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### **Peter Dreier**

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## Glenn Beck's Attacks on Frances Fox Piven Trigger Death Threats

**If anyone** thinks that the vitriol that Glenn Beck spews on his radio and TV shows can't sometimes stir people to aggressive and hateful action, they should take a look at the <u>postings on his website</u>, The Blaze, about Frances Fox Piven.

For two years Beck has targeted the political science professor as a Marxist Machiavelli whose writings constitute a manifesto for a radical revolution.

But in recent months Beck has escalated his hate campaign against Piven, a professor at the City University of New York, former vice president of the American Political Science Association, and former president of the American Sociological Association. He labeled Piven one of the "nine most dangerous people in the world," and "an enemy of the Constitution."

Not surprisingly, this has led to a dramatic rise in ugly threats to the 78-year-old Piven.

Some of Beck's followers have emailed Piven directly. One of the anonymous emailers simply wrote "DIE YOU CUNT" in the subject line. Another wished that she would get cancer.

Since September, The Blaze has published eight articles about Piven with headlines like <u>"Frances Fox Piven Rings in the New Year by Calling for Violent Revolution"</u> and <u>"Piven: Violence is Okay If It's Part of Your Strategy."</u>

In the wake of the Tucson massacre, Beck exhorted his audience to take a pledge to denounce "violent threats and calls for the destruction of our system -- regardless of their underlying ideology -- whether they come from the Hutaree Militia or Frances Fox Piven."

The Blaze also posted an audio recording of remarks Piven made at a meeting of faculty retirees in early December. She had been invited to comment on the 2010 election. In the course of the discussion, people asked about the sociological causes of the Tea Party movement. Piven discussed what is known about the demographic characteristics of Tea Partiers. She added that she suspected that older Tea Party sympathizers were also reacting against changes in family and sexual norms triggered by the women's and gay rights movement. Piven suspects that a conservative colleague used a cell phone to record the comments featured on The Blaze article titled, "Frances Fox Piven: The Tea Party is All About Sex."

These Blaze articles, in turn, have triggered hundreds of incendiary reader comments, some of which have included death threats (and some of which have since been removed). Here's just a sample:

- "Maybe they should burst through the front door of this arrogant elitist and slit the hateful cow's throat"
- "We should blow up Piven's office and home"
- "I am all for violence and change Frances: Where do your loved ones live?"
- "Another Idiot here who needs to be Euthanized!"
- "Dear Frannie, Trotsky got his in Mexico with a well applied icepick."
- "I would not be upset at all if she got hit by a car sliding in the snow during a winter storm.... yeah, i wouldn't be upset at all, i don't even consider her human."
- "Hey Frances and your "unruly mobs"! I'd like you to meet bullets! Our friendly neighborhood riot police can help you make their acquaintance!"
- "Hey Frances. Please get sick and die quickly!"
- "That old woman is nothing more than bile coming from a rabid animal, put it out of its misery."
- " The time for talk is over ! i stand with free people and my Lord Jesus, he has the ability to forgive. I do not. It will be ugly".
- "Here's hoping that this Piven hag is the first one killed in her "Grand Socialist Revolution"!"
- "Bring it B\*TCH, Bring it....You are all just future moving targets."
- "Somebody tell Frances I have 5000 roundas ready and I'll give My life to take Our freedom back. Taking Her life and any who would enslave My children and grandchildren and call for violence should meet their demise as They wish. George Washington didn't use His freedom of speech to defeat the British, He shot them."
- "Big Lots is having a rope sale I hear, you buy the rope I will hang the wench."
- Hey Frances and your "unruly mobs"! I'd like you to meet bullets!

- "I say they should vent their frustration by stringing up the old hippy revolutionaries like Piven."
- "Isn't it time we schedule Ms. Piven's end-of-life counseling session?"
- "OK! If it is violence she wants I think we should start with Ms. Piven."
- "I have at least 400 rounds ready for those freaking communist's when ever they are ready"

Some of these bullies have posted links to documents that reveal Piven's home address and phone numbers.

On Thursday (January 20), the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), a public interest law firm, issued a written appeal to Beck's boss -- Fox News chairman Roger Ailes -- to put a stop to the increasing threats against Piven incited by Beck tirades. The letter, written by CCR Legal Director Bill Quigley and Executive Director Vince Warren, asked Ailes to distinguish between First Amendment rights, of which they are "vigorous defenders" and an "intentional repetition of provocative, incendiary, emotional misinformation and falsehoods [that place that Piven] in actual physical danger of a violent response."

The letter states that the "threats must be taken seriously by Fox News," and that "Professor Piven's life could well be at stake." It further asks that Ailes "order an immediate investigation into this, and insist on a speedy and fair resolution which will stop the Fox and Beck generated threats on Professor Piven."

Joel Cheatwood, Fox News vice president, told the New York Times that the company would not order Beck to stop criticizing Piven. He had no knowledge of any threats against Piven, he said.

After news outlets reported CCR's letter to Ailes, *The Blaze* removed some of the incendiary comments from its website. But the following day (Saturday, Jan 22), Beck's website continued its attack on Piven. It published an article entitled, "Globalization Destruction: Piven Gleefully 'Hopes' and Explains How Countries Like China Can Shut Down USA and Bring Revolutionary Transformation."

This article provoked another wave of angry comments, including this one from an anonymous writer using the name "MILIG":

• "The cemeteries are half empty and this witch is still running around living?"

And this post from "Cylone:"

• "I'll pay up for the bullet....I"m \$1.07 bid....I'll just have to let Glenn shoot her though.... he's the best shot out there... :-)"

**Piven is** certainly no stranger to controversy. For almost half a century, she has been a prolific writer whose more than a dozen books and hundreds of articles explore the causes of poverty, the role of government policy in lifting the Americans out of poverty, the importance of increasing voter turn-out among the poor, and the value of protest and activism in changing public policy.

Her books (many of them written with her husband, sociologist Richard Cloward, who died in 2001), include Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare (1971), The Politics of Turmoil

(1974), Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail (1977), The New Class War: Reagan's Attack on the Welfare State and Its Consequences (1982), Why Americans Don't Vote (1988), The War at Home: The Domestic Costs of Bush's Militarism (2004), Challenging Authority: How Ordinary People Change America (2006), and Keeping Down the Black Vote: Race and the Demobilization of American Voters (2009). Piven has won numerous awards and honors for her scholarly work, which itself has been the subject of many books and articles by other academics.

But it isn't Piven's academic writings that has riled right-wingers. Instead, it is two articles in *The Nation* magazine, 44 years apart, that have made Piven a central character in the right wing's paranoid conspiracy theories and triggered the recent conservative crusade against her.

Beck and his paranoid posse consider Piven's 1966 *Nation* article, "The Weight of the Poor: A Strategy to End Poverty," coauthored with Cloward, the semi-official blueprint for a radical takeover of American society. In that 6,327-word article, Cloward (a professor at the Columbia University School of Social Work at the time) and Piven (at the time an anti-poverty researcher and activist who joined the Columbia faculty later that year), proposed organizing the poor to demand welfare benefits in order to pressure the federal government to expand the nation's social safety net and establish a guaranteed national income.

To put their strategy into practice, Cloward and Piven worked with George Wiley to create the National Welfare Rights Organization, which at its peak in the late 1960s had affiliates in 60 cities and had some success increasing participation in the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children program by organizing protests at welfare offices, initiating litigation on behalf of the poor, and pressuring politicians and welfare administrators to change the rules.

After years of working with community organizing groups and helping devise anti-poverty strategies, Cloward and Piven concluded that a successful anti-poverty movement had to combine grassroots protest with electoral politics. During the Reagan years in the early 1980s, they wrote a widely-read book, Why Americans Don't Vote, which examined deliberate efforts throughout the 20th century to deny the franchise to immigrants, the poor, and African Americans. They also used their contacts among unions, community groups, and social workers to help build a movement to expand voting among the poor.

Their idea led to the National Voter Registration Act, usually called the "motor voter" law, which President Clinton signed in 1993, at a White House ceremony at which Piven spoke and received one of the president's pens.

Conservatives have been attacking their ideas for decades. But the paranoid demonization of the couple by the extreme Right has escalated since Obama's election.

The story they now tell about Piven can be traced to David Horowitz, a former New Left radical who did an about-face in the 1970s and became a prominent conservative propagandist. In his 2006 book, written with Richard Poe, *The Shadow Party: How George Soros, Hillary Clinton, and Sixties Radicals Seized Control of the Democratic Party,* Horowitz identifies the "Cloward-Piven Strategy" outlined in their 1966 *Nation* article as the centerpiece of the radical blueprint to "collapse" the capitalist system.

Horowitz's idea caught on with other elements of the conservative lunatic fringe, particularly after an African American former community organizer was elected president. A few weeks after Obama's victory, James Simpson penned an article for the right-wing *American Thinker* entitled, "Cloward-Piven Government," describing their "malevolent strategy for destroying our economy and our system of government." The right-wing echo chamber has transformed the duo into Marxist

Machiavellis whose ideas have not only spawned an interlocking radical movement dedicated to destroying modern-day capitalism but also, in their minds at least, almost succeeded, as evidenced by what they consider Obama's "socialist" agenda.

Conservative radio jockeys Rush Limbaugh and Mark Levin have, on multiple occasions, warned their listeners about the nefarious social scientists. "The Cloward-Piven strategy is essentially what Obama and a number of these people are following," Limbaugh told his listeners on December 18, 2009, "and its ultimate objective is to have everybody in the country on welfare, by destroying it."

Horowitz, the editor of *FrontPage*, a far-right magazine and website, called Cloward and Piven the "architects" of "radical change." Other right-wing outlets, including *American Spectator*, *The Washington Times*, *The American Thinker*, *Free Republic*, NewsMax, and WorldNetDaily, have all educated their audiences about how the Cloward-Piven Strategy has infected society like a dangerous left-wing virus.

Beck first mentioned the so-called "Cloward-Piven Strategy" in March 2009, three months after he began his nightly Fox News show, and over 50 times since. He often used his trademark chalkboard to connect Cloward and Piven to Woodrow Wilson, Che Guevara, Bill Ayers, ACORN, the SEIU, the Apollo Alliance, the Tides Foundation, George Soros, Van Jones, Valerie Jarrett, and Obama -- some of the right's favorite villains. Piven and her radical colleagues are "taking you to a place to be slaughtered," Beck told his TV audience.

Beck, like his right-wing colleagues, views Cloward and Piven as dangerous radicals masquerading as reformers. On one show, Beck claimed that SDS, the 1960s radical student group, believed the road to change was "Let's blow things up," but Cloward and Piven counseled, "No, no, no, let's try to just collapse the system." Beck also said that Obama's health care proposal followed the Cloward-Piven strategy to "melt the system down and have it collapse into a new system."

On January 5th of this year, Beck promised to give viewers a tutorial on Cloward and Piven's idea, which he <u>described</u> as a "strategy to overwhelm the system and get everybody on the welfare and collapse the economic system of the United States." According to Beck, the Watts riots, which took place in 1965, a year before their initial *Nation* article appeared, "served as an inspiration for the Cloward and Piven strategy. That was it. That's -- they saw that and they went -- oh, my gosh. I have the answer."

"Violent riot inspired them to help create more riots and feel your anger and let the hatred flow," Beck told his audience. "Most people would have seen this and say, wow, we got to make sure that doesn't happen again. But not France Fox Piven. This was an epiphany for her."

"The riots was [sic] the inspiration," Beck went on. "Their solution: guaranteed income. That's communism."

At the first annual Tea Party convention held in Nashville in February 2010, Joseph Farah, editor of the white supremicist website WorldNetDaily <u>devoted eight minutes of his 38-minute keynote</u> diatribe to fulminating about what he called Cloward and Piven's "manifesto."

The duo's work with NWRO led to increasing welfare costs that "brought New York City to its knees" in the 1970s," Farah said. He correctly linked Cloward and Piven's ideas to various efforts to get more poor people to vote. Then he drew a direct line between the couple and one such effort, Project Vote in Chicago, which once hired a young law school graduate named Obama. Farah also repeated the inaccurate canard that ACORN was involved in widespread voter fraud. He told the Tea Party crowd that Cloward and Piven's ideas have influenced Democratic Party prescriptions since George McGovern's 1972 presidential candidacy.

Obama's purpose, Farah said, is to "increase misery and create crises." That, according to Farah, is an "old trick" that was "codified by a Marxist Columbia professor and his research assistant" [sic] -- a strategy of "orchestrated crises."

"Obama is still employing the Cloward-Piven strategy, not as a community organizer but today as the community organizer in chief," Farah explained. "He's still creating crises as a means of empowerment" -- right out of the Cloward-Piven playbook.

"Nothing's changed" since Cloward and Piven first penned their article, Farah said. "With Obama, everything is a crisis. Carbon dioxide levels. The banking industry. The automobile industry. The health care system. And especially the economy. He's going to fix all of them, he promises. How? By turning make-believe crises into real crises."

"The goal remains the same as when it was first outlined in 1966," Farah said. "It is, as the Marxists of the 1960s and early 1970s explained, to heighten the contradictions of capitalism. Bring the system to its knees, and ultimately to collapse."

In his 2010 book, Radical-in-Chief: Barack Obama and the Untold Story of American Socialism, the crackpot writer Stanley Kurtz claims that a young Obama may have heard Piven speak at a conference of radical scholars and decided then and there to become a community organizer.

**Piven is** used to being criticized by conservatives, but last year the attacks got closer to home -literally. In January 2010 Kyle Olson phoned her, told her he was a college student in Michigan,
and asked if he could videotape an interview with her about her most recent book *Challenging Authority*. Temporarily housebound and recovering from a auto accident, Piven invited Olson to her
New York apartment. On February 1, Olson and a friend arrived from Michigan with a video
camera. Piven offered them something to drink. Then, for about an hour, she and Olson sat at her
round dining room table and talked about everything from the founding fathers to Fox News, while
the friend taped them.

Two weeks later, Piven, learned that about eight minutes of the taped interview <u>appeared</u> in three segments on BigGovernment, Andrew Breitbart's conservative news website. The same outlet achieved national prominence two years ago when it published James O'Keefe and Hannah Giles' highly edited but hugely destructive hidden-camera recordings of ACORN employees. And the same website became infamous when O'Keefe was arrested in January for allegedly trying to tamper with the phone system in Sen. Mary Landrieu's New Orleans office as part of another "investigation," while on Breitbart's payroll. Olson and Breitbart employed those same "gotcha" tactics on Piven.

But Olson was not a college student. He was a 31-year-old Republican Party operative, conservative activist, and would-be journalist. He runs a Michigan-based conservative advocacy organization, the Education Action Group (EAG), which primarily attacks teachers unions. Hating teachers unions is a core tenet of the Republican mainstream. But branched out in the lunatic fringe, using his camera and computer to sniff out the left-wing Marxist conspiracy and its chief strategist, Professor Piven. Indeed, Greg Steimel, a researcher for the Michigan Education Association who has followed Olson's career, calls him a "Glenn Beck wannabe."

The segments of Olson's video interview with Piven posted on BigGovernment featured no major revelations about America's imminent mass socialist uprising. In one snippet, Piven remarks that Thomas Jefferson "would be stunned by the oligarchical character of American society." She also

comments that when wealth and power become too concentrated, society needs a "corrective period of people rising," as they did during the Depression and the 1960s. In another video clip, Olson asks Piven about Beck's attacks on her *Nation* article, which he regularly blames for many of America's problems, including the financial crisis. "Can you think of anything sillier than to attribute the financial crisis to an article in a low-circulation magazine in 1966?" Piven asked. She called Beck's efforts to find an easy "scapegoat" for the country's troubles typical of "right-wing ideologues."

When Olson's ploy was exposed, he told his hometown paper, the *Grand Rapids Press*, that he regretted using a lie to get an interview with Piven. But he continued to attack, harass and mock Piven in his online postings.

In fact, Piven has never encouraged or celebrated violence in any of her writings or speeches. She's long been a proponent using the combined power of voting and grassroots protest to bring about change. In her writings, she examines the history of protest and documents how tactics such as pickets, rallies, strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, and civil disobedience -- the kind of activism that once catapulted a young Baptist minister in Montgomery to the national limelight, an icon whose birthday we just celebrated as a national holiday -- often pressure powerful figures in business and government to pay attention to grievances they had previously ignored and level the political playing field.

As Piven explains in her books, articles, and speeches, protest can give powerless people a voice and lead to important reforms, like the eight-hour day, women's right to vote, desegregation of public schools and universities, and increased funding for social programs like food stamps and welfare.

When protest turns violent, Piven has documented, it is typically because the police, the National Guard, or private militias and goon squads hired by business attack the protestors with billy clubs and guns.

But sometimes angry people do riot. Piven is hardly the first academic to note that when people are frustrated by the slow pace of change, or by an incident of police brutality, they occasionally resort to civil unrest. Langston Hughes, the celebrated African American writer, made the same observation in his famous poem, "Dream Deferred," written in 1951. "What happens to a dream deferred?" Hughes asked. "Does it dry up, Like a raisin in the sun?...Or does it explode?"

Neither Hughes, nor Piven, nor the hundreds of other social observers who explored why angry people sometimes explode -- southern lynch mobs, Old West vigilantes, and the urban poor -- were condoning violence. They were simply explaining it as a persistent reality in American history.

But Piven has also been interested in the other side of that question -- why, in the face of much suffering and injustice, do so many people, especially the poor, remain passive, as if they accept their lot in life as something immutable, or blame themselves, or "bad luck," for their misfortune, rather than channel their frustrations and anger in political action, such as voting or participating in protest?

Piven's most recent *Nation* article "Mobilizing the Jobless," published in its January 10 issue, and which has triggered the latest and ugliest wave of attacks on her, asked those questions. In a country with nearly 15 million people officially unemployed and another 11.5 million settling for part-time work or giving up the frustrating search for a job -- and with little confidence that things will get better soon -- why is there so little protest?

"So where are the angry crowds, the demonstrations, sit-ins and unruly mobs?" Piven wrote in her 1,159-word essay. "After all, the injustice is apparent. Working people are losing their homes and their pensions while robber-baron CEOs report renewed profits and windfall bonuses. Shouldn't the unemployed be on the march? Why aren't they demanding enhanced safety net protections and big initiatives to generate jobs?"

Ever the political sociologist, Piven then tries to answer her own question. She explains that because American who are out of work, or losing their homes, are isolated from each other, dispersed in different areas, and comprised of people in different workplaces and industries, it is difficult to mobilize them. Also, she points out, many jobless people blame themselves for their troubles. "They have to go from being hurt and ashamed to being angry and indignant," before they are ready to join picket lines or show up at rallies. "A kind of psychological transformation has to take place; the out-of-work have to stop blaming themselves for their hard times and turn their anger on the bosses, the bureaucrats or the politicians who are in fact responsible."

Piven would like to see a revival of the kind of mass protest and civil disobedience -- what she calls "disruption" -- that animated the labor and civil rights movements. "A loose and spontaneous movement of this sort could emerge," he says in her *Nation* article, but it isn't inevitable.

And if Americans did start to build a "social movement from the bottom," what should they demand from the nation's policymakers? Is Piven calling for a radical revolution to overthrow the capitalist system, as her critics allege? No. She'd like to see a new New Deal "to relieve the misery created by the Great Recession." That would mean, she says, "massive investments in public-service programs" and "big new initiatives in infrastructure and green energy."

Piven's strategy and policy agenda falls squarely within the American tradition of progressive "social democracy." But in their wacky paranoid worldview, Beck and his Tea Party acolytes consider "progressive" and "social justice" as code words for Marxist revolution.

Soon after the newest *Nation* article appeared, Ron Radosh -- a conservative historian whose political trajectory, like Horowitz's, was from 1960s student radical, to ultra-right wing pundit -- posted an anti-Piven screed on his website, Pajamas Media. On its own, Radosh's piece, <u>"The Second Time is Farce: Frances Fox Piven Calls for a new Cloward-Piven Strategy for Today"</u>, would have had little impact outside the right-wing blogosphere. But with Beck fanning the flames with his relentless attacks on Piven, bloggers like Radosh get a wider audience.

It isn't clear whether Beck actually believes what he says and writes about Piven, or simply uses it to whip up his followers' anger and resentments. We'll never know what's in Beck's mind. But what's obvious is that this tactic is not simply aimed at Piven, an acclaimed academic but hardly a well-known figure in American politics. It is, instead, intended to discredit Obama's liberal policy agenda and to destroy the progressive movement (unions, consumer and community groups, environmentalists, women's and civil rights organizations, and gay rights groups) that has pushed the president and the Democratic Party to be bolder, as they did in last year's health-care battle.

This maneuver is hardly new. As far back as Joseph McCarthy and Richard Nixon, Republican politicians and hired strategists -- like Murray Chotiner, Ed Meese, Michael Deaver, Karl Rove, Pat Buchanan and Frank Luntz -- have perfected the art of linking liberal Democrats to communists, socialists, radicals, subversives, "welfare queens," and terrorists. These ideas might seem crazy, but they are, like Roger Ailes, the communications guru for Nixon, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush, and now Glenn Beck's boss, crazy like Fox News.

Media mogul Rupert Murdoch recruited Ailes to turn the Fox network into a propaganda arm of the

right wing of the Republican Party, a key link in the network of conservative think tanks, magazines, columnists, websites, and radio talk shows. Few people who've looked closely at Beck's background and career believe that he is the conductor of the Fox orchestra. But his hysterical end-of-the-world rants, along with his paranoid conspiracy theories and misguided history lessons, have found a niche audience, including Tea Party supporters, the Republican Party, and the blogosphere.

Piven admits to being "unnerved" by this recent wave of blog attacks and death threats triggered by Beck's incendiary rhetoric. But she's determined not to let the right-wing assault intimidate her. She's accepted several invitations to speak and is working on several new writing projects.

What she has learned from a lifetime of scholarship is that it is impossible to predict when reformers and radicals can win significant victories, like the eight hour day, women's suffrage, civil rights laws, consumer protections, and increases in the minimum wage. The only constant, she says, quoting abolitionist Frederick Douglas, is that "without struggle there is no progress." After half a century of activism, Piven isn't about to let "that blowhard" Glenn Beck silence her.

Peter Dreier is E.P. Clapp Distinguished Professor of Politics at Occidental College. His next book, *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century*, will be published later this year.