

Stop Trump's coup d'état! Mobilize the working class against authoritarianism and dictatorship!

27 July 2020

The Trump administration's unconstitutional deployment of paramilitary forces in cities throughout the country is tantamount to a declaration of war against the people. Blatantly violating the Bill of Rights and threatening to overthrow the Constitution, the conspirators in the White House are attempting to carry out a coup d'état. Violating his oath to "faithfully execute the Office of the President of the United States," Trump is plotting to incarcerate and execute his political opponents.

For the last two weeks, federal agents of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have been deployed on the streets of Portland, Oregon. The White House has mobilized these forces in defiance of objections from the state and city governments, utilizing them to wage an ever more violent campaign of repression, targeting ongoing protests against police violence.

Unidentified agents in military gear have seized unarmed protesters and thrown them in unmarked cars to be transferred to unknown locations without probable cause. SWAT teams with assault rifles have charged peaceful protesters, beating them with truncheons and firing tear gas and flash bang grenades. One protester was targeted and shot in the head with a rubber bullet, fracturing his skull.

Trump's shock troops have been drawn from the apparatus of repression built up to target immigrant workers and wage war. This includes agents from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Customs and Border Protection (CPB), each of which is led by an "acting" director not confirmed by the Senate and therefore accountable only to the president. Particularly ominous is the central role played by the CPB internal SWAT team known as BORTAC, a brutal and battle-tested organization that has been involved in the major operations of the US military abroad, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last week, Trump declared that other cities will be subjected to federal intervention as well, including New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Detroit, Baltimore, Oakland and Albuquerque.

At a press conference on July 22, Trump denounced what he called a "far-left" and "radical" movement "to defund, dismantle, and dissolve our police departments," and vilify "our law enforcement heroes."

The pretext for Trump's mobilization is the protests that have swept the country following the May 25 police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. However, Trump's actions are driven by more wide-ranging concerns.

The United States is a social and political tinderbox. The pandemic has exposed the dysfunctional state of American society and its political institutions. The absolute subordination of all social needs to the capitalist oligarchy's relentless drive for profits and wealth has created the conditions for the catastrophe that is now unfolding.

More than 150,000 people in the United States have died from COVID-19, with more than 1,100 added to this horrific figure every day.

On Thursday, the US recorded its four millionth case of coronavirus, just 14 days after it surpassed three million cases. Hospitals are overflowing in Texas, Florida, California, Arizona and other states.

But even as the virus spreads and the death toll mounts, the Trump administration is insisting that workers stay on or return to their jobs, and that schools reopen regardless of the consequences for teachers and their students.

In order to maximize the economic pressure on workers, the limited social support that was enacted last March under the CARES Act is about to be greatly scaled back or ended altogether. Last week, Congress recessed without passing an extension of federal unemployment benefits. Even as new unemployment claims rose last week to 1.4 million, a federal moratorium on evictions expired, leaving millions at risk of being thrown out of their homes.

Within a matter of weeks, millions of working-class families will be threatened with destitution, homelessness and hunger. The Trump administration expects an eruption of social protest and is preparing for massive repression.

At the same time, the US is engaged in a series of provocative threats against China, pushing the world closer to the brink of world war. On Thursday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a bellicose tirade against China as US agents broke into the Chinese embassy in Houston after the Trump administration took the unprecedented decision to order it closed. Before Pompeo's speech, two US aircraft carriers and strike groups were ordered to conduct "high-end" war games with Australian and Japanese ships in the South China Sea.

The deployment of federal police is a continuation of Trump's efforts to establish a presidential dictatorship, announced eight weeks ago in his June 1 national address at the Rose Garden. As military police launched a violent attack on peaceful protesters outside the White House, Trump declared himself the president of "law and order," threatening to invoke the 1807 Insurrection Act to brand those protesting police violence as "domestic terrorists."

Trump's initial coup attempt encountered resistance from within the military, including from Trump's former defense secretary, General James Mattis, because it believed that such a drastic action was not adequately prepared. But it would be dangerously naïve to believe that the military will defend democracy. The latest actions of the White House have no doubt been taken after consultation with generals who have told Trump that he has other forces at his command, and that he should use them before calling on the military itself. But the paramilitary forces of BORTAC and ICE will be augmented by others.

The old adage, "It can't happen here"—that there could never be a dictatorship in the United States—is being refuted. Not only can it happen, it is happening.

In a column published Friday, *The New York Times*' Roger Cohen

compared developments in the United States to the situation in Germany prior to the Nazi conquest of power. In his July 24 column, “American Catastrophe Through German Eyes,” Cohen cites the comment of Michael Steinberg, a professor of history at Brown University and the former president of the American Academy in Berlin:

The American catastrophe seems to get worse every day, but the events in Portland have particularly alarmed me as a kind of strategic experiment for fascism. The playbook from the German fall of democracy in 1933 seems well in place, including rogue military factions, the destabilization of cities, etc.

Unlike Hitler, however, Trump does not have a mass fascist movement at his disposal. While attempting to whip up far-right forces, his primary instrument is the apparatus of the state, in a manner akin to the dictatorship of General Abdel al-Sisi in Egypt or the Latin American military dictatorships. Cohen himself draws direct parallels to the experience in Argentina, which was ruled by a bloody military dictatorship in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Perhaps the years I spent covering Argentina in the 1980s, in the aftermath of the military junta, made me particularly sensitive to the use of unmarked cars—in the Argentine case, Ford Falcons—to grab left-wing political opponents off the street. They were “disappeared,” a word whose lingering psychological devastation I measured in countless tear-filled rooms.

The response of the Democratic Party is a combination of cowardice and fecklessness. Democratic Party mayors have alternated between feeble challenges in the courts and calls for the paramilitary forces to be utilized against “crime” and not against protesters. In the only major case challenging the authority of federal police to seize protesters, a judge in Portland ruled on Friday that the arrests could continue.

In the aftermath of Trump’s June 1 speech, the Democrats ceded all opposition to Trump to the generals, upholding them as the arbiters of political power. The Democrats’ presidential nominee, Joe Biden, has said that his “greatest nightmare” is that Trump will refuse to leave office after November, but his response to such a scenario is the hope that the military will intervene to force him out.

Earlier this year, the Democrats concluded their impeachment fiasco that was based on their own right-wing anti-Russia campaign. As Trump blatantly violates the Constitution and prepares a presidential dictatorship, there has been no suggestion of a new impeachment trial, let alone calls for mass demonstrations to force Trump out.

The White House is now the cockpit of a political conspiracy to establish a presidential dictatorship.

This situation has been prepared over a protracted period. It is now two decades since the theft of the 2000 presidential elections, when the US Supreme Court intervened to stop the counting of ballots in Florida and handed the election to George W. Bush, which the Democrats did not resist.

Less than one year later, the terrorist attacks of September 11 were utilized by the ruling class to declare a “war on terror” as the pretext for unending war and a massive escalation of police state measures. The Department of Homeland Security, under whose authority ICE and the CPB operate, was established with bipartisan support in November 2002. This was part of a raft of actions—the PATRIOT Act, the US Northern Command, the construction of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp, CIA

torture, NSA spying.

These powers were expanded under the Obama administration, which proclaimed the right of the president to assassinate American citizens without due process, spearheaded the persecution of WikiLeaks’ Julian Assange, and created the legal framework for the network of concentration camps to detain immigrants fleeing to the United States.

Trump personifies the criminality of the corporate elite. But the breakdown of democracy and danger of dictatorship are not the products of his sociopathic personality.

As with everything else, the pandemic has accelerated and intensified this underlying tendency toward dictatorship. While the billionaires have utilized the crisis to massively enrich themselves, the broad mass of the population faces an absolutely desperate situation. The determination of this oligarchy to enforce its interests, at the cost of countless thousands of lives, is not compatible with democracy. Political forms are coming into alignment with social reality.

For all his ruthlessness, Trump’s actions are those of a desperate and frightened man. He knows that he and his administration are hated. His repeated threat to remain in office regardless of the results of an election is an admission that his administration lacks popular support and can remain in power only through violence.

Workers must be on guard against attacks and provocations. In all workplaces and working-class neighborhoods, the actions of paramilitary forces must be closely monitored.

But, above all, workers and young people must understand that the defense of democratic rights is, in essence, a fight against the capitalist system and its state. The methods that must be employed in this fight are the methods of class struggle. The conspiracies of the Trump administration and the ruling elites must be countered through the development of a strategy to transfer political power to the working class and establish socialism.

Workers must resist all efforts to channel their anger behind either of the capitalist parties. They must ruthlessly oppose all efforts to break up their unity—either through the promotion of war or through the politics of racial-communal division. The claim promoted by the Democratic Party that the fundamental conflict is between “white America” and “black America” is false and reactionary. No, the conflict is between the working class and the corporate-financial oligarchy.

Events speak for themselves and conclusions must be drawn. Rather than wait and see what Trump will do next, the working class must act. Whether the struggle of the working class against capitalism will proceed more rapidly than the implementation of military-police dictatorship will not be determined in the abstract. It will be determined through struggle.

The Socialist Equality Party makes an urgent appeal to all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*: Now is the time to get off the sidelines! Now is the time to take a stand! Join the Socialist Equality Party and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party

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