

Democratic mayor green lights police assault on protesters opposing family's eviction in Portland, Oregon

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On Tuesday, Democratic Mayor Ted Wheeler gave permission to local police to break up an occupation protest outside a home called the “Red House on Mississippi” in Portland, Oregon, in which hundreds of people have worked to prevent the eviction of the Kinney family since a court order was handed down in September.

“I am authorizing the Portland Police to use all lawful means to end the illegal occupation on North Mississippi Avenue and to hold those violating our community’s laws accountable,” Wheeler tweeted on Tuesday, adding, in reference to Seattle’s Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone protest this summer, “There will be no autonomous zone in Portland.”

This announcement came after a full day of confrontations between police and the protesters, who were resisting the attempts of the technical owner of the home, Urban Housing Development Ltd., to place a fence around the property and board up the windows and doors. These efforts were assisted by both the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) and the Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office. Police allege that protesters threw rocks and paint-filled balloons at officers and police vehicles.

After the police and property owners left the premises, protesters tore down the fence, re-entered the home, and constructed barricades to form an occupation zone at which up to 200 people gathered in defense of the family. The police returned but were eventually forced to leave after protesters chased them away by spraying fire extinguishers and throwing rocks, breaking one police car window. Police fired “less-lethal” impact munitions and arrested at least seven protesters outside the home.

The events in Portland, and experience of the Kinney family, give a sense of a much broader struggle that is developing as millions of working-class renters and homeowners face eviction or foreclosure in the coming months, as eviction moratoriums, rental assistance, and unemployment benefits are set to expire this month. A recent analysis found that 12 million renters across the US owe an average of \$5,850 in back rent and utilities.

Originally built in 1896, the Red House has belonged to the Kinney family for 65 years since William and Pauline Kinney moved to Portland from Little Rock, Arkansas in a wave of African-American migration to escape racial oppression of the South and find better industrial jobs. The couple bought their home with cash in 1955 after facing racial discrimination in the home loan industry due to the practice known as “redlining,” which identified blacks as high-risk borrowers and restricted where they could buy homes.

This experience was very common at the time, causing North Portland and the Mississippi Avenue area to become a largely black, working-class neighborhood for decades. In recent years private development and investment firms have fueled the gentrification of the neighborhood and forced thousands of residents out of their homes as housing costs have risen significantly.

William Kinney, Jr. and his wife Julie Metcalf Kinney took over the home from his parents in 1983. In the last two decades the Kinney family has been forced into financial ruin, leading to the foreclosure. Their son, William Kinney III, was imprisoned in 2002 due to an automobile accident, sparking years of legal battles that led the family to take out a loan against their home. Already having trouble making payments, their loan

was transferred between a series of banks, with Clear Recon Corporation eventually declaring foreclosure in May 2018.

Since the Kinney family's eviction process began in 2018, when their home was auctioned to a private housing development company as a "nonjudicial foreclosure" in October of that year, the courts have ruled that the current federal and city emergency moratoriums on evictions do not apply to the family.

According to the Red House on Mississippi website, after Multnomah County Judge Judith Matazarro authorized the eviction process in September and declared that the defendants were unlawfully occupying the premises, "Multnomah County Sheriffs bashed open the Kinney family door at gunpoint. Armed with assault rifles, they barked orders for the family to pack up their belongings and move within 30 minutes. The Kinneys were given no prior legal notice, as their case was still in litigation in a higher court."

The occupation protests have been ongoing since September, mostly with a handful of people camping outside in the front yard and mobilizing protesters whenever police arrived. The family is still waging a costly legal battle to reclaim their home during the occupation, relying on a GoFundMe page. Another court order that gave the sheriff 30 days to re-evict the family was set to expire on October 27, but was extended for another 120 days on October 22.

Mayor Wheeler's attempt to paint the protest as a violent and illegal action, necessitating a police crackdown, is meant to signal that there will be no tolerance of any opposition to the wave of evictions to come in Portland and across the US, ensuring that the Kinney family and countless others will be made homeless in the middle of a raging pandemic.



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