials and others. None shared their information with us. Police Captain Gibson, who signed the parade permit on behalf of the city, lied deliberately and despicably to the rally organizer, assuring him of police protection. (p. 6)

Prior to our rally, we had discussed possible police harassment of our parade and agreed we would not be baited into a violent response to police provocation***. It occurred to no one, however, that the police would actively collude with the Klan and Nazis and would not be present to protect parade participants and city residents at the poor, majority black Morningside Homes community*** where the rally took place. Knowing what they knew, the police should have warned demonstrators, indeed, all city residents, that they faced imminent danger. However, the City and the police, in sync with the media, made every attempt to pit the community against WVO/CWP, despite the fact that Rev. Johnson and the Greensboro Association of Poor People (GAPP) had been actively organizing in the community for over a decade. (p.6)

…

Chief Swing, who made contradictory statements after November 3rd, knew by mid-October that the WVO was having an anti-Klan rally and the Klan was coming. From the time Dawson was hired as a GPD informant, all the important information that Cooper received from Dawson about the Klan/Nazi plans to violently attack the November 3rd rally was passed to Chief Swing through Assistant Chief of Police, Col. Walter Burch…(p.12)

Nor did this police plot happen without the support of city officials. The police are subordinate to city government and Chief Swing was subordinate to Hewitt Lovelace, Director of Public Safety for the City of Greensboro at the time. Swing, Lovelace, and City Manager Tom Osborne met in a restaurant on November 2nd to discuss Nelson Johnson and the anti-Klan rally. Swing reported what he knew about the impending confrontation to these city officials. They, along with Mayor Jim Melvin, authorized the police’s plan for responding to what all knew to be a dire threat. Mayor Melvin, a few days after the killings, called the actions of the police on November 3 “very commendable.” (Told to reporter William Welch, “Causes of Violence Not Easy to Pinpoint,” *Durham Sun*, Nov. 6, 1979) (p.12)

…

In the aftermath of November 3, 1979, lies and cover-ups springing from the misdeeds of local to national law enforcement agencies did nothing to redeem the situation. Truthful, investigative reporting was scarce… (p.12)

… Two acquittals by all-white juries of Klan and Nazi members seen on videos shooting people down in broad daylight left many in the Greensboro community incredulous. In the final piece of litigation, however, a civil suit brought by surviving spouses and wounded protesters, we saw a glimmer of justice. (p.12)

The June 1985 verdict of the civil suit found two police officers, (Spoon and Cooper), four Klansmen, (Dawson, Sherer, Matthews and Smith), and two Nazis, (Wood and Fowler) jointly liable for the wrongful death of one demonstrator, Dr. Mike Nathan. The civil suit was the first judicial proceeding in which plaintiffs were not represented by lawyers from law enforcement agencies with a motive to cover up their own nefarious involvement in the massacre, but were represented by their own team of lawyers—and it was the first time the jury had a black juror. (pp. 12-13)

For the plaintiffs, the civil suit was an incredible uphill struggle against many obstacles. Although the finding of the jury was unprecedented in holding some perpetrators of the November 3rd tragedy liable and in declaring joint liability of Klansmen, Nazis and police, it was only a partial victory and very far from complete justice. But it was something. The City of Greensboro paid the $350,000 judgment for the Klan, Nazis and Greensboro Police Officers found liable for wrongful death of one person. At the same time the City and the Police denied any specific wrongdoings even up until the present time. (p.13)

…In his testimony to the ***Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission*** … on August 26, 2005, the Reverend Nelson Johnson, one of the most blamed and demonized persons in the ranks of the CWP/WVO, expressed some of his regrets, self-criticisms and apologies… (To access the full testimony, go to www.greensborotrc.org , then Public Hearings and Statement Archives.)

I deeply regret the use of the slogan “Death to the Klan.” …The slogan was meant to convey the weight of our conviction about the damage done by racism, a challenge this nation…needs to face. It would have been more accurate to say “death to racism.

I very much regret that a flyer was developed in the form of a letter that called the Klan members cowards … The names demeaned and devalued the potential of people who were members of the Klan or Nazis. Although in a letter form, it was really a flyer and I need to emphasize here that it was never mailed to anyone by us.

I regret the use of the word communism. Let me say that many people who were part of the Communist Workers Party no longer consider themselves communists. The party was officially disbanded in 1985. I have many friends, however, whom I respect deeply, who still consider themselves communists. I mean no disrespect to them.

…the word communism… no longer describes my core beliefs. .. Because of the fear and confusion associated with the word, it became almost impossible to use that term to convey broadly anything of positive value. I would note in passing that there is a passage in a very broadly read book which says, ***“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need****.”* This saying comes for the second chapter of Acts, verses 45 and 46, in a book called the *Holy Bible*. I think our culture would do well to ponder its implications as it relates to our economic structure and way of life. (p. 13)

None of the regrets and criticisms cited above in Johnson’s testimony or any place else, can or should be used to justify the conduct of the City of Greensboro or the Police. (p.14)

… [At] a speech made at Grosse Pointe High School outside of Detroit by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on March 14, 1968--three weeks before his death, [ King said], “ I want to discuss the race problem tonight, and I want to discuss it very honestly. I still believe that freedom is the bonus you receive for telling the truth. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. And I do not see how we will ever solve the turbulent problem of race confronting our nation until there is an honest confrontation with it and a willing search for the truth and a willingness to admit the truth when we discover it. (p. 14)

We earnestly implore you to join us in “a willing search for the truth:” A sincere apology from the City Council, along the lines we have sketched out here, would admirably show a willingness to admit truth once discovered. …We are sincere about working with the City and the Police to make our city better, and although we face a bitter past in many respects, the possibilities to use our God-given gifts to come together in truth, friendship and cooperation are always alive and never more needed than now. (p. 14)