

Biden funnels pandemic relief funds into strengthening the police

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On Wednesday, President Joe Biden announced new measures to deal with what he called an epidemic of gun violence in America. Speaking of his plan from the White House, Biden said nothing about the social causes of the spike in gun violence being reported in many US cities, nor did he mention the continuing wave of police killings that take more than 1,000 lives every year in the United States.

Rather, he sought to establish his law-and-order credentials and dissociate his administration from calls to “defund the police” that emerged during the mass demonstrations last spring and summer against police violence, following the police murder of George Floyd.

Saying that now was “not a time to turn our backs on law enforcement,” Biden announced that states and localities could use any portion of the \$350 billion in pandemic relief funds allotted them under the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan enacted in March to fund their police departments.

In a statement released by the Treasury Department, the administration announced that the money could be used to hire additional police officers to reach pre-pandemic staffing levels, and, in communities with high rates of gun violence, increase the size of their department beyond pre-pandemic levels. The money could also be used to establish community violence intervention programs and purchase new policing equipment.

Biden and his attorney general, Merrick Garland, explained that the plan also included expanded deployment of the FBI and other federal police agencies to aid local police, as well as enhanced technology for tracking criminal activity, presumably a coded reference to surveillance activities.

Citing a 34-city study by the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice, the Biden

administration claims that homicides rose by 30 percent in large cities across the US in 2020. Additionally, the study says aggravated assaults and gun assaults rose last year by 6 percent and 8 percent, respectively. The White House further states that the nationwide homicide rate was 24 percent higher in the first months of 2021 than it was in the same period of 2020, and 49 percent higher than two years ago.

According to data compiled by CNN and Gunviolencearchive.org, there were 10 mass shootings across nine states that killed seven people and injured at least 45 others just last weekend.

Biden claimed in his speech that “the secondary consequences of the pandemic and the proliferation of illegal guns” were behind the increase in crime and said he expected crime rates to rise over the summer.

“Crime historically rises during the summer,” he said. “And as we emerge from this pandemic with the country opening back up again, the traditional summer spike may even be more pronounced than it usually would be.”

A fact sheet released by the White House on Wednesday listed five major components of the administration’s strategy to reduce gun violence and crime: stiffer enforcement of firearms restrictions, increased federal funds for police departments, community violence interventions, summer jobs for teenagers and young adults and programs to help former prisoners find employment and housing.

As Biden’s White House speech on Wednesday made clear, however, the program is really about vastly increasing funding for the police, with the rest more a matter of packaging than substance.

Noticeably absent from his remarks was any mention of police reform, which he claimed to champion during his 2020 election campaign, as millions of all races and

ethnicities were demonstrating in US cities and cities around the world in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd.

Nor did he speak of the massive job loss and growth of poverty for workers resulting from the pandemic, alongside a record rise in stock prices and wealth for the corporate-financial elite, fueled by trillions of dollars in bailouts and virtually free money provided by the Federal Reserve.

Over 600,000 Americans have died to date from COVID-19 due to the policy of subordinating human life to corporate profit pursued by Trump and continued in all essentials by Biden. This policy of social murder is being intensified with the lifting of all restrictions on the spread of the virus and the insistence on reopening the schools with in-person instruction, despite the rapid spread of the more virulent Delta variant of the virus and large parts of the country with low vaccination rates.

What is really driving Biden's diversion of pandemic relief funds into the strengthening of the police is the mounting social and political crisis in the country and the growth of social opposition in the working class. The entire ruling class, complicit in a policy of mass death, is fearful of an eruption of working-class opposition that will escape the control of the pro-corporate trade unions and the two parties of the financial oligarchy.

The police are part of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state. They are the frontline force for suppressing the working class and upholding the system that exploits it. All factions of the ruling class and both of its parties seek to shore up the police to be thrown against a mass movement of workers.

In an op-ed piece published Wednesday, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman expressed the panicked concerns of the ruling class when he warned of the danger of "civil war." Biden and the Democrats, he argued, had to make clear their support for the police. Under the headline "Want to Get Trump Re-elected? Dismantle the Police," he warned of "volcanic forces ... that could blow the lid off our democracy."

In 1994, as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee during the Bill Clinton administration, Biden championed the Violent Crime Control and Enforcement Act, which established mandatory and draconian sentences for drug offenders, leading to a

surge in incarceration of poor and minority workers and youth. The law also expanded the reach of the death penalty.

Biden drafted the Senate version of the law in collaboration with the National Association of Police Organizations. He warned at the time of "predators" who were "beyond the pale."

Today he heads a right-wing administration in the midst of an unprecedented economic, social and political crisis of American capitalism. His attempt to outflank the Republicans on the issue of law and order and support for the police underscores the impossibility of reforming the police under capitalism, as well as the bankruptcy of politics based on the notion that the Democratic Party can be pushed to the left and turned into an instrument for progressive change.



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