

Police stood by as Proud Boys carried out attacks on anti-fascist protesters in Portland, Oregon

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On Sunday, members of the fascist groups the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer mobilized in the city of Portland, Oregon, inciting violence against left-wing protesters, journalists and local residents. The Portland Police Bureau (PPB), with the backing of Democratic Mayor Ted Wheeler, stood by, refusing to intervene until live gunshots were fired, giving the far-right mob a green light to carry out their attacks.

The so-called “Summer of Love” rallies were organized weeks in advance, with dozens of far-right members traveling from across Oregon, California and other surrounding states to commemorate violent provocations during the George Floyd protests last August. Proud Boys leader Tinseltown “Tiny” Toese helped organize the rally and was in attendance.

The main rally took place in the parking lot of a vacant K-Mart shopping center in Northeast Portland on 122nd Street. Proud Boys speakers referred to those who participated in President Donald Trump’s attempted coup on January 6 as “political prisoners”; upheld Ashli Babbitt, shot and killed by Capitol police as she attempted to force her way into the House Chamber, as a martyr; accused “antifa” or anti-fascists of being violent criminals; and threatened physical violence against transgender people. Reverend Dr. Chuck Currie, who filmed the far-right rally from his car, reported that Proud Boys members hit his car and called him a “faggot.”

Soon after, antifascist protesters left downtown Portland, where around 200 had been peacefully demonstrating since the morning to oppose far-right violence, to mobilize around the Proud Boys rally at the K-Mart. Between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. clashes between the two sides ensued, with paintball guns, chemical agents,

and baton fights.

Fascist militia men vandalized one man’s truck and proceeded to beat him, as he was allegedly with the counter-demonstration. They also destroyed a medical vehicle and flipped it on its side. An independent journalist, Maranie R. Staab was physically attacked while being subjected to xenophobic and derogatory comments by men who claimed to be with the antifascist “black bloc,” although further investigation is required to determine their identities and affiliation.

After the Northeast Portland clashes died down by the evening, live gunshots were fired at anti-fascist protesters downtown, with no injuries reported from the incident. After taking a hands-off approach the whole day, three police officers arrested the shooting suspect, a 65-year-old man named Dennis G. Anderson. His affiliation with the groups is currently unknown, and he was released on bail on Monday.

While the streets of Portland turned into a war zone, sparked by far-right violence and fascist politics, the PPB were nowhere to be found. They did not respond to any acts of vandalism or physical attacks by the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer, essentially giving these far-right organizations license to attack “antifa” as they saw fit.

Mayor Wheeler issued a public statement Monday, 24 hours after the events, defending the “hands off” approach as a conscious strategy developed weeks ago when they first heard about plans for the far-right mobilization. “With strategic planning and oversight, the Portland Police Bureau and I mitigated confrontation between the two events and minimized the impact of the weekend’s events to Portlanders.” Wheeler continued, “In the past, these same groups

have clashed with extremely violent and destructive results. This time, violence was contained to the groups of people who chose to engage in violence toward each other.”

As part of this do-nothing strategy, Wheeler praised himself and other public officials for hosting a “virtual peace event” on Friday where they verbally denounced hate speech and bigotry. These rhetorical exercises were deemed “effective” by Wheeler because “one of the groups decided to relocate to a separate area in the city,” referring to 122nd Street where the bulk of the violence took place.

Mayor Wheeler, PPB and the local Democratic Party establishment have taken a definite stance on the side of the far-right by allowing them to incite and carry out violent attacks without intervention. This follows a trend that has developed over the past several years, in which Portland officials brutally crack down on left-wing demonstrations while giving the kid-glove treatment to the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer.

In January, after a series of anti-police-violence protests resulted in property damage to government buildings, Wheeler denounced “violent antifa and anarchists” and promised to “gather intelligence on these small groups of organized criminals.” In March, local police and federal agents deployed tear gas, rubber bullets and illegal kettling techniques against a peaceful crowd. This all comes after the massive police response to the George Floyd protests last summer, during which peaceful protesters were beaten and gassed by PPB, then arrested and thrown into unmarked vehicles by the Trump administration.

In comparison, the fascist militiamen and supporters of the January 6 coup are treated as friendly neighbors receiving the trusted defense by the local government. Proud Boys rallies have been physically protected by police on numerous occasions, with the bulk of brutality targeted against “antifa” members. In 2019, leaked texts showed PPB Lieutenant Jeff Niiya providing advice to Patriot Prayer leader Joey Gibson. On Sunday, these groups were again given the message that they can do whatever they please without police interference.

These developments indicate a further shift to the right on the part of the Democratic Party, which has extended an olive branch to the increasingly fascistic Republican Party since Biden’s inauguration.

Confronted with explosive social anger from below, accelerated by the pandemic crisis, the Democrats are turning toward militaristic, anti-democratic and authoritarian forms of rule to intimidate and suppress opposition from masses of workers and young people that are turning toward left-wing, socialist politics.



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