

# Portland police attack anti-fascist counter-protesters at neo-fascist rally

By Alec Andersen  
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The violent intervention by city police against peaceful counter-demonstrators protesting a far-right rally in Portland, Oregon, on Saturday has provoked widespread public outrage. The protesters attacked by the police were marching in opposition to armed, neo-fascist provocateurs assembled under the leadership of Joey Gibson and his “Patriot Prayer” group.

Some 400 far-right demonstrators convened at Portland’s Riverside Park Saturday, wearing black shirts with fascist slogans and carrying signs denouncing immigrants and promoting “white nationalism.” The group was primarily comprised of members of Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys, but represented a number of “alt-right” and other neo-fascist organizations.

The neo-fascist rally drew about 1,000 counter-protesters from a variety of anti-fascist, labor, clergy and other organizations, including the anarchist Antifa group. The counter-protesters chanted “We remember Charlottesville,” referring to the neo-fascist riot in Charlottesville, Virginia, last year that ended with a neo-Nazi driving his car into a crowd of anti-fascist protesters, killing Heather Heyer and wounding 19 others.

Demonstrators at the Saturday rally held up signs recounting a slew of assaults and murders by the far-right over recent years, including the stabbing to death of Ricky Best and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche by a white supremacist affiliated with Patriot Prayer onboard a public light rail train in Portland last year. Scattered scuffles broke out between members of the two groups, but the event remained relatively peaceful for several hours.

Dozens of local police in full riot gear stood between the two groups for several hours before police, without

warning, declared the counter-demonstration a “civil disturbance” and began lobbing “flash bang” stun grenades into the crowd. Over a loudspeaker mounted on a truck, police claimed they had observed rocks and bottles thrown at officers and commanded the counter-demonstrators to disperse.

Simultaneously, police charged at the crowd with batons. They chased the retreating crowd through the streets, beating protesters and journalists with their batons while firing volleys of flashbangs and tear gas at them.

At least two people suffered major injuries from the police rampage and had to be rushed to the hospital after exploding flashbang grenades broke one woman’s arm and sent shrapnel flying through a man’s helmet and into his skull. Hospital staff told the man he would have died had he not been wearing a helmet. Several others suffered bruises from police batons and there were other minor injuries. The police actions drew vociferous praise from the fascist demonstrators, one of whom noted approvingly that the police did “a nice job.”

Police arrested four people, all anti-fascist demonstrators, on charges ranging from misdemeanor disorderly conduct to felonies, including “unlawful use of a weapon” (a slingshot), “attempted assault” and “assaulting a police officer.”

While Antifa protesters were reported to have thrown rocks and water bottles at police during the assault, the Portland Police Bureau’s claim that the police attack came in response to “projectiles” thrown at officers by anti-fascist protesters is directly contradicted by video and witnesses. Photographer Doug Jones told the *Guardian* that “the first missile I saw and heard came from the Patriot Prayer side.”

*Willamette Week* reporter Katy Shepherd wrote on

Twitter: “Standing at the police line, I did not see anything thrown prior to crowd control being deployed. There may have been. My impression was that things were settling down before the first flashbang exploded.”

Patriot Prayer was founded by Gibson, who is presently running against Democratic Senator Maria Cantwell in the midterm elections, in 2016 as a far-right organization inspired by the skirmishes between pro-Trump and anti-fascist elements during the election. His group advances an extreme nationalist and xenophobic perspective under the guise of defending “free speech.” It has held numerous rallies along the West Coast, most of them in Portland due to its location just across the Columbia River from the group’s headquarters in Vancouver, Washington.

Patriot Prayer rallies are characterized by provocations designed to trigger violent clashes with counter-demonstrators, which Gibson then holds up as evidence of the supposed “intolerance” of the left and to portray the far-right as persecuted for its political beliefs. The group’s ideology, though somewhat vague, is an amalgam of extreme nationalism and racism that attracts a cross-section of the most backward and fascist social layers, including the openly white supremacist and xenophobic Proud Boys.

These provocations escalate until skirmishes break out between Gibson’s far-right supporters and counter-protesters. On Saturday, as at previous events, Gibson and his body guards charged into the crowd of protesters, setting off clashes before he was pulled away.

Saturday’s rally was the largest yet for the group, which has carried out similar actions in Seattle, Berkeley and elsewhere. A police rampage on behalf of fascist demonstrators has become a pattern at such events.

At a Savannah, Georgia, event held by an assortment of armed, far-right and neo-Nazi groups earlier this year, thousands of police violently attacked counter-demonstrators and arrested several of them for violating a 1951 anti-Ku Klux Klan law against wearing masks during demonstrations. A series of similar events in Berkeley have been met with police repression after masked Antifa members carried out minor acts of vandalism. Antifa has a long history of infiltration by police and agents-provocateurs, who

attempt to instigate violence in order to provide a pretext for a police crackdown.

Major media outlets have since celebrated the police crackdown as having prevented greater violence from emerging, justifying the assault as necessary given the supposed danger the counter-protesters posed.

For his part, after maintaining a complicit silence on Saturday’s events, Democratic Mayor Ted Wheeler issued a written statement Monday praising the actions of the police and denouncing the supposed use of violence by the protesters, writing: “I reject the idea that violence or hate speech is a legitimate means to a political end. Publicly available information gathered by PPB (Portland Police Bureau) prior to the demonstration indicated numerous individuals were arriving with every intent to inflict great bodily harm. The goals of the police during the demonstrations were to keep groups separated and protect lives, both of which they did.”

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