

31 fascists arrested at Idaho Pride parade on conspiracy to riot

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Idaho police in the town of Coeur d'Alene arrested 31 people Saturday linked to the white nationalist group Patriot Front. The arrested men were spotted gathering where the North Idaho Pride Alliance was holding its annual Pride in the Park event to celebrate gay and lesbian people.

A bystander reportedly saw the men entering a U-Haul truck and called the police, saying that “it looked like a little army was loading up into the vehicle.” According to the local police officials, officers intercepted the truck and arrested the men inside. They have been charged with conspiracy to riot, a misdemeanor charge.

The men arrested were wearing white balaclava masks and apparel identifying themselves as Patriot Front members, including matching insignia and an informal uniform of khaki pants, navy blue shirts, and beige hats.

They were also found with shin guards, shields, riot gear and at least one smoke grenade.

Local police issued a statement declaring the evidence was clear that the men were present with the intention to riot throughout the town and disrupt the pride parade. According to Coeur d'Alene Police Chief Lee White, “It is clear to us based on the gear that the individuals had with them, the stuff they had in their possession, the U-Haul with them along with paperwork that was seized from them, that they came to riot downtown.”

The paperwork mentioned was a seven-page detailed operational plan describing the Patriot Front members’ plan of attack. A brief excerpt provided by White described “a column forming on the outside of the park, proceeding inward, until barriers to approach are met” and “once an appropriate amount of confrontational dynamic has been established the column will

disengage and head to Sherman [Avenue].”

White continued that the plans were “similar to an operations plan that a police or military group would put together for an event” and that they entailed rioting at several places around downtown, not just in the park where the pride parade was located.

The emphasis on creating a “confrontational dynamic” is a critical element of the Patriot Front’s strategy. According to the Anti Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center, Patriot Front operates by creating disruptive and confrontational scenarios which they record and upload on social media to be used as recruitment propaganda.

The Southern Poverty Law Center’s profile of Patriot Front notes: “When [Patriot Front] orchestrates protests or public appearances, they are typically tightly choreographed and scripted to maximize propaganda value. Virtually all its activities are undertaken with propaganda value in mind.”

This propaganda is intended to build a fascist movement based on the premise that American democracy has failed and that it must be replaced with a fascist dictatorship. This dictatorship is envisioned to protect “pan-European identity” and prevent the replacement of whites with foreigners.

The plans were reportedly found on Thomas Rousseau, the founder and leader of Patriot Front, which broke away from the neo-Nazi Vanguard America after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017. Rousseau led a group of Vanguard America members during the Charlottesville rally, which included Alex Fields Jr., the man convicted of killing counter-protester Heather Heyer by ramming the crowd opposed to the neo-Nazis with his car.

Rousseau, who is from Virginia, was one of nearly all

members who traveled from out of state to riot at the pride parade. The 31 fascists came from at least 10 other states, including Washington, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Colorado, South Dakota, Illinois, Wyoming, Virginia and Arkansas. Only one of the men arrested was from Idaho.

Several other fascistic elements gathered at the pride event on Saturday. According to NPR, there was a gathering of Christian nationalists affiliated with the America First movement less than a mile from the event. Additionally, a motorcycle riding club event encouraged its members to arm themselves with firearms and confront the pride parade.

At the parade, several men observed to be brandishing handguns and long guns walked around and within the event, and one armed individual unfurled a flag with an offensive message accusing LGBTQ people of harming children. Reports have also noted some individuals carrying bear spray at the protest.

Idaho does not have any restrictions on the open carrying of firearms or items like bear spray. No confrontations with these individuals were reported by police or parade-goers.

Prior to the arrest of the Patriot Front members, there were two other arrests of two men who had brought sound amplification devices to protest the parade. They were arrested for disorderly conduct and trespassing. Both men had traveled from Oregon.

The highly coordinated plans of Patriot Front and the mobilization of local fascistic elements to disrupt and intimidate members of Idaho's LGBTQ community is a dangerous development in the fascist movement in the United States.

Physical assaults on Pride events have become an increasingly common occurrence around the world. In Croatia last year, attendees at a Pride march in Zagreb were assaulted by fascistic protesters for the first time in 10 years. And in Ukraine and Poland there have been multiple events in recent years targeted by openly fascist organizations for physical violence. At an event in Odessa in 2020, Pride marchers were pelted with eggs and attacked with pepper spray by members of the Traditions and Order neo-Nazi group.

The number of hate crimes committed against LGBTQ people in the United States has risen over the past decade, but such highly coordinated attacks on

entire protest events have so far been uncommon. For a fascist organization to plan a military-style raid on a Pride event is a major warning sign of how aggressive fascist organizations have become.

Another anti-LGBTQ attack occurred on the same day in Dallas, Texas when fascists gathered from across the country at a "drag queen brunch" event hosted at a local gay bar. The fascists were reported to mostly be young men affiliated with the America First movement and the notorious fascist Nick Fuentes.

Attendees were bombarded with insults and derogatory language as they attempted to enter the building and as they walked back to their cars. The attack was quickly picked up by fascistic Republican politicians and media figures from around the country, who showered the protesters in praise and vowed to take legislative action against what Texas state Representative Bryan Slaton called "a disturbing trend in which perverted adults are obsessed with sexualizing young children."

While these groups are becoming more aggressive, particularly with the support of high ranking government officials and politicians, it is noteworthy that Patriot Front could only gather a single person from Idaho. These groups remain small, relying on people to travel cross country to protest Pride events.

There is little support for fascist violence in the American population, but as the Republican Party increasingly embraces these fascistic elements and as the Democratic Party does nothing to challenge them, such groups are increasingly emboldened to commit violence against oppressed groups and the working class as a whole.



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