

Immigration police launch political attack on Portland mayor for backing anti-ICE protests

Kayla Costa
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A union representing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents submitted a letter to Mayor Ted Wheeler of Portland, Oregon, denouncing the city for not providing full local police assistance to ICE agents during a 38-day demonstration outside a federal immigration facility in the city.

The letter comes from an attorney representing the National ICE Council, an American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) union that represents 7,600 officers, agents and other employees. The union is affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

In their attack on the city's Democratic mayor, the agency accuses the mayor of forbidding Portland law enforcement from responding to 911 calls by ICE agents, who claim they were threatened by protesters outside the building. Such a policy, the letter goes on, "created a zone of terror and lawlessness" outside the detention facility and left federal officers "vulnerable to violence, harassment and even death."

The use of the word "terror" to describe peaceful protesters has a profound significance. The most violent, repressive methods employed by US imperialism during the "war on terror" are now being prepared against domestic social opposition.

The zone that the ICE union describes in the letter was one of the largest demonstrations in the "Occupy ICE" protest movement, where people set up round-the-clock encampments to obstruct immigration facilities and offices. This particular site consisted of a miniature tent-city run by mostly radical, anarchist and liberal groups on train tracks behind the agency's field offices in a downtown location. Anywhere from a small handful of people to thousands of demonstrators participated in the occupation at any given time, remaining peaceful and unarmed throughout the five weeks of its existence.

There were no physical attacks by demonstrators, but the letter states that some agents called the Portland Police Bureau after facing threats of violence and harassment. Alleging that the city deliberately ignored the calls for police assistance during and after ICE office hours, the National ICE Council accuses the city of violating the Equal Protection Clause of the US Constitution by not providing agents with equal police protection.

The letter concludes by suggesting that failure to provide local police services to ICE agents may result in a lawsuit. "We would like to avoid federal litigation, but we are prepared to protect our membership and their families," it states.

Using absurd claims that protesters threatened the lives of ICE agents as a pretext, the letter serves as a political attack on the city government. Nothing less than full compliance with federal police orders, including local cooperation with ICE agents, will suffice for the fascistic organization. Contrary to their written defense of the constitution and their absurd invocation of the Equal Protection Clause, federal immigration police provide a key base for the fascistic movement against immigrants and the democratic rights of the entire working class.

The Portland government's general support for anti-ICE demonstrations along with their limited restrictions on local collaboration with federal deportation and detention operations, as weak as they are, are seen as obstacles to the efficiency and power of ICE operations.

When the "Occupy ICE" demonstration was first established on June 17, in the midst of popular opposition to the separation of families and denial of asylum at the border, Mayor Wheeler said that the Portland Police Department would not intervene on

behalf of the federal police agencies.

The empty promise slowly collapsed. By July 23, Wheeler sent local police to enforce the evacuation of the camp under the pretext that the demonstration posed environmental and safety concerns. Portland police dressed in riot gear had also been present at rallies and standoffs between protesters and officers of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which oversees ICE, in mid-July.

Still, Wheeler won over half of all votes in the 2016 mayoral race in a city with mass support for immigrants and refugees. Around one-tenth of the local population is comprised of immigrants and refugees from all regions of the world. Though the mayor is uninterested in opposing his own party's attack on immigrants, he felt the need to posture as a defender of immigrants in the face of widespread opposition to Trump.

Wheeler responded to the National ICE Council letter on Tuesday evening, calling it "inaccurate and inflammatory." He clarified that Portland Police had responded to 911 calls by agents for emergency services when there were serious security threats, and that the Council had no substantive evidence to prove otherwise.

The reason for his initial calls to keep local police forces from getting involved with the Occupy ICE demonstration, he continued, was that he "did not want the Portland Police Bureau to be engaged or sucked into a conflict for the purpose of securing federal property that houses a federal agency with their own federal police force."

This argument for a local hands-off stance on immigration policing is also found in the "sanctuary" status endorsed by some sections of the Democratic Party at the city and state levels, including in Portland. Under the guise of protecting immigrants from raids or deportation, it simply leaves the anti-immigrant procedures in the hands of federal agencies with little to no extra assistance from localities. Such technical barriers merely limit the amount of public and private information granted to ICE and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), requiring them to go through legal processes of requesting information and warrants.

The Trump administration has challenged sanctuary cities and states, seeing the limitations as obstacles to the full expansion of the deportation machine. Earlier this month, the New York City and New York State

governments filed a lawsuit against the Justice Department for withholding \$12.9 million in federal funding because of their sanctuary status. Similar lawsuits were filed by city officials in New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Virginia and Washington State.

In early March, the US Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against the state of California, saying its efforts to establish a sanctuary state were unconstitutional. Attorney General Jeff Sessions claimed these weak obstacles put the lives of ICE agents at risk when they conduct their workplace and neighborhood raids.

Democrats have played a leading role in expanding ICE forces and building the mass deportation machine, particularly under the Obama administration, which deported about three million immigrants.



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