

USA: Trump toys with a Police State

Dave Stockton Wed, 22/07/2020 - 14:24

Dave Stockton

For the last ten days, Donald Trump has been trialling a presidential coup d'etat, starting in Portland, Oregon but now being extended to Chicago. In his usual style, he claimed that anarchist violence in Chicago is 'worse than in Afghanistan'. This is not only a response to the Black Lives Matter movement against the US's killer cops, but to his accelerating slump in opinion polls. On the basis of an executive order 'to protect federal property' he was able to deploy the considerable range of federal police forces, militarised over the past two decades under the excuse of the War on Terror. In Portland, 40 miles from the Canadian border, he is deploying Customs and Border Protection forces sent from the Mexican frontier!

In Portland, armed Border Patrol Tactical Units, BORTAC, using unmarked vehicles, have been seizing demonstrators and detaining them for interrogation at undisclosed destinations. Agents wear camouflage without names or numbers. Demonstrators have been tear-gassed and subjected to fire from impact munitions. As a result, a round fractured the skull of one 26-year old demonstrator, Donavan LaBella. A 53-year old navy veteran was videoed being beaten senseless by club wielding officers. A wall of dozens of self-described 'moms', trying to stand between the BORTAC thugs and the protesters, was tear-gassed.

Over a week ago, Trump sent his Acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary, Chad Wolf, to Portland to oversee the repression. On his return, Trump praised Wolf's results, claiming that, 'Portland was totally out of control, and they went in, and I guess we have many people right now in jail and we very much quelled it, and if it starts again, we'll quell it again very easily. It's not hard to do, if you know what you're doing?.'

Trump has emphasised that he is not just targeting 'antifas?', or the Black Lives Matter movement, but his opponents in the upcoming elections.

'We're looking at Chicago, too. We're looking at New York,' he said. 'All run by very liberal Democrats. All run, really, by the radical left. This is worse than anything anyone's ever seen?', he continued. 'And you know what? If Biden got in, that would be true for the country. The whole country would go to hell.'
(Washington Post)

Trump, who showed his yellow streak when he hid in the White House basement from a peaceful BLM demonstration, is now posing as the strong man in the hope of consolidating his white supremacist followers and shoring up his electoral base. Now, as he threatened, Trump has extended the repression to Chicago and has listed Philadelphia, Detroit, Baltimore and Oakland, for the same treatment.

Unless he is stopped, this promises to be the most severe assault on US citizens' democratic rights since the Palmer Raids after the First World War. Trump is languishing in the opinion polls, widely seen as criminally responsible for the US suffering the world's worst covid-19 outbreak, and a historic slump that could bear his name as 1929 did that of Hoover. Unless he pulls some sort of shock and awe tactic out of the bag, he could face a landslide defeat in November.

True, various legal challenges have been raised by Democratic mayors and governors but, unless there is a massive popular response on the streets and direct action in the workplaces, Trump will continue to play the dictator. He will continue to surround his election campaign with the febrile atmosphere of a civil war. His new campaign organiser, Bill Stephen, has already described Joe Biden as 'the hapless tool of the extreme left'.

The American Presidency has far reaching powers which Trump has used in a way few of his predecessors have done outside of wartime. With the aid of federal forces, backed by local police departments enraged by the highlighting of their murderous attacks on people of colour, he has already unleashed what in Italy in the 1970s was called a 'strategy of tension', a pretext for ignoring the constitutional rights of the people and giving the executive around the President quasi-dictatorial powers, what Marxists call bonapartism.

And, even if Trump loses in November, many things point to a post-election crisis if he claims the results are fake. Trump has created an amorphous mass following not restricted to traditional conservative Republicans but drawing in maddened petit bourgeois and older disoriented white workers. In conditions of a Great Depression, these could quite quickly crystallize into a genuine fascist movement.

The answer to Trump, to a viciously racist police force and to mass unemployment such as we have not witnessed since the 1930s, is not Joe Biden, or even Bernie Sanders, who now backs him. The programmes either of Clinton-style Democrats or Scandinavian-style Social Democracy cannot drain the swamp of racism and cut-throat capitalism out of which Trump and his 'movement' emerged. Only a mass force, capable of facing up to police repression and crushing the freelance racists and fascists, a party based on the working class and all the racially and gender oppressed, can lead the struggle that has opened up with Black Lives Matter and the new labour struggles of the past few years.

A first step, nationwide, but above all in the cities threatened by Trumps' occupation forces, must be mass mobilisations to surround, isolate and force their withdrawal and humiliate the dime store dictator in the White House.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/usa-trump-toys-police-state>