

Trump endorses right-wing violence in Kenosha, Portland

By Patrick Martin
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At a press conference late Monday afternoon, President Donald Trump defended the right-wing gunman who shot to death two protesters against police violence in Kenosha, Wisconsin, last week. Trump spoke on the eve of a scheduled appearance Tuesday in the impoverished “rust belt” city—an intervention that has the character of a political provocation, coming barely a week after the police shooting of Jacob Blake and requests from state and local officials that he stay away.

Trump was asked by one reporter whether he would condemn the actions of Kyle Rittenhouse, the 17-year-old former police cadet who opened fire with an assault rifle last Tuesday night, killing two unarmed men who were protesting against police violence.

Trump claimed the right-wing vigilante acted in self-defense, saying, “He was trying to get away from them and he fell and then they very violently attacked him... I guess he was in very big trouble. He probably would have been killed.”

This account is a deliberate whitewash. Rittenhouse was a police enthusiast who had traveled to a Trump campaign rally in Iowa last January, where videos show him sitting in the front row. He tried to enlist in the Marine Corps but was turned down. On Aug. 25, he left his home in northern Illinois and drove with his AR-15 across the state line to Kenosha, where he joined with dozens of other right-wing gunmen whose activities were coordinated and condoned by the police.

Rittenhouse shot to death two men who were peacefully protesting the police shooting of 29-year-old Jacob Blake, left paralyzed with seven bullets in his back. He shot and wounded a third protester as well.

After the killings, the gunman was allowed to pass through police lines carrying an assault rifle, without being arrested or even stopped for questioning. He was subsequently arrested at his home in Illinois and charged with first degree homicide.

Trump also praised his supporters in Portland, Oregon, who invaded the city in a convoy of cars and pickup trucks and attacked demonstrators against police violence, firing paint-ball weapons, pepper spray and other toxins. A melee broke out in which one of the right-wing provocateurs was shot and killed, under circumstances that remain unclear. But Trump declared that the provocateurs in Portland “were supporters [of his] but that was a peaceful protest. Paint is not bullets.”

This defense of right-wing violence came at the end of a 30-minute fascistic diatribe in which he referred dozens of times to the “far left,” “left-wing radicals” and “Antifa” (which does not actually exist as an organized group, but has become the main bogeyman of the fascist right).

Trump repeatedly made an amalgam of “left-wing radicals,” Democratic Party mayors and Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, claiming, as he did at last week’s Republican National Convention, that a Biden victory in the Nov. 3 election would mean the collapse of American society.

As he usually does, Trump began the press briefing by praising the performance of the stock market, the sole measure of human progress as far as he is concerned, hailing “the best stock market Dow in 36 years.”

He then claimed a 38 percent decline in new coronavirus cases, a figure that—if not simply made up for the purposes of the briefing—largely reflects a substantial decline in testing. In reality, coronavirus is sweeping almost unchecked through factories, meatpacking plants, college campuses and public schools, and the toll in both infections and deaths is likely to rise exponentially in the coming months.

He then proceeded to his main purpose, to “update the news on the violence in Democrat-run cities.” Trump claimed that federal authorities had arrested more than 200 people for various offenses and announced a joint investigation by the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice into what he called “the violent left-wing civil unrest that began in Portland.”

The rest of his statement consisted of a largely incoherent mélange of praise for the police (“There is a war on law enforcement in this country. Without law enforcement, there is chaos.”) and vilification of Biden and the Democrats as the enablers and supporters of left-wing terrorists.

He claimed that in order to “teach our children that America is a free and just nation” it was necessary to “jail lawbreakers and defeat their hateful ideology.” He seemed to be echoing the extraordinary statement made by Newt Gingrich earlier in the day on Trump’s favorite cable television show, “Fox and Friends,” where the former House speaker said that the only way to “break the fever” of violence in the streets was to “keep arresting people until there’s no one left.”

Trump combined praise for the police and denunciations of the Democrats with an invocation of nationalism that would not have been out of place in a speech by Mussolini. “The only path to unity is to rebuild a shared national identity and focus on common American values and virtues, of which we have plenty,” he said. “This includes our nation’s schools.”

Trump seemed to be particularly disturbed by an incident Thursday night after the final session of the Republican National Convention, when Senator Rand Paul and others were accosted by anti-Trump protesters outside the White House. This incident has been portrayed by the right-wing media and the Republican Party as an example of left-wing “mob violence,” an indication of the extreme fear of popular opposition that characterized the convention throughout.

The driving force behind Trump’s increasingly unhinged and incoherent denunciations is the initial stirring of working class resistance to the policies of his government, particularly its homicidal effort to force workers back to their jobs and teachers and students back to school, regardless of the dangers from the coronavirus.

The Democratic Party shares Trump’s fear of the developing movement of tens of millions of working people, which will threaten the profit system that both capitalist parties defend. They warn that Trump, by his criminal negligence in relation to the coronavirus pandemic and his transparent indifference to anything but the fortunes of billionaires like himself, is provoking an uncontrollable upheaval from below.

This was the meaning of the speech delivered by Biden earlier Monday in Pittsburgh, his first public appearance since the Democratic National Convention and his first major speech setting out the themes for the final two months of his election campaign.

It was obvious that the primary purpose of the speech, announced on short notice, was to counter Trump’s law-and-order and anti-communist demagoguery with a clear statement on the part of the Democratic ticket in support of law-and-order and the suppression of “violence.” There is growing nervousness in Democratic Party circles over indications that Biden’s lead in opinion polls is shrinking in the aftermath of the Republican convention.

Declaring that “we have to stand against violence in every form it takes,” Biden drew an equivalency between the violence of killer cops and fascistic vigilantes and that of “extremists and opportunists” among the protesters. He declared, “I want to make it absolutely clear... Looting is not protesting. Setting fires is not protesting. None of this is protesting. It’s lawlessness, plain and simple. And those who do it should be prosecuted.”

His basic line of attack against Trump was the he, not the Democrats, was responsible for the “violence” and “chaos” in “our cities.” Middle-class suburbanites who felt unsafe in “Trump’s America” would be safer in Biden’s, because he would more effectively work with the police and their critics to

contain social opposition.

This was, of course, combined with well-practiced sympathy for the families of Jacob Blake, George Floyd, Brionna Taylor and other African American victims of police violence, references to the enormous death toll from the coronavirus and Trump’s incompetent response to the pandemic, some perfunctory remarks on the economic collapse triggered by COVID-19, and a warning of Trump’s scheme to bankrupt Social Security. But he did not propose a single practical measure to deal with any of these social evils, except to replace Donald Trump with Joe Biden.

He issued a direct disavowal of any sympathy for socialism, saying: “Ask yourself, do I look like a radical socialist with a soft spot for rioters?” And he pointed to the record of the Obama-Biden administration in protecting federal property, stating: “When President Obama and I were in the White House, we had to defend federal property. We did it... You didn’t see us whipping up fears around the deployment of secret federal troops. We just did our job...”

Most dangerously, he embraced the anti-Russia demagoguery that has been the staple of the Democratic Party since Trump entered the White House. He repeated the bogus “Afghan bounties” story invented by the *New York Times*, which claims, without a shred of evidence, that the Kremlin was paying the Taliban to kill American soldiers. And he denounced Trump for allegedly playing “a subservient role to a Russian leader,” President Vladimir Putin, claiming this is “not only dangerous. It is humiliating for the rest of the world to see.”

Here, then, is the choice offered to the American people by the capitalist two-party system: the ultra-right ravings of the Republican Trump, who seeks to create a police state, or the “reasonable” alternative offered by the Democrat Biden, who demands more aggressive preparations for war against nuclear-armed Russia.

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