

United States: Trump-Inspired Racist Murders and Counter-Mobilization in Portland

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Two murders and an attempted murder in Portland, Oregon, on the first day of Ramadan, by a white fascist-minded racist Islamophob are the latest in a string of hate crimes inspired by Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric, and racist actions since he took office.

Heidi Beirich, Intelligence Project director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which keeps track of hate crimes, said on Democracy Now, "President Trump, whose words in the campaign unleashed against immigrants, against Muslims and others, unleashed a wave of hate crimes and bias incidents, especially right after the election. The SPLC has documented about 900 of them in the first 10 days [after the election]."

Since then, such crimes have accelerated.

The Portland murders began when Alt-Right supporter Jeremy Christian, known for racist violence, armed with a knife, accosted two Black teenagers on a commuter train. One of the young women was Muslim, wearing a hijab, the other her non-Muslim friend.

Christian screamed racist and Islamophobic slurs at the women, yelling at them to get off the train and get out of the country. Three white men intervened and tried to stop Christian, who then stabbed two of them to death and gravely wounded a third.

These heroes were Ricky John Best, a 53-year-old Army veteran and Portland city worker; Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, a 23-year-old recent graduate of Reed College in Portland; and Micah David-Cole Fletcher, a 21-year-old poet and Portland State University student. The three were stabbed in the neck. Best and Namkai-Meche were killed, and Fletcher was severely wounded but survived in hospital.

In an emotional interview on CNN, 16-year-old Destinee Mangum, one of the young women Christian accosted, said in tears:

"He told us to go back to Saudi Arabia, that we shouldn't be here and to get out of his country. He was just telling us that we basically weren't anything and that we should just kill ourselves....[After the three white heroes intervened] me and my friend, we were going to get off the [train]. And then we turned around while they were fighting, and he just started stabbing. It was just blood everywhere, and we just started running for our lives...."

"I just want to say thank you to the people who put their life on the line for us, because they didn't even know us. And they lost their lives because of me and my friend and the way we looked. I just want to say thank you to them and their families and that I appreciate them, because without them, we would be dead right now."

Mangum's Muslim friend is anonymous at least for now, for good reason.

At his arraignment Christian shouted "Free speech or die, Portland. You've got no safe place. This is America. Get out if you don't like free speech."

A short time later he yelled: "Death to the enemies of America. Death to antifa [anti-fascists]. You call it terrorism. I call it patriotism. Die."

It took days and outrage before the White House issued a perfunctory statement that didn't even mention Islamophobia or the Alt-Right, a motley collection of fascist-minded organizations that are one of Trump's outlying support groups.

This all is occurring as the top Republican in Portland, James Buchal, told the *Guardian* that the Republicans could make their own security arrangements rather than relying on city or state police, using Alt-Right armed militia groups like the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters.

According to the SPLC, the Oath Keepers are an extreme right organization of some 10,000 former law officers and army veterans. The Three Percenters were organized to fight the federal government after the election of (Black) President Obama.

Buchal recently made a video against "Our enemies" who "want open borders, because they know if they keep the borders open, bring in all sorts of people from Third World countries who have no conception of liberty ... it will change this country forever, it will destroy everything that is special about America."

He went on to praise Trump as the bulwark against these "enemies."

Writing in the U.S. *Socialist Worker*, eyewitness reporters in Portland said, "But here is another side of the story beyond the awful stabbings: hundreds of thousands of people who shared this city with Ricky Best and Taliesin Namkai-Mechein were horrified by their murder, and many of them want to do something to stand up against hate.

"The day after the killings, some 1,000 people came out to a hastily organized vigil to honor the heroes who tried to stop a racist. People of all ages and races, including many women in hijab, held candles and left flowers at a makeshift shrine at the [train] station near where the stabbings took place...."

"Those working for social justice in Portland won't forget about this horror. Despite the killings, Alt-Right organizations are still planning to mobilize June 4 for a rally for 'free speech,' but a strong and growing coalition of left organizations is building for a counter-rally under the slogan 'Portland Stands United Against Hate' – to show with our numbers that Portlanders will stand up to violence and racism."

This the correct way to fight the right wing. Some are supporting the Portland Mayor's proposal to ban the Alt-Right rally. But this goes in the wrong direction for a number of reasons.

First we cannot trust the capitalist state to fight the right. A key element of the state are its armed wings, breeding grounds for groups like the Oath Keepers. Moreover, it is the capitalist system itself that gains from and supports Islamophobia, including from the very top in Washington, using it to "justify" its endless wars in the Mideast and North Africa.

Black Lives Matter has exposed that institutionalized racism and violence is alive and well in the U.S., and is furthered and protected by the capitalist state.

It is capitalism and its state that nurtures and creates the far right. In an extreme crisis, the

capitalists will even support fascism, as they did in Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal.

Second, the left should not support any capitalist state ban on free speech. World and U.S. history has amply demonstrated that such bans, even when originally proposed against the right, always are used a hundredfold more against the workers and oppressed. In this case, it plays into the hands of the Alt-Right, whose June 4 rally is called to defend their “free speech” to divert attention from their hate speech.

The best way to oppose the Alt-Right’s hate speech and actual violence as has just erupted in Portland is mass mobilization from below, of the exploited, oppressed and their supporters – not reliance on our exploiters and oppressors and their state.

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