

Washington DC's mayor and Trump trade authoritarian demands in crackdown on peaceful protesters

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A strange series of developments this week in the US capital of Washington, DC demonstrates the right-wing character of both the Trump administration as well as his nominal opponents within the Democratic Party in regard to the democratic rights of the population.

On Tuesday, calls by Washington, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser and her administration for accelerated prosecutions of peaceful protesters swept up in the weeks and months since the police killing of George Floyd in late May were publicly rebuked by a federal prosecutor representing the administration of President Donald Trump, who stated that the Democratic mayor was demanding the federal government “skirt constitutional protections and due process.”

The week’s events were set in motion Sunday, when Trump launched a fusillade against Mayor Bowser for supposedly failing to aggressively crack down on protesters in DC, which has been one of many cities beset by nightly protests and demonstrations against police brutality. Trump called on Bowser to “arrest these agitators and thugs! Clean up D.C. or the Federal Government will do it for you. Enough!!!”

In response Monday, Bowser demanded the Trump administration “assist us the best way that they can, by supporting our officers. When we make an arrest for violent protests, we need those violent agitators prosecuted.” Bowser continued by alleging, “There hasn’t been a willingness from the U.S. attorney’s office to prosecute” the dozens of people arrested at DC protests since May. John Falcicchio, Bowser’s chief of staff, said at the same press event Monday, “You [President Trump] can tweet fast but can’t actually make your prosecutors prosecute fast.”

Bowser said that protests and demonstrations over the

weekend had resulted in the arrest of at least an additional 29 people alleged to have been involved in confrontations with police in the area around Black Lives Matter Plaza close to the White House. Bowser maligned the latest wave of protests and clashes between police and bystanders as the result of “outside agitators” who were “looking for police to confront.” Finally, Bowser threatened to institute a nightly curfew, as her office had done in the days immediately following the mass demonstrations against police brutality in late May and early June.

Then, on Tuesday, the office of Acting US Attorney for the District of Columbia Michael Sherwin releasing a public letter addressed to Bowser, stating all but one of the cases against protesters had been dropped due to the fact that arrests were carried out “collectively” and “presented to the Office without any articulable facts linking criminal conduct to each individual arrested.”

“Simply put, we cannot charge crimes on the basis of mere presence or guilt by association,” the letter said. Sherwin reminded Bowser, “As I am sure you are aware, without some evidence to establish probable cause of a particular arrestee’s criminal conduct—e.g., a police officer’s observation or video footage of the alleged crime—we cannot bring federal charges.” The police had arrested these individuals on suspicion of spray-painting buildings and burning patio umbrellas.

The most sharply worded portion of the letter states: “Surely, by your comments, you are not suggesting that this Office skirt constitutional protections and due process.” Sherwin, the top federal prosecutor in DC, even claimed his office worked with the DC police to try to “further develop these cases to establish a bare minimum of probable cause,” but “To date, no

sufficient evidence has materialized.”

This created the paradoxical situation in which the fascistic administration of Donald Trump and the nominally “progressive” Democratic administration in Washington, DC were goading one another to run roughshod over constitutional protections, and it in turn being scolded by a representative of the Trump administration for ignoring these basic civil liberties.

This unlikely scenario was upended when Sherwin publicly sought to distance himself from his Tuesday comments. Following a meeting with Police Chief Peter Newsham on Wednesday, Sherwin penned a letter saying, “As we further discussed, you should not take my letter of September 1, 2020 as suggesting that there had been no probable cause for the arrests. That was not the Department’s position. Rather the concern was that we needed certain additional information to be reflected in the supporting affidavits to proceed with criminal charges.”

For the record, Sherwin’s office has charged at least 121 people involved in protests around the country between May and August. On Thursday, Sherwin added that his office would “be charging a number of arrestees today.”

The impetus for Sherwin’s cowardly about-face was spelled out Wednesday, when the Trump administration filed a memo calling for the federal government to consider withholding funds from “anarchist jurisdictions.” The District of Columbia was among the locales listed. This, in addition to arm-twisting and threats behind the scenes, on both the part of Trump and Bowser, likely brought the prosecutor’s office into line.

The latest feud between the Democratic Party and the Trump administration again exposes the right-wing and reactionary character of the entire political establishment, and the Democrats’ claims to support the mass demonstrations against the police or even sympathize with the victims of police brutality.

Bowser in particular had sought to put herself forward as the unlikely foil to the fascistic Trump in the weeks following the president’s efforts to enact a presidential dictatorship on the streets of the District of Columbia, utilizing militarized police forces to clear the area surrounding the White House of peaceful protesters.

It has been revealed since that time that Trump’s

dictatorial putsch was aided and abetted by the Democratic mayor, who also sent local police to attack unarmed protesters fleeing from flash grenades and rubber bullets. As is abundantly clear, in confronting Trump, the working population will find no greater enemy than the Democratic Party “opposition,” whose differences with Trump and the Republican Party amount to little more than tactics and certain issues of foreign policy.



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