

Seattle Police Department plans to increase arrests and penalties for left-wing protesters

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Seattle, Washington, Police Chief Adrian Diaz announced on January 23 that left-wing demonstrators will be arrested and charged under a “tighter policy,” revealing the preparations of the Democratic Party in the state’s largest city to deal with the emergence of social opposition among workers and youth in the coming year.

While the new policies have a vague character, Diaz made clear that the police will no longer hesitate throwing protesters who carry out misdemeanor property destruction into jail, despite overcrowding and COVID-19 concerns, and that those who commit these minor offenses will be prosecuted at a higher rate. Even protesters who cross freeways and major roads will be subject to harsher penalties.

The police department justified their new approach by citing the recent protests that took place in downtown Seattle on January 20, Inauguration Day, when President Joe Biden was sworn into office, that resulted in a few shattered windows and spray-painted buildings. The protesters focused on the demand to “Abolish ICE,” referring to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency responsible for the detainment and deportation of undocumented immigrants.

“It doesn’t matter who is in the presidential office,” the police chief said. “It really is a matter of understanding that people are just out there for destruction.” In an attempt to turn public opinion against left-wing protests, he proceeded to state that many of these “criminals” come from out of state, and that protesters’ vandalism is one of the reasons why small businesses in Seattle have suffered during the pandemic.

This announcement is in line with the response of other Democratic Party officials, such as Portland,

Oregon, Mayor Ted Wheeler’s proclamation on December 31 that protesters in that city are “organized criminals” and that the Portland Police Bureau should use “any means necessary” to combat demonstrations. Such a statement is a clear indication of the utter ruthlessness with which the Democratic Party will meet protest against police violence and inequality under President Biden.

Throughout the Pacific Northwest region of the United States, protests have continued since the George Floyd demonstrations began last summer, opposing police brutality, immigration detention centers and evictions. While there have been small numbers of anarchistic types at some of these protests—many of whom are likely police provocateurs—who carry out reckless tactics like lighting cars on fire, the damage done to property has been a relatively microscopic social cost.

The real target of these measures in Portland and Seattle is growing social opposition among broad masses of workers and young people, which will inevitably erupt into protests, walkouts and strikes as the COVID-19 pandemic and the related social-economic crisis intensifies. Democratic Party officials, who dominate politics in the Pacific Northwest, are working to criminalize left-wing protesters and build up the police apparatus in order to suppress struggles when they arise.

This analysis is supported by the fact that city officials are focusing their attacks on left-wing protests while remaining silent about the fascistic armed militia groups, which mobilized during Trump’s January 6 coup attempt outside of Washington Governor Jay Inslee’s house. These same far-right groups have rallied many times in the last year at the Olympia Capitol in Washington state, demanding the overturn of

the presidential election results and elimination of limited COVID-19 restrictions on businesses.

Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan and Portland Mayor Wheeler, both Democrats, share an attitude toward protesters that does not differ much from the former Trump administration, which carried out a frenzied campaign against “radical left extremists,” called those who aligned themselves with the Antifa movement “domestic terrorists,” and deployed police repression during the summer’s anti-police violence protests.

Police brutality and repression will continue, and in fact intensify, under Democratic Party leadership at the local and federal level, focused against left-wing protests, workers’ strikes, as well as working-class neighborhoods. Just on Saturday, a policeman drove over an unarmed man who was in the middle of a peaceful crowd at a street race in Tacoma, Washington, just south of Seattle. In New York City, striking workers at Hunts Point Market were subjected to arrest last week by police dispatched by Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio.



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