

Connections exposed between far-right group and police in Portland, Oregon

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A report from a local news publication reveals close connections between the far-right group Patriot Prayer and the police department in Portland, Oregon. The latest ties confirm the support provided to Patriot Prayer by the Portland Police Bureau (PPB), which has been a regular feature of the provocations between the far-right group and Antifa-linked forces in recent months and years.

Through a public records request, *Willamette Week* journalists acquired hundreds of texts between Portland Police Bureau Lieutenant Jeff Niiya and leader Joey Gibson of Patriot Prayer, a right-wing chauvinist group based in the Pacific Northwest. Their communications included amiable and detailed discussions about upcoming demonstration plans, legal advice for Patriot Prayer members, and known individuals among the counter-demonstrations.

In an exchange of texts in December 2017, Gibson asked Niiya about the status of an active arrest warrant for another prominent Patriot Prayer member, Tusitala “Tiny” Toese. Lt. Niiya counseled Gibson, explaining that Toese would likely not be arrested, based on officers ignoring his warrant at previous events. “Just make sure he doesn’t do anything which may draw our attention,” the officer advised. “I don’t see a need to arrest on the warrant unless there is a reason.”

One month later, they discussed a frequent attendee at the anti-fascist protests, Luis Enrique Marquez, who had received violent threats from Patriot Prayer members. When Gibson complained about the activist after one of the clashes, Niiya responded on January 2, 2018, “Wow, when will others realize Luis is ... involved in so much.” Gibson replied, “He’s a bad dude. He threw Gia under the bus while at the same time claiming PPD is taking advantage of minorities. Every single problem we run into it goes back to him.”

In another exchange, Gibson told Niiya about his coming election campaign, “The hate against me will multiply because I am running for office, so when I come into Portland and Seattle the energy will be high. I know it’s a pain in the ass for you guys, but I will do the best I can to work with you.” Niiya responded enthusiastically, “Your [sic] running for office?!! Good for you. County level?”

Niiya frequently gave advice to Gibson about the logistics of planned demonstrations, hinting at plans and attendance levels of Antifa, and explaining how to avoid conditions that require police get involved. For example, at a demonstration on June 4, 2017, he texted Gibson, “Nows [sic] a great time to break down the rally and be able to leave. We have a large group of antifa to flank us and you. We are stopping them for now ... but not sure how long.”

They frequently shared information that they acknowledged should not be publicly announced, implying a highly-trusted and mutual relationship. At one point, Gibson apologized to Niiya for letting slip the statement “the Portland police has our back” in a pre-event video.

Lieutenant Jeff Niiya became a PPB police officer in 1996, and held management-level positions for “neighborhood response units” and campus policing at Oregon Health and Sciences University prior to becoming a lieutenant in February of 2018.

He has been the head of a police committee that oversees protest activity, and he attends all of the often-violent clashes of Patriot Prayer and anti-fascists. Holding this position, Niiya says the text exchanges should be considered intelligence collecting. In June of 2017, he recruited an obscure Antifa demonstrator named Tan to become an informant. Tan texted Niiya with information about protests and the group, a

relationship that other Antifa members exposed in October.

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler has called for a “thorough investigation” into the exchanges, which he called “disturbing.” He explained that the messages “appear to cross several boundaries. They also raise questions about whether warrants are being enforced consistently and what information is being shared with individuals who may be subject to arrest.”

While supporting the call for an investigation, PPB officials have been quick to justify Niiya’s actions. “It is not uncommon for officers to provide guidance for someone to turn themselves in on a warrant if the subject is not present. In crowd management situations, it may not be safe or prudent to arrest a person right at that time,” said Lt. Tina Jones, regarding certain texts in the published collection.

The Portland chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America responded to the leaks by demanding the role of Police Commissioner be transferred from Mayor Wheeler to a recent city council-elect, Jo Ann Hardesty, a “progressive” Democrat who they claim can enact “comprehensive police reform.” The official DSA statement says, “Hardesty has shown that she is capable of making the changes that Mayor Wheeler has only pretended he cares about. On police issues, Commissioner Hardesty is more experienced, knowledgeable, and actually willing to institute change.”

The DSA and the International Socialist Organization chapters in Portland have been the targets of recent acts of police censorship at Portland State University and Portland Community College. Nonetheless, the DSA has promoted the false hope of reforming the police in alliance with the “progressive” wing of the Portland political establishment. Portland Police Chief Danielle Outlaw, who was praised because she is an African-American woman and expresses criticisms of “racist” police activity, wrote in the wake of recent events, “We would like for the public to have the opportunity to share with the Portland Police Bureau their ideas for how to move forward.”

Despite all the efforts of reforming the city police to curb police violence and corruption, even after a 2012 Department of Justice investigation concluded PPB regularly used excessive force against people with mental illness, the problems are only getting worse.

Police brutality and far-right connections are not due to the lack of “good” politicians in office, but a product of the objective role of the police within capitalist society.

As the ruling class turn sharply to far-right politics to defend their interests in a period of immense crisis, the police arms of the state serve as a crucial component to maintain bourgeois rule. The ties between the far-right and police forces are not an issue isolated to Portland, but rather an international trend, where fascism is being promoted from above. Police in California and Baltimore, Maryland came under investigation for charges of collusion with the far-right last year. In Germany, recent reports have documented a large underground fascist network within the army and the police.

What has been exposed of the direct communications between police and the far-right is surely just the tip of the iceberg. Like the PPB, police departments across the United States have engaged in the protection of right-wing tendencies at major protests, keeping a distance from the violent clashes to give free reign to the far-right while cracking down on the anti-fascist protesters.

The most tragic example of this conscious police support occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 12, 2017. While fascist militiamen carried out an armed riot, beating counter-demonstrators and shouting Nazi phrases, police stood to the side. As a result, 19 people were injured and 32-year-old Heather Heyer died when a fascist activist deliberately drove his car into a crowd.

The ties between the PPB and Patriot Prayer carry dangerous implications. As the working class comes into broader and more independent struggle, the ruling class will intensify its drive to promote fascism in the highest levels of the state apparatus, attacking democratic rights and left-wing politics in order to crush the growing threat of a revolutionary workers movement.



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