

Mass repression being prepared for Cleveland Republican convention

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The city of Cleveland, Ohio has been awarded a \$50 million federal security grant for its hosting of the Republican National Convention July 18-21. According to Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson, \$30 million of the federal grant will be spent on personnel and \$20 million on equipment.

National conventions of the two major parties are considered “national special security events,” and Congress has appropriated funding for every convention since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York City. An equal amount of \$50 million has been approved by Congress to provide security for the Democratic National Convention to be held in Philadelphia.

Convention security within the Quicken Loans Arena, the main convention site, will be administered under the direction of the Secret Service, while the Cleveland Police Department will be responsible for providing security outside the convention hall, in coordination with a number of federal agencies.

Cleveland is planning a massive buildup that would increase its police force from 1,200 to 5,000 officers for the convention. This is causing concern because the city has been the scene of a number of racially charged police shootings and protests. The Cleveland Police Department was the subject of a US Justice Department investigation in 2014, coming under scrutiny for its use of “unreasonable and unnecessary force.” The police killing of 12-year old Tamir Rice, playing in a park with a toy gun, made headlines throughout the world.

The city is planning heightened security measures and is now seeking bidders to provide some 2,000 sets of riot gear, including “Elite Defender” riot-control suits and 26-inch retractable steel batons.

Other items on the shopping list include three miles of interlocking steel barriers to be used for crowd

control; video surveillance systems, cameras and laptops; 10,000 flexicuffs; 16 pointer illuminator aiming lasers; motorcycles, bicycles, tactical armor, ballistic helmets and vests; and horse trailers for use by mounted police. Whatever the city acquires in the way of surveillance technology and military equipment will stay in the region after the convention ends.

Four years ago, at the Republican Convention in Tampa, Florida, police had a variety of sophisticated crowd-control weapons including sound weapons, long-range acoustic devices (LRAD), sting rays, chemical “non-lethal” munitions, rubber and wooden bullets and tasers.

Freda Levenson, legal director of the Ohio Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* expressing concerns about the police build-up: “We’re worried about the militarization of the Cleveland Police Department. The consent decree is based on a history in which our Police Department has shown an inability to police with conventional police equipment in ordinary day-to-day situations, and now they’re going to be given all this new shiny technology and weapons... We’re concerned about their training and their ability to use this [equipment] especially in this larger and challenging context.”

The “Consent Decree” refers to a 2015 agreement between the Cleveland Police and the US Justice Department regarding a review of the department’s unconstitutional “use of force” practices. The Ohio ACLU has published an online Constitutional Playbook for the 2016 Republican Convention, available [here](#).

A portion of the federal money will be used to purchase “protest insurance.” According to the Plain Dealer, the city of Cleveland will pay a \$1.5 million brokerage fee to AON Risk Services Northeast to

obtain a \$10 million insurance policy, although it is not clear how the city will pay the premiums. Such insurance, designed to protect the city from lawsuits arising from injuries, accidents, and violations of protesters' first and fourth amendment rights, has now become standard for cities hosting political conventions.

The convention is expected to attract tens of thousands of demonstrators. So far, two organizations, the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and Organize Ohio, have filed permit applications to demonstrate, according to the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*. However, no permits will be issued until city officials receive the security plan from the US Secret Service, which is not expected until two weeks before the start of the convention.

In a direct attack on the freedom to speech and assembly, at past conventions and G20 meetings, protesters were confined to so-called "protest areas," which were fenced-in areas, often blocks away from the meeting location, in which participants were closely guarded.

The AIDS healthcare Foundation, based in Los Angeles, is planning a march involving 1,000 "walking participants." Organize Ohio, a grassroots organization, wants to stage a downtown march involving between 1,000 to 5,000 participants. Its director, Larry Bresler, is planning an anti-poverty demonstration on July 18, the opening day of the convention. "There's a complete ignoring of the problems of poverty and the structural issues of poverty," he said.

The law school of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland hosted the Midwest Regional Conference of the National Lawyers Guild on March 19, which was devoted to the provision of legal assistance and jail support to people who might be arrested during mass demonstrations. Conference attendees were warned about RNC committee staff, informants or undercover law enforcement personnel who might be in attendance. In their remarks, speakers recalled the political unrest and activism of the 1960s, and government efforts to undermine protest movements through infiltration.



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