

Federal agents in Portland, Oregon shoot and critically injure protester

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16 July 2020

An anti-police violence protester in Portland, Oregon was shot last Saturday night, July 11, by a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officer with what has been described as an impact munition, leaving him hospitalized in critical condition. The strike on the left side of his face inflicted skull fractures and required reconstructive surgery.

The victim, Donovan LaBella, 26, remains hospitalized where, according to his mother, doctors continue to monitor his neurological condition and to drain blood from his brain. LaBella also required an MRI for vision problems in the left eye. An eyewitness interviewed by KOIN-TV said the shooting “caused a pretty deep laceration, but he was bleeding from his nose, his mouth, his ears — it was pretty bad.”

The assault by DHS occurred a day after President Trump, in a briefing by military commanders in Florida, asked acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf—in what was obviously a staged event—about “out of control” protests in Portland. Trump spoke approvingly that “We sent you there recently. It was out of control. The locals couldn’t handle it. And you people are handling it very nicely.”

Wolf answered that “[T]he Department of Homeland Security, along with the [Department of Justice], FBI, and others are surging resources, and we’re starting to make a difference there.”

Two days after the shooting, Trump, making no mention of the injured young man, menacingly stated that “Portland was totally out of control, and they went in, and I guess we have many people right now in jail and we very much quelled it, and if it starts again, we’ll quell it again very easily. It’s not hard to do, if you know what you’re doing.”

Since the murder of George Floyd at the end of May, Portland has seen significant daily demonstrations and

protests of a multi-racial and multi-ethnic character. Protesters have gathered outside the federal courthouse in downtown Portland in what has become a nightly occurrence.

It is clear that Portland has been used by the Trump administration as a test case—with only token opposition from state and local Democrats—for the use of federal police forces built up during the so-called War on Terror and the ongoing war on immigrants to suppress popular protests against police brutality in cities across the United States.

In a White House meeting with Attorney General William Barr on Wednesday, Trump attacked those who have been demonstrating for an end to police killings as well as the Democratic Party, declaring that Democratic-run cities have turned into “war zones.” He added that “the left-wing group of people that are running our cities are not doing the job that they’re supposed to be doing.” Trump said he had a “very exciting” announcement next week about “what we’re planning to do to help them [the Democrats].”

A news release by the Federal Protective Service listed four federal agencies tasked to Portland. “Officers from the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Protective Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and from the Department of Justice’s U.S. Marshals Service continue to defend federal property from criminal acts of violence and vandalism.”

Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) reported on the presence of an elite Border Patrol tactical unit known as BORTAC, which has been based on the US-Mexico border, with specialized military training and experience obtained during operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. What role is a military-style unit, previously in the Middle East battlefields, projected to play in a

domestic environment against young protesters? One only has to look at their role in those countries—the suppression of popular opposition to US imperialism—in order to determine their purpose.

The response by Governor Kate Brown and the state's two senators, all Democrats, condemning the use of DHS officers, rings hollow since a federal court on June 9 had to order that the Portland Police Bureau (PPB), overseen by Democratic mayor Ted Wheeler, “be restricted from using tear gas or its equivalent except as provided by its own rules generally.”

Jesse Merrithew, an attorney for Don't Shoot Portland, an accountability group formed by Black Lives Matter, stated “The federal courts have made it clear that what PPB was doing was unlawful and in violation of the Constitution.”

The judge's order has been circumvented multiple times by PPB as it repeatedly declares that a protest has become a riot, allowing the full use of previously prohibited “less than lethal” weapons. Dozens of people had been injured by the PPB's indiscriminate use of tear gas or other types of gas, as well as being struck by so called “less than lethal” rubber and foam tipped bullets.

Ten days after the court order, PPB attacked a late night protest, and used impact munitions against the participants, resulting in a head injury that, according to PPB, “started to bleed profusely” with the victim still suffering dizzy spells a week later. The article went on to note that “Two months of protests and a court order seem to have done little to change how police disperse crowds in the city.” That is, violently.



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