

At least 14 arrested in Portland as police suppress anti-Trump protest

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On Sunday afternoon, crowds of several thousand people took part in opposing demonstrations in downtown Portland, Oregon, following the May 26 fatal stabbing of two men by 35-year-old Jeremy Joseph Christian. As of this writing, Portland Police have announced that 14 demonstrators were arrested throughout the day.

Initially, right-wing Trump supporter Joey Gibson, a leader of the Christian fundamentalist, pro-Trump group “Patriot Prayer,” organized a “free speech” rally at Terry Schunk Plaza, a plot of federal land outside Portland City Hall. Other far-right groups present at the rally included American Freedom M/C, the III Percenters and Oath Keepers.

The headline speaker at the rally was slated to be Kyle Chapman, a virulent Trump supporter who has become popular among the “alt-right” this year following a series of violent acts against anti-Trump demonstrators in Berkeley, California. Earlier in the week, Chapman provocatively tweeted: “I declare open season on the Antifa. Smash on sight!” Prior to Sunday’s rally, Chapman told media that he approved of people “uniting under the banner of American nationalism.”

In response, at least five separate counterdemonstrations involving an estimated 60 groups took place at nearby Chapman Square, with thousands of anti-Trump protesters attending. These included numerous anarchists affiliated with the amorphous “black-bloc” group Antifa (standing for antifascist), which created a Facebook event page titled, “No Nazis on our Streets Rally.” Antifa is an anarchist organization, attracting demoralized and disoriented sections of the middle class, that has participated in various confrontations with right-wing organizations in recent months.

Also present were immigrant rights groups, religious and community organizations opposed to hate speech, and many others simply opposed to the Trump administration.

The right-wing protests followed the murder of Ricky John Best, 53 and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, 23, when the two individuals, along with Micah David-Cole Fletcher, 21, intervened to stop Christian from continuing a racist, Islamophobic tirade against two women on the train, one of whom was wearing a hijab. Christian allegedly stabbed all three men in their necks, killing both Best and Namkai-Meche and injuring Fletcher.

Christian is currently being held without bail on several charges including aggravated murder, intimidation and attempted murder. He made his first court appearance on Tuesday, issuing a fascistic tirade.

Upon entering the courtroom, Christian shouted, “Free speech or die Portland, you got no safe place, this is America! Get out if you don’t like free speech!” He further declared, “Death to the enemies of America, leave this country if you hate our freedom. Death to ANTIFA. You call it terrorism, I call it patriotism. You hear me? Die.”

In light of this tirade, the fact that Gibson would hold a rally dedicated to “free speech” is highly provocative and was intended to incite violence.

In fact, prior to the May 26 stabbing incident, Christian had attended another rally on April 29 that was organized by Gibson, also supposedly in defense of “free speech.” At that rally, he was filmed giving the Nazi salute, calling for the death of Muslims, and shouting other racist and religious epithets, to the point that police separated him from protesters and confiscated a baseball bat he had brought.

At Sunday’s rally, anti-Trump and Antifa protesters

were herded by hundreds of police into nearby Chapman Square, with police forming a human barricade to protect the city-sanctioned, pro-Trump rally outside City Hall.

With full knowledge that violence would break out at some point, as has happened at such rallies repeatedly over the past year, the Portland Police Bureau enlisted at least eight other law enforcement agencies to assist them in suppressing any outbursts of anger and opposition. These included the Oregon State Police, the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, the Federal Protective Service, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Portland Fire & Rescue, among others.

Early in the afternoon, Portland Police began posting photos on Twitter of weapons seized from demonstrators, which by the end of the day included a hunting knife, brass knuckles, clubs, roadside flares, a slingshot and several homemade shields. By 1:00 pm, two anti-Trump demonstrators had been arrested, an hour before the start of the "free speech" rally.

At 3:18 pm, less than an hour after the start of the "free speech" rally, Portland Police tweeted, "Balloons with unknown, foul-smelling liquid have been thrown from Chapman Square at officers and people in Terry Schunk Plaza."

Police soon claimed that protesters threw bricks and mortars, asserting that only the anti-Trump protesters at Chapman Square engaged in criminal behavior and that no pro-Trump demonstrators were involved. This gave police the impetus to carry out a violent crackdown on the anti-Trump and Antifa protesters.

Over the next hour, police used loudspeakers to order all anti-Trump protesters to leave or face detainment for disorderly conduct. Police used flash bang grenades and doused protesters with pepper spray, which they euphemistically referred to as "less-lethal chemical munitions."

Police later reportedly took photographs of IDs of roughly 200 people who didn't immediately leave Chapman Square, claiming this measure was carried out "because everyone here is being detained for disorderly conduct," according to *Oregonian* photographer Dave Killen, who noted that these protesters were then allowed to leave after the photos were taken. It remains to be seen whether these photos will be used to press charges against these anti-Trump

demonstrators, or simply to identify those involved in order to better track their activities.



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