

Police look on as Proud Boys assault students, media at Pennsylvania State University

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Several students and journalists at Pennsylvania State (Penn State) University were assaulted and pepper-sprayed Monday night by right-wing thugs ahead of a university-sponsored event that featured the founder of the Proud Boys militia group, Gavin McInnes, and Republican Party operative Alex Stein.

The attack happened in full view of dozens if not hundreds of police from multiple departments who did nothing to stop the violence. Prior to the assault, Stein, a long-time fascist provocateur and close associate of Georgia congresswoman and QAnon adherent Marjorie Taylor Greene, attempted to provoke the counter-protesters by ripping up their signs and insulting them while live-streaming his antics to his followers.

McInnes and Stein billed the event as a “comedic” commentary and titled it “Stand Back and Stand By”—in itself a provocation. As is well known, these were the words uttered by Donald Trump in his September 29 pre-election debate with Joe Biden when challenged to call off his militia foot soldiers. Instead, Trump gave the military-style order for the Proud Boys to prepare to violently disrupt the orderly transfer of power should Trump lose the 2020 presidential election. This is precisely what they and other far-right groups proceeded to do in the January 6, 2021 attack on Congress.

On-the-ground video recorded by photojournalist Zach Roberts and documentarian Ford Fischer before the Penn State event was set to begin shows one of the attacks as it happened. Both Fischer and Roberts were pepper-sprayed by a fascist dressed in black. It is unknown as of this writing if the attacker has been identified or arrested.

As the video shows, after pepper-spraying up to a dozen people, the Proud Boys and their allies ran away while the police looked on. One right-wing thug is seen at the end of the clip giving a police officer a pat on the back as he flees

from angry students.

Separate footage from Monday shows a Proud Boy throwing punches and lunging at counter-protesters. After a fight breaks out between the Proud Boy and students, the police engage to protect the Proud Boy.

In an article published Tuesday, the *Centre Daily Times*, a newspaper based in State College, Pennsylvania, reported that prior to the pepper spray assault, its reporter and photographer witnessed “several masked men,” including one “in tactical gear” and another giving a “Nazi salute,” provoking counter-protesters.

The reporters saw one man “aim Counter Assault Bear Deterrent at protesters,” while another “hate-group sympathizer” began “spraying the red-orange stream at protesters, who scurried away to avoid the stinging mist. One police officer broke out his baton but stayed back as the man jogged away.”

In an interview with the reporters, Chelsey Sweet, a counter-protester and member of the Democratic Party-linked group “Indivisible: Mayday,” recounted: “I witnessed several officers smacking their batons against their hands as people, including myself, tried to warn them that a Proud Boy agitator was threatening random people with pepper spray and was about to deploy it.”

She said the police “heard us but turned and began walking in the opposite direction as journalists and protesters were maced.” She added that the police “were doing nothing to protect students from the actual threats on the scene.”

Though there is no question that the violence Monday night was instigated by right-wingers, several news outlets, including the *Centre Daily Times* and *Vice*, are reporting that only one person, a student, has been arrested. It is unclear if the student was one of the hundreds of counter-protesters or one of the few dozen Proud Boys.

After the pepper spray assault, which left several students

and journalists blinded, police declared an “unlawful disturbance” and told students and journalists to leave the area or be arrested. Roughly 10 minutes later the university announced that the event had been canceled due to “the threat of escalating violence.”

Video footage after the event was canceled shows police providing McInnes and Stein an escort as they exit the campus.

After making their escape, the two provocateurs recorded a brief video showing them speeding through traffic escorted by the police. “So we just had the cops sneak us out the back of the college,” McInnes gloats.

Confirming his ongoing relationship with and leadership role in the Proud Boys, McInnes says he knows there were Proud Boys on campus and that they were “not in uniform.”

“I know all the Proud Boys who were here, they were in civilian clothes,” he declares. He then lies outright, saying, “There was no pepper spraying. It’s all a lie. These are agent provocateurs who do it to themselves so they can say ‘Look, there is violence.’”

Stein seconds McInnes, claiming, “100 percent agent provocateurs.”

In a statement Tuesday, Penn State President Neeli Bendapudi blamed both the students and the fascists for the violence that led to the cancellation of the event. Bendapudi disingenuously wrote that it was “unclear which individuals onsite ... resorted to physical confrontation” and used “pepper spray against others in the crowd, including against police officers.”

She continued: “Tonight, Stein and McInnes will celebrate a victory for being canceled, when in actuality, they contributed to the very violence that compromised their ability to speak. Tonight, counter-protestors also will celebrate a victory that they forced the University to cancel this event, when in actuality they have furthered the visibility of the very cause they oppose.”

To say that Stein and McInnes “contributed” to the violence is a gross understatement. They provoked it and initiated it, knowing full well that they had the protection of the police and the toleration of the administration.

The event was a deliberate provocation organized by elements closely linked to the Republican Party. The student

group that requested that the event be held in the first place is called “Uncensored America.”

The phony “free speech” group was founded by Sean Semanko when he was a senior at Penn State in 2020. An avid Trump supporter, Semanko volunteered for the 2016 Trump campaign and was a field organizer for Trump’s 2020 reelection campaign. While at the university, Semanko was also the campus chapter president of Turning Point USA, a far-right, pro-Trump student organization headed by Charlie Kirk and linked to Virginia Thomas. The latter, the wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, was deeply involved in efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

Documents show that at a September 6 meeting of the Penn State Allocation Committee, a student-run body that allocates funds from student fees to pay travel expenses and fees for guest speakers, the committee agreed to have the university spend over \$1,000 on airfare to fly McInnes and Stein to State College and pay the two a \$6,500 speakers’ fee.

For weeks, students and the wider community at Penn State protested against the university’s de facto sponsorship of the scheduled “comedy” show hosted by McInnes and Stein, citing the Proud Boys’ leading role in the January 6 coup attempt, which resulted in at least five deaths and hundreds of injuries.

The Student Committee for Defense and Solidarity (SCDS) circulated a petition calling on the Penn State administration to refuse to sponsor the fascist rally. The petition, signed by more than 3,200 people, warned that the university was inviting violence by providing a platform to fascist provocateurs.

Its authors rejected the specious claim that by funding an appearance of McInnes and Stein on campus the university was upholding “free speech.” They wrote: “‘Free speech’ does not mean ‘paid speech,’ nor does it mean platforming fascists and promoting hateful, meritless disinformation with thousands of student-fee dollars.”



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