

Republicans defend Kenosha gunman as nationwide protests continue

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Defying curfews, National Guard soldiers, militarized police, federal agents and gun-toting fascists, protesters from across the country continue to turn out in major US cities to demand justice for victims of police murder. Protests have continued, in some cases for over 90 days, in US cities throughout the week, with major events scheduled this weekend in places such as Chicago, Washington DC, New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle and Portland, as well as Kenosha and Madison, Wisconsin.

In the largest single protest, tens of thousands gathered in Washington DC for the “Get Your Knee Off Our Necks” march, commemorating 57 years since the first “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” led by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963.

The turnout was substantial, given the threat of the coronavirus pandemic as well as the atmosphere of violent intimidation whipped up by Trump even before a pro-Trump vigilante gunman opened fire on protesters in Kenosha, Wisconsin Tuesday night, killing two people and wounding a third.

One group of about 50 people marched on foot from Wisconsin to Washington, encountering occasional hostility along the way in rural areas. One of this group was shot and lightly wounded in Bedford County, Pennsylvania by a local man using a rifle, in an incident that was live-streamed.

The politics of the protest, however, were those of its Democratic Party organizers, particularly the Reverend Al Sharpton, who has long specialized in covering up the fundamental class issues and the responsibility of capitalism for poverty, police violence and racism, and promoting a racist agenda aimed at dividing the working class.

While the speakers included survivors and family members of victims of police violence, they also included Democratic vice-presidential candidate Kamala Harris, US Representative Joyce Beatty of the Congressional Black Caucus, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten and Sharpton himself.

In their speeches, the capitalist politicians and union executives painted police murder in purely racial terms,

obscuring the role of the police as a repressive arm of the state, and urged a vote for the Democrats in November as the only solution. Meanwhile, Democratic mayors and governors continue to work hand-in-glove with Trump and his federal thugs from the FBI, ICE and the Border Patrol, while the police departments they run suppress protests and arrest “agitators.”

Despite the bankrupt politics of the speakers, the large multiracial and multiethnic crowd in attendance testified to the broad support within the population for equality and opposition to the fascistic politics being put forward by Trump and the financial oligarchy for which he speaks.

In his acceptance speech Thursday night, Trump spoke for more than an hour without mentioning the specific events in Kenosha or acknowledging that a political supporter, acting on the basis of his political slogans, opened fire on protesters and murdered two of them.

A direct line can be drawn between the fascistic screeds delivered by Trump over the last four years and repeated endlessly at the Republican National Convention this past week and the vigilante killings in Kenosha perpetrated by Kyle Rittenhouse.

The 17-year-old fervent Trump supporter and former police cadet—who attempted to enlist in the Marine Corps in January but was turned down—remains in custody in Illinois after the judge ruled Friday to delay an extradition hearing for another month in order to allow Rittenhouse to retain a private attorney.

He has been charged with five felonies, including first-degree intentional homicide for the death of 26-year-old Silver Lake resident Anthony Huber, first-degree reckless homicide for the death of Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, of Kenosha, and attempted first-degree intentional homicide for the shooting of Gaige Grosskreutz, 26, of West Allis. He is also charged with two counts of recklessly endangering public safety.

Currently, Rittenhouse is being represented by a public defender and by private attorney Lin Wood, whose Twitter profile proudly displays his allegiance to QAnon with the

hashtag #WWG1WGA ("When We Go One, We Go All," a slogan of the fascist conspiracy theory).

Rittenhouse is fast becoming a symbol for fascists. He has been elevated by Fox News personalities such as Tucker Carlson, with an average nightly viewership of roughly 4 million, and Ann Coulter, who boasts 2.2 million followers. On Wednesday Coulter replied to a follower, who said that he wanted Rittenhouse as his bodyguard, stating, "I want him as my president."

The night after the shooting, local Wisconsin radio personality Vicki McKenna, whose morning talk show is carried in the two largest cities, Madison and Milwaukee, asked her listeners, "Do you have enough ammo?" She continued, "Are you going to prepare by finding that old set of white sheets so that you can raise the flag of surrender? Or are you going to be ready to defend your property, your people, against the imminent violence being unleashed by people whose end game is total destruction of our way of life?"

During Wednesday night's taping of his prime time show, Carlson devoted an entire segment to defending the fascist gunman, while blaming "leaders" and "authorities" for abandoning Kenosha and allowing it to "devolve" into "anarchy." He ended the segment by rhetorically asking, "How shocked are we that 17-year-olds with rifles decided they had to maintain order when no one else would?"

Far from "abandoning" the city, Democratic Governor Tony Evers, along with Democratic Mayor John Antaramian, have made clear they are willing to use any and all means to suppress the protests. As of this writing, over 1,000 National Guard military police from four states in addition to hundreds of federal agents and local police have poured into the area to attack demonstrators, even as the police allow self-proclaimed militias such as the Kenosha Guard to violate curfew, intimidate and in even kill protesters.

Protests have continued throughout the week in Kenosha despite the fact that a curfew remains in effect from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. through Sunday, August 30. Daily emergency texts warning of "civil unrest" have been sent to cell phones throughout Kenosha County, ordering "citizens... to be off the streets for their safety."

The Kenosha murders are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to right-wing violence against the protests that have erupted throughout America since the May 25 police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Critical data published in a recent article by the *Huffington Post*, which was collected by Alexander Reid Ross, a doctoral fellow at the Center for Analysis of the Radical Right, revealed that the bulk of the violence committed at protests throughout the summer has been carried out by

elements associated with the far-right, as opposed to protesters. So far, there have been at least 497 instances of far-right actors and vigilantes confronting, assaulting and/or murdering protesters.

Commenting on the scale of the violence instigated by far-right counterprotesters, Ross told the *Huffington Post*, "I've never seen anything like this in my life." So far Ross has confirmed 387 incidents of intimidation, 64 cases of simple assault, 38 vehicle attacks and nine instances of protesters being shot at, of whom six were injured and three killed.

Even the specific form of the events in Kenosha has extensive precedent. Ross documented over 20 instances of police encouraging the formation of militias to help "suppress lawlessness."

On July 30, Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb created a "civilian posse" to help with "widespread unrest" in the central Arizona county. Sioux Rapids Police Chief Tim Porter in South Dakota was suspended for two weeks earlier this summer after posting a Facebook message in which he likened Black Lives Matter protesters to "speed bumps," and encouraged fascists to "HIT THE GAS AND HANG ON" as they committed vehicular manslaughter.

The response of the Democratic presidential ticket to the violent attacks on protesters is a combination of identity politics and cowardice. Former Vice President Joe Biden said that Trump hoped to profit from the upheaval in Kenosha. "I think he views it as a political benefit," he told MSNBC, saying Trump was "just pouring gasoline on the racial flames that are burning now."

He complained that Trump was attacking the Democrats although the Republicans are actually in power and should be held responsible. "The violence we're witnessing is happening under Donald Trump," Biden said, "Not me. It's getting worse, and we know why."

Senator Kamala Harris said, "We must always defend peaceful protest and peaceful protesters," but added that "we should not confuse them with those looting and committing acts of violence."

Neither Biden nor Harris pointed to Trump's role as the moral author of the Kenosha murders or to the growing danger of ultra-right violence against anyone who publicly denounces the crimes of the Trump administration or the police.



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