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How Police Are Complicit in the Rise of Fascism

June 5, 2017

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In May, Jeremy Christian, an alt-right proponent of so-called “free speech,” murdered two people on a commuter train in Portland who were responding to his attacks on two teenage women of color. In response, far-right organizers promoted a rally in favor of “free speech” to take place in downtown Portland on June 4. Portland Police, Oregon State Police, the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, and a host of other state forces mobilized to protect these “patriots” from the consequences of promoting hatred and violence.

The events in Portland reflect a classic model we have already seen police and fascists employ in Berkeley. Police disarm and disempower demonstrators so fascists can attack them with impunity. In the aftermath of the clashes that took place in Berkeley on April 15, police carried out a series of raids in the Bay Area utilizing intelligence that had been provided to them by far-right internet trolls. This two-pronged assault enables reactionaries embedded in the state to disavow the elements of their agenda that are perceived as too extreme, while utilizing a variety of tactics to crush attempts at self-determination and self-defense.

In creating a space for nationalists to promote violence and seizing weapons from those who need to be able to defend themselves from attacks like the one carried out by Jeremy Christian, Portland police are complicit in the rise of fascism. On June 4, police attacked demonstrators bearing banners reading MOURN THE DEAD and FIGHT LIKE HELL FOR THE LIVING. They utilized a variety of less-lethal weaponry to break up demonstrations against the far-right organizers, in order to preserve a space for the far right to continue recruiting.

Fascists and other nationalists support the police, in turn, by spreading narratives justifying their violence against those opposing the rise of fascism. Anyone who has experience in demonstrations knows that police manufacture their own propaganda to justify whatever they do. Yet reactionaries who consider CNN and the *New York Times* “fake news” are willing to believe anything they read on a police twitter account. This is the mindset that supports fascism: independent reporting and critical inquiry are derided, while the narratives spread by the authorities are swallowed whole.

All this is part of a broader pattern in which police and fascists reinforce each other’s activities. Here’s how it works, in a nutshell. Fascist groups promote racist, sexist, and nationalist violence. Individual bigots carry it out—attacking people in the streets, shooting people in churches, stabbing people on trains. The authorities use these attacks as an excuse to increase control, promising to protect a fearful population. But the greatest threat is not individual fascists: it is the state itself. It is the state that deports and imprisons millions, that suppresses dissent, that imposes the tremendous imbalances of power that characterize this society.

If we count on the authorities to control fascist activity, granting them resources and legitimacy in hopes that they will protect us, it is only a matter of time until a more reactionary government takes power and uses those resources and legitimacy to carry out even more violence.

This is why only grassroots resistance can stop the rise of fascism. We salute the courage of those who took the streets in Portland to oppose racist violence and the rise of fascism. In the end, if we want to put an end to all racist violence, we will have to come to grips with the state itself. We have to become capable of defending our demonstrations and communities from police as well as fascists.