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‘Feds get out’: Portland movement fights to put power into the hands of the people

written by Scott Scheffer
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In July, tens of thousands of protesters in Portland, Ore., faced off with federal troops dispatched by President Donald Trump.

Struggle-La Lucha spoke with Cody Urban of the International League of Peoples Struggle (ILPS) about the protests against racist police terror in Portland, Ore., and the violent federal agents dispatched by the Trump administration to terrorize the community.

Struggle-La Lucha: All eyes were on Portland as the fight for justice and the outpouring of rage over the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police exploded there. After more than two months of standing up against brutality and arrests, can you tell us who is involved? What areas of Portland are the protests taking place in?

Cody Urban: Protests have been organized and led all over the city and most suburbs — that’s been one of the greatest achievements of the mass movement here in Portland. While generally decentralized, the protests have really reached so many people from so many corners of the metro area. The protests that have garnered the most news and have been met with the harshest repression have been centered downtown outside the Justice Center, symbolizing the people’s rage at the countless lives taken and immense public theft at the hands of bourgeois “justice.”

But while the downtown protests could rightfully be seen as the central focus of confrontations against state forces, it would be remiss not to mention the near-daily rallies in streets, parks, car caravans and many other locations in defense of Black lives and against the increasing attacks on all working and oppressed people. These attacks started increasing long before COVID-19, but it took a moment like now to heighten the class contradiction to a point in which it no longer felt like a choice but a necessity to take to the streets and make our demands heard in one united voice.

People are really coming out from all walks of life to mobilize and show their rage. Many different political tendencies (including socialist, communist, anarchist, liberal democratic and more) encompassing many different issues (human rights, anti-racism, national liberation, women’s liberation, LGBTQ2S liberation, etc.) have come together under the basic unity of ending racist police terror.

One of the greatest things to see is how many youth have risen into the leadership of this mass movement. Organizers as young as high-school age are organizing rallies that hundreds of people of all ages attend. It truly is a “movement moment” of today that I hope lays the foundation of new organizational leadership for tomorrow — younger, newer activists taking action for the first time against an enemy that previously felt insurmountable will be hitting the streets and other public spaces for years to come as they commit to a life of organizing for the long term.

It’s these kinds of moments, engendered by the crisis of the crumbling system itself,

that will lead the people to one day soon challenge the capitalist system itself.



SLL: Can you talk about the role of the federal agents that were sent to Portland?

CU: When we talk about the role of federal troops in Portland, I think there are multiple factors for us to consider. First, there is the international situation of U.S. imperialism today. The Trump regime finds itself overstretched in countless wars and occupations overseas, looking for any method to maintain the dwindling public support for this aggression. These actions were the testing grounds for the tactics we're seeing on the streets of the U.S. today.

Next, there is the situation nationally. In one of the most bizarre election years in U.S. history, Trump's narcissism and thirst for dictatorial privileges pushes the

regime to do whatever it can do to cover up its mishandling of the COVID-19 health crisis and to divert attention away from the impacts of his white supremacist rants on racist police impunity around the nation. We've seen Trump singling out certain organizations and people's movements as a means to make an example to others, and it seems that Portland is just the latest "example" to be made.

Finally, despite the city of Portland joining the calls of "Feds, Get Out!", federal agents have had a welcome home in Portland for a long time under the Joint Terrorism Task Force. This relationship between Portland Police and the Department of Homeland Security lasted for years. It was only removed through mass mobilization in 2019 after the arrests of numerous activists and members of the Muslim community.

Add to this the countless Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids that this so-called sanctuary city has allowed to brutalize undocumented communities since long before the Trump regime came to power, and the question of federal troops today merely becomes one of quantity, not quality.

The assaults, kidnappings and intimidations at the hands of federal troops in Portland are a horrific escalation of fascist state violence, but they must be seen in this wider context.



SLL: The mayor of Portland and the governor of Oregon opposed the presence of Trump’s federal agents. Mayor Ted Wheeler has said the city will “reimagine” police accountability and redirect funds from the police bureau. How do you think the movement might respond to concretize and extend any gains that come about as a result of the uprising?

CU: Regardless of what happened in the fight against the federal occupation of Portland, lasting change needs to be struggled for. That means that the city of Portland needs to take an honest look at what led to this situation to begin with. The federal troops took advantage of a genuine peoples’ uprising against the impunity of the Portland police as their excuse to enter our city. This grievance with the city government still exists.

I do believe that this is a moment to push for winnable change at the city level, change that the city can be held accountable to. Demands to halt the funneling of army-grade equipment to the police, an end the city's contracts with human rights-violating companies like G4S and to stop the open collusion with white supremacists can all be used as rallying cries to ensure our organizations are stronger than they were before this moment began.

In short, what's needed is a true mass movement that is rooted 100 percent in working and oppressed communities, that has the strength and will to fight to take power away from the bourgeois state and put it into the hands of the people.

