

What Happened in Portland on May Day?

May 19, 2017

This May Day in Portland, Oregon about 1,500 people rallied and marched against capitalism, racism, and colonialism, including immigrant families, undocumented folks, people with disabilities, and working families with kids. It was International Workers Day, which commemorates the Haymarket affair, which took place in Chicago, in 1886, and is also known as May Day. May Day commemorates anarchist organizers murdered by the State for agitating for an eight-hour work day on the way to a truly free society, and is an avowal to continue their work.

Portland organizers had a permit for the march. There was a sizable black bloc at the back, also a large contingent of people turned out by the Black Rose Anarchist Federation with red and black flags, members and supporters of the Burgerville Workers' Union, and a contingent of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Shortly after the march began, however, the police announced that the permit had been revoked and that anyone in the street would be subject to arrest: that the annual May Day parade was now an "unlawful assembly." Within minutes the police began shooting concussion grenades and tear gas, and doing baton charges. The police gave the excuse for their decision to cancel the march permit that some Pepsi cans had been thrown, at fully body-armored riot police mind you. Needless to say with the police threat, all hell broke loose, with families struggling to understand what was going on and escape the police attack. In response to this, some corporate windows were smashed, a police SUV was destroyed, and a bonfire was lit in the middle of a downtown intersection as a distraction to allow people to safely escape the police assault, which resulted in the police declaring it a riot. About twenty-five people were eventually arrested, with most facing disorderly conduct misdemeanor charges, and a couple of juveniles charged with riot. Three days later a man was also formally charged with riot, arson and criminal mischief.

In response to these events, *The Oregonian*, Oregon's largest paper, ran a piece by their own editorial board calling anarchists "parasites" and "punk fascists," blaming them rather than the police for what happened.

May Day organizers refused to go along with this anti-anarchist agenda, and its divide-and-conquer, "good protestor/bad protestor" strategy, staying focused on condemning the police violence, and not throwing anarchists under the bus.

In response to *The Oregonian* editorial, Paul Messersmith-Glavin, long-time member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS) and the *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* collective who lives in Portland, wrote a letter to the editor, which *The Oregonian* titled "Here's What Anarchists Really Want".

And finally, as a result of his letter, Paul was invited on a local morning radio talk show, where he discussed May Day, what anarchism is, how “raising the social costs” has put a check on imperialist power in the past, the work of the IAS, and other things.

Almost three weeks since May Day, and Portland anarchists and other militants are continuing their daily organizing, wage and reproductive work, and wondering what will happen next in terms of fall out from the “riot.”

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