

Amid nationwide protests against police violence

Officials prepare for mass repression at Republican National Convention in Cleveland

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Ahead of the July 18-21 Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, police and government officials have ramped up preparations for mass repression in the city, spending millions on military-style hardware and targeting potential protesters for surveillance and harassment.

The convention, where the fascistic candidate Donald Trump is projected to accept the Republican nomination for president, is expected to draw thousands of protesters and counter-protesters from around the country. Cleveland Police, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and the Secret Service are coordinating an effort to meet mass protests with antidemocratic repression on a vast scale.

The convention's designation as a "National Special Security Event" (NSSE) entitles the city to \$50 million in federal funds for additional personnel and security upgrades. In addition to bringing in police officers from around the country, a partial list of security purchases that Cleveland city officials have made include 2,000 sets of full riot gear, 10,000 sets of plastic handcuffs, night vision goggles, body armor, laser sights for long-range rifles, and a new video surveillance system for downtown Cleveland. Though only some of the purchases have been made public, other cities that have received NSSE funds have used them to buy tear gas and chemical munitions, LRAD sonic weapons, "stingray" cellphone surveillance devices, and so-called less lethal munitions such as rubber bullets.

Regardless of how much of the gear is used during the convention, the introduction of such militaristic technology will likely have a permanent effect on policing in the city.

In addition, the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) has

reported that FBI, Homeland Security, Secret Service and local law enforcement agents have been knocking on the doors of individuals throughout the city, interrogating them about their protest plans and demanding to know their political connections. The agencies, which have been referring to the operation as "community outreach," appear to be targeting individuals who have connections to protest groups, particularly those protesting police violence. One woman targeted said she had been previously arrested at a Black Lives Matter event, and though the charges had been dropped and she had attended no further protests, her mother had still been questioned by law enforcement agents.

By contrast, right-wing and pro-Trump groups do not appear to have been targeted, even though many have vowed to unleash violence in the event of a contested convention.

In a statement, the co-coordinator for the Ohio National Lawyers Guild stated, "The purpose of these door knocks is simple: to intimidate the target and others in an effort to discourage people from engaging in lawful First Amendment activities." The Cleveland deputy police chief, meanwhile, bragged to the city council about the city's "very robust pre-convention intelligence team."

There is every indication that the city is preparing a massive police crackdown on protesters. An estimated 3,500 additional officers are being brought in from around the country. The Cleveland Municipal Court is extending its hours and will stay open from 5 a.m. through 1 a.m. during the convention, anticipating a need to process 1,000 people a day. More than 1,000 additional spaces are being cleared in the county jail to

hold those arrested during the convention.

Additionally, the city has quintupled its protest insurance policy from \$10 million to \$50 million, at a \$9.5 million cost to the city. On top of covering destruction of property during the convention, the policy will cover legal fees from lawsuits brought against the city by protesters who are injured or wrongfully arrested. The size of the policy, costing roughly four times what the city of Tampa paid during the 2012 RNC, gives the Cleveland police virtual carte blanche to run roughshod over democratic rights throughout the convention, with the understanding that they can “pay out” legal fees to cover themselves later on.

Recent years have seen a rapid increase in heavy-handed security measures at political conventions, with hosting cities looking more and more like war zones. While a rogues’ gallery of political criminals descend upon the city to coronate their leaders, protesters are confined to “free speech zones” far from the official convention halls. There, they are often beaten, detained and arrested without cause. Over 300 people were detained during the 2008 RNC in St. Paul, Minnesota, and 1,800 people were imprisoned over four days during the 2004 convention in New York, many locked up in the infamous “Guantanamo on the Hudson.”

While posturing as “more inclusive,” the Democratic National Convention is preparing to employ similarly repressive measures at its July 25-28 gathering in Philadelphia. Last month, the City Council passed legislation letting police issue \$100 civil fines rather than make criminal arrests for disorderly conduct, blocking a street and failing to heed a request to disperse. An adviser to the police commissioner told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* the department is concerned about how “unruly protesters” would be handled outside the DNC.

Increasing domestic “anti-terror” laws are being used to crush political dissent. Thousands of workers and youth around the country have mobilized in recent days to protest police violence and it is this sentiment that is the true target of police-state measures. Tensions in Cleveland are still simmering following the November 2014 police murder of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, for which neither of the cops involved was indicted. The preparations for an antidemocratic crackdown comes in the aftermath of the 2012 entrapment of five Occupy

Cleveland protesters, who were arrested for their alleged involvement in a bomb plot, hatched by an undercover police officer.

In addition to protest groups, members of several right-wing organizations also plan to attend the convention in support of Trump. Many have expressed a determination to clash with protesters, with the far-right Stop the Steal organization, run by Republican provocateur Roger Stone and right-wing fanatic Alex Jones, stating that, “We must own the streets,” and that the event would be “our days of rage.” Many of these organizations have encouraged their members to attend the protests bearing firearms.

The city has come under sharp criticism for its decision to only allow a single parade route for all groups that plan to attend the convention, as well as confining them to only a handful of small public parks, virtually ensuring that right-wing and neo-fascist organizations will be shouldered up next to protesters. This may very well be part of a deliberate plan to goad protesters into violence to justify a crackdown. In any case, many observers have concluded that the city’s plan makes such clashes inevitable.



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