

Letter from a Portland protester

29 August 2002

On August 22, about 500 demonstrators outside a downtown Portland, Oregon hotel were assaulted by riot police, who attacked the protesters with batons, tear gas, rubber bullets, bean-bag rounds and “pepper balls” The demonstrators had gathered to protest Bush’s environmental and economic policies and the administration’s war threat against Iraq. The WSWs received the following letter from a protester whose family was pepper-sprayed during the demonstration.

This is an open letter describing our experience and an urgent call to action.

First and foremost, I want to thank from the bottom of my heart the kind human beings who helped my children, my wife and me after we were pepper sprayed by the Portland Police. We were aided immediately by fellow demonstrators, the Black Cross and passersby caught in the crossfire. These people shielded us with their bodies and soothed us with their treatments and words, and argued with police, putting themselves in danger, to secure our safe passage through the cordon. Their actions stand in beautiful contrast to the savage inhumanity of the police.

We brought our children to a peaceful protest, we stayed in the back and we were walking on the sidewalk. The march stopped at the intersection of 2nd and Alder, we could not see why from our position on the SW corner of the intersection. Police quickly moved up behind us and a moment or two later sprayed pepper spray into the crowd from the NE corner of the intersection. The crowd ran toward us to escape the spray. We asked the officer closest to us how we should exit the intersection. He pointed and said to exit to the NE, into the spraying police opposite him.

As the crowd pressed toward us I yelled to him to let us through (south on 2nd) because we had three small children. He looked at me, and drew out his can from his hip and sprayed directly at me. I was at an angle to him and the spray hit my right eye and our three-year-old, who I was holding in my right arm. In the same

motion he turned the can on my wife, who was holding our 10-month-old baby and doused both of their heads entirely from a distance of less than three feet. My six-year-old daughter was holding my left hand and was not hit directly.

We ended up on the sidewalk a few feet down Alder with fellow protesters holding my screaming children and pouring water on our eyes. Someone yelled that the police had said that we could pass through the cordon on Alder with the children. I picked up the baby and other protesters brought my wife and other children to the police line. We attempted to pass through, but they leaned in shoulders to block us. I yelled at them to let us pass for about two minutes and finally some officer up the line nodded me and the baby through. They were not going to let my wife and other children out, but after a few minutes of pleading from the crowd and another signal from up the line they let them out. As we passed, the officers were laughing and said something to the effect of “that’s why you shouldn’t bring kids to protests.”

I immediately called 911 as we moved up to the corner of 3rd and Alder. I explained that a baby had been directly pepper sprayed and that I needed an ambulance. They informed me that they would not send one and that all protesters were to report to a first aid tent on the other side of the police lines. Fellow protesters aided us until Black Cross arrived. Business people brought water from the nearby offices and someone bought some juice for the children. Two KBOO staffers drove up in their Volvo and took us to Emmanuel ER. One of the protesters who had helped us from the beginning accompanied us to the hospital and waited with us until the kids were admitted (special thanks!). The children were examined for respiratory problems and chemical burns. Luckily all were only suffering “normal” pepper spray reactions that have no treatment but to wait. The pediatrician kept us a little longer so that she could call poison control to check for

other recommended procedures, as she had never in her career seen an infant pepper spray victim.

On the way to the ER my three-year-old said that those guys back there were trying to get us and said we should call the police.

That is the story.

We need the help of every person who was at the corner of 2nd and Alder and witnessed, photographed, or made video of any of this. Even if you are unable to testify later we need facts written down (location of police, names of officers, timelines, everything). We will keep it anon if you request....

Please help us expose this extreme, undemocratic, and brutal attack on peaceful citizens.

Email info to a22brutality@attbi.com

Thank you again to all the wonderful people who helped us. All power to the people!

Donald Joughin



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact