

Democratic mayor prepares police crackdown on “violent antifa and anarchists” in Portland, Oregon

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On Friday, Democratic Mayor Ted Wheeler held a press conference in which he called for the expansion of the police apparatus to combat left-wing “extremism” in the city of Portland, Oregon, after a small demonstration of around 100 people on December 31 resulted in vandalism and confrontations with police.

Decrying “violent antifa and anarchists,” Wheeler stated that he would convene a meeting with local, state, and federal law enforcement officials to “develop clear plans to address anarchist violence both here in Portland and throughout the state.” He called on the state legislature to increase penalties for criminal destruction and vandalism, while giving the police a green light to videotape protests and “gather intelligence on these small groups of organized criminals.”

While the exact policies are to be determined by officials, Wheeler indicated that he would like the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) to use “any means necessary” to suppress demonstrations and ensure that protesters are legally persecuted. This will result in the expansion of the police apparatus, giving them greater freedom to crack down on left-wing protests, make arrests, and carry out surveillance, all of which constitute an attack on basic democratic rights.

Invoking identity politics to give a “progressive” veneer to his right-wing diatribe, Wheeler attacked the “group of largely white, young and some middle-aged men” for crushing the supposed “hope and optimism” for the new year. “Why would a group of largely white, young and some middle-aged men,” Wheeler asked, “destroy the livelihood of other people who are struggling to get by?”

Describing protesters as “violent anarchists” who “just want to watch the world burn,” Wheeler’s speech carried more than an echo of the fascistic rhetoric of President Donald Trump. The Republican president has constantly ranted against the “radical left,” labeling antifa as a “terrorist organization,” and sent in federal agencies to assist local police in Portland and other Democratic-run cities in cracking down on anti-police violence protests last summer.

The new proposal from the Democratic Party in Portland was warmly received by conservative and far-right figures in the state. Andy Ngô, a far-right “journalist” and social media personality, who defends the Proud Boys and other fascist militia groups, tweeted, “In his new year’s presser, Portland Mayor @tedwheeler admits that his efforts to de-escalate & compromise with antifa have failed to yield results. He condemns the violent extremist movement by name & calls for more to be done.”

Wheeler’s actions exemplify the right-wing, anti-democratic character of the Democratic Party as a whole, which serve as political defenders of the capitalist system and its police and military-intelligence apparatus no less than the Republicans. In the course of opposing calls to “defund the police,” President-elect Joe Biden even attacked Trump from the right, criticizing federal budget cuts for police departments and demanding \$300 million in additional funding, a call which was matched by Senator Bernie Sanders who said cops should be paid higher salaries.

Biden launched a massive “law and order” ad blitz during his election campaign in which he denounced anti-police violence protesters involved in vandalism or looting, while making no mention of right-wing

extremist violence.

During a trip to Kenosha after the police shooting of Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old black man who was shot seven times in the back, Biden used the opportunity to frame American society on the basis of identity politics and racial hatred, while maintaining silence on the killing of two protesters by 17-year-old far-right militia member Kyle Rittenhouse, who has been hailed as a hero by fascist organizations, Trump and other sections of the Republican Party.

In Oregon, Patriot Prayer and other fascistic groups recently stormed the state capitol in opposition to COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, but this was not deemed “violent” and proceeded without any police interference. In fact, text messages leaked to the *Willamette Week* found PPB has been found to be in close communications with Patriot Prayer leader Joey Gibson, providing advice on how to not get arrested during their confrontations with left-wing protesters.

What Biden and Wheeler seek to suppress is not “antifa,” however, but the broader social anger among the working class that finds expression through growing left-wing radicalization, protests, and strikes. As evictions loom for millions of Americans who have been forced into poverty and unemployment without any financial aid as the pandemic rages out of control, Wheeler has already indicated his support for PPB cracking down on a protest against the eviction of a family from their multi-generational home in North Portland.

The buildup of local police departments and implementation of “intelligence gathering” operations will be used against all left-wing protests and demonstrations as the working class enters into struggle against the horrific conditions of the pandemic and its long-term consequences.



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