

As protests against police violence continue across the US

Trump visits Kenosha to defend killer police and vigilantes

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President Donald Trump made an appearance in Kenosha, Wisconsin on Tuesday as demonstrations against police violence continued in the aftermath of the August 23 police shooting of Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old African American worker. Kenosha police shot the unarmed Blake seven times in the back, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down.

On the eve of the visit, yet another unarmed man was shot and killed by US police, this time in Los Angeles, provoking protests in that city. Since May 25, the day George Floyd was brutally murdered by a Minneapolis police officer, at least 235 people have been killed by police in the US. The pace of killings is on track to surpass 1,000 this year, with nearly three people shot dead by the police every day.

Trump went to Kenosha, an impoverished “rust belt” Democratic-run city in a Democratic-run state, to escalate the law-and-order campaign attacking social protest and socialism and promoting police repression and right-wing vigilante violence that was the theme of last week’s Republican National Convention. The strategy of Trump and the Republicans in the final two months of the presidential campaign is to incite far-right forces and hold the November 3 election under conditions of violence, political instability and the threat of civil war.

Trump and the Republicans are seeking to make an amalgam between the right-wing Democratic campaign of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris and left-wing protesters, whom the White House demonizes as criminal anarchists and looters, in line with Trump’s goal of establishing a presidential dictatorship.

At a White House press conference on Monday, Trump defended Kyle Rittenhouse, the 17-year-old Trump supporter who joined with a band of vigilantes on the night of August 25 to confront protesters in Kenosha and fatally shot two peaceful demonstrators. Rittenhouse also shot and wounded a third protester.

The Kenosha police, as recorded on cell phone video watched by millions, thanked the fascistic gunmen, gave them water, and allowed the automatic rifle-toting Rittenhouse to walk through police lines after his shooting spree and return home to Illinois. Rittenhouse was subsequently charged with first-degree homicide and is facing extradition to Wisconsin.

Trump, however, said Rittenhouse acted in self-defense and otherwise would have been killed by the protesters. At the same press conference, he defended Trump supporters who drove a truck caravan into downtown Portland on Saturday and fired paintballs and pepper spray on demonstrators. The provocation resulted in the shooting death of a right-wing activist under circumstances that remain unclear.

Trump’s efforts to project an image of authoritarian strength during his visit to Kenosha were belied by the extraordinary security measures taken to wall him off from the population of the Midwest city of 100,000 people. Hundreds of police, sheriff’s deputies and National Guard troops patrolled the streets, helicopters circled overhead, hulking armored vehicles were deployed, and those areas toured by Trump were blocked off by rows of gigantic construction vehicles and trucks. All commuter train traffic between Kenosha and Chicago was shut down.

Trump visited an emergency management center, toured small businesses damaged by rioting that followed police crackdowns against protesters, and held a one-hour roundtable discussion with local and state police and National Guard officials. Also on hand was Attorney General William Barr and Department of Homeland Security Acting Secretary Chad Wolf. Democratic Governor Tony Evers and Mayor John Antaramian, both of whom had publicly urged Trump not to come to the city, were not present.

No mention was made in the course of the roundtable, or the scattered questions from reporters that followed, of the vigilante murder of protesters in Kenosha. In his rambling remarks, Trump repeatedly praised the “great job” by the police and National Guard troops in Kenosha and made a blanket condemnation of protesters as anarchists, looters and rioters. He said the demonstrations in Kenosha were not “acts of peaceful protest, but really domestic terror.”

Trump once again presented Biden as a stalking horse for “reckless far-left politicians” who portray the police as “repressive or racist.”

Asked by a reporter if he would condemn the shooting of Blake, Trump alibied for the cop, seven-year-veteran Rusten

Shesky, saying the case was “complicated” and “under investigation.” He repeated a statement he had made the previous night in an interview with Fox News host Laura Ingraham, saying police who shot unarmed civilians in many cases “choked,” like a golfer who missed a three-foot putt.

Attorney General Barr denounced “mob violence” and claimed that the protests in Kenosha were organized by “the same people using the same tactics that have been used in various cities—Washington DC, Atlanta, Chicago, now Kenosha and Portland.”

He said federal and state officials were reviewing all video of the thousands of protests since last May to identify people who threw rocks or carried out vandalism, adding, “The federal government is willing to use all our tools and all our laws to bring these people to justice.” He said nothing about right-wing, pro-Trump vigilantes who have not only attacked protesters, but to date killed at least three of them.

Despite the attempt to project the image of the great and all-powerful “leader,” the roundtable, totally insulated from the population, including the family of Blake, had the character of a meeting under siege. The Trump administration and the entire ruling class are petrified at the growth of social opposition. They fear that the ever-rising death toll from the coronavirus pandemic and mounting working-class opposition to the deadly back-to-work and back-to-school drives could spell the demise of the capitalist system.

In a telling remark, Trump at one point noted the many police and military agencies represented at the meeting and gushed, “Even me. I’m here today and I feel so safe.”

Trump gave further expression to the mood of fear gripping the ruling elite in his Monday night interview with Ingraham, during which he spoke of “dark forces” and a “shadowy group of people” who were behind the mass protests and who controlled Biden “like a puppet.”

At one point he told Ingraham: “Biden won’t calm things down. They will take over. They will have won... They will have taken over our cities. It’s a revolution. You understand that, it’s a revolution.”

The greatest advantage held by Trump and the fascistic faction of the ruling class for which he speaks is their nominal political opposition—the Democratic Party. This right-wing party of American imperialism is no less hostile to and fearful of a mass movement of the working class. The Biden campaign expresses the Democratic Party’s ever more rapid movement to the right.

The Democratic convention was focused on two things: seeking to divide the working class by promoting racial and identity politics, and appealing for support to the military, the intelligence agencies, Wall Street and disaffected Republicans. It put forward no social program to address mass unemployment and the coming wave of evictions and growth of hunger, after the Democrats conspired with the Republicans to end the \$600 federal unemployment supplement.

It barely mentioned the back-to-work and back-to-school drives, which the Democrats support in full knowledge that the result will be an exponential rise in infections and deaths. It said virtually nothing about the multitrillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street in the CARES Act, for which the Democrats voted nearly unanimously, or the ongoing pumping of money into the stock market by the Federal Reserve.

Biden’s response to the Republican convention and Trump’s law-and-order demagoguery is to shift further to the right and declare his own law-and-order credentials. On Monday, he gave his first speech since the convention, whose centerpiece was an unequivocal denunciation of looting and arson, and the demand that protesters who engage in such things be prosecuted.

His basic argument was that he is the man to suppress violence, whether on the left or the right, and keep America “safe.” He combined this attempt to attack Trump from the right on law and order with an attack on Russia, based on the fabricated claim of Russian bounties against US troops in Afghanistan, a continuation of the Democrats’ attacks on Trump for being too “soft” on Russia and China.

Even this, however, is not enough for the *New York Times*, which published an op-ed column Tuesday by Brett Stephens declaring Biden’s law and order speech insufficiently right-wing. Stephens wrote: “He can publicly call out far-left ugliness (not just violence) the next time he sees it. He can pay a visit to the people who’ve had their businesses burned to the ground in Kenosha and tell them that their grievances will be heard, and their property protected, in a Biden administration. He can even call the family of the right-wing activist killed on Saturday in Portland.”

The working class faces immense dangers from the efforts of the ruling elite to cultivate a fascistic movement and create the conditions for police-military dictatorship, despite workers’ immense social power and their growing leftward radicalization. However, that danger is centered not in any inherent strength of Trump and company, but rather in the dead weight of the Democratic Party and all those who seek to channel social opposition behind it.

The fight against Trump requires a complete break with the Democratic Party and the building of a mass independent socialist movement of the working class. This is the program being fought for by the Socialist Equality Party and its 2020 candidates, Joseph Kishore for president and Norissa Santa Cruz for vice president. All those who agree with the fight for socialism should support the campaign and join the SEP.



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