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D12 Report-Back: Pittsburgh Anti-Fascists on the D.C. Front

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We arrived in DC in the morning on Saturday. After dropping our bags at lodging we walked most of the way to the plaza to scout an approach that would let us bloc up close by. There were already small groups of MAGAs and PBs on the sidewalks although their behavior was relatively subdued.

Once we reached the plaza and were able to get into bloc, we started waiting. SURJ, a DC group, was holding the space. One of their people thanked us for coming out in bloc. People without masks were denied entry to the segment of the plaza antiracists controlled by a bike line backed up by people on foot.

One instance upset the relative calm of the morning. An unmasked man attempted to force his way through the bike line into the plaza. This was opposed by bikes as well as a large group of people. The police seized this as a tactic to throw their weight around and helped the man smash through the bike line and backing crowd of antiracists. No one was arrested though.

The plaza continued to fill with groups of people as noon came and went. The police eventually blocked off I street at 15th and 17th and pulled their northern line out to K Street. This created a much larger space for antifascists to operate in.

Some time after noon, a large crowd of MAGAs/PBs marched by on 15th. The plaza began boiling like an ant hive and what seemed like the whole group went down to confront the fascists from across the police line. This rush of people led to the macing of at least one antiracist by the MPD as they struggled to separate the two groups.

For several hours this continued. A group of fascists would make an appearance a block away, separated from the plaza by a line of police, and antiracists would move to oppose them from across the police line. To editorialize – it seemed like a lot of concern and effort went into these one block mobilizations. While holding the space was a priority, there was never a time when fascists had unhindered access to the plaza, even in the absence

of an antifascist response. Regardless, it was fortunate for us that only a few of us were maced during these instances.



Observations, Critiques, and Lessons Learned

1. Between 12 and 3, most of the plaza's occupants repeatedly flowed to the edge of the plaza when MAGAs would pass by. In one instance, multiple people were maced as cops failed to form a proper line and deployed mace to cover their mistakes. It's unclear what this accomplished.

2. Flocking behavior to individual MAGAs at many points during the day was excessive. Distracting 20 people for 1 MAGA while in a supremely hostile environment was wasteful and potentially dangerous.

3. Shields leaving when they did for McPherson may have opened the plaza to attack. Should have been communicated better that they were marching out or coordinated a more complete emptying of the plaza to go to the vigil/march.

4. Decision to take more than half of the McPherson contingent north without the shields, who were waiting on the group that had called for the vigil at McPherson was very nearly disastrous. Splitting the party with that many fash around is risky.

5. Proud Boys really don't want to fight you if you're looking ready and in a group that's even half the size as theirs. At multiple points, the PBs could have engaged in a general melee with a large but still heavily outnumbered group of antifascists and they chose not to.

6. There still weren't enough counterprotesters out. There were loads of bloc but without more liberal support the fash will continue to have a heavy numbers advantage. This puts us in the awkward position of being bailed out by the police separating the two groups.

7. It was absolutely galling to accept what essentially was a police escort back to BLM plaza. Necessary, but frustrating.

At around 4pm, a group no larger than 40 antifascists including many carrying shields, departed BLM plaza with the intended destination of McPherson Square. McPherson was the planned site of a 530pm vigil for Casey Goodson Jr. and Brandon Bernard. As the sun began to set, this group established itself in the square.

It was then learned from people with comrades still in the plaza that after the advance group had left, MPD had rushed the plaza, arresting around five antifascists. After the police backed off, a group of the people remaining in the plaza managed to make it to McPherson Square as well.

The advance team in the square, which included a shield wall, was busy almost immediately upon arrival. A small detachment was tasked with holding the southeast entrance of the park. As that group arrived, they saw a number of kids riding bikes north past the McPherson building. There were MAGAs chasing them. I saw a woman pull a taser out of her pocket and discharge it at the back of a fleeing teen, only to miss. We quickly motioned the kids behind our shield line into the park. At that point a large crowd, a mix of MAGAs and Proud Boys began to come up the street from south near the Sofitel. A runner went to alert the rest of the people in the park. Our numbers could not have been more than 60 all told.

Despite their overwhelming numbers and verbal provocations, no Proud Boys attempted to cross 15th St. to the park where our group held the sidewalk. Instead, PBs/MAGAs waited for MPD to put bike lines on both sides of the street, separating the groups. The police dispersed the crowd of MAGAs towards the east on I and south on 15th. Antifascists returned to a more neutral position in the park, waiting for the arrival of the vigil group.

The presence at McPherson slowly swelled as people trickled in for the 530pm vigil. However, reports that a friendly church nearby was under siege by MAGAs pushed more than half of the group there to head north. Others stayed, waiting on the delayed vigil organizers.

When they did arrive, the remaining group began to march as well. Initial fears that the first contingent had been kettled were allayed. According to people in that group, while police did surround them, the appearance of a crowd of fascists pulled away one of the police lines and they were able to leave the area.

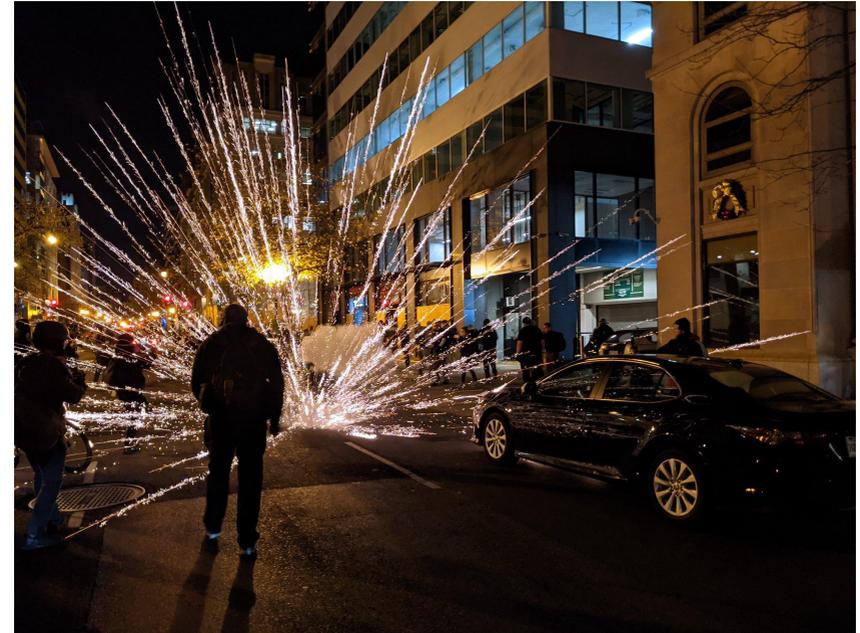
This march moved around town for some time, unhindered by police. After a break some ways to the north, the march moved back south in an attempt to return to the plaza. A confrontation with a group of fascists occurred, although the formidable shield wall combined with general numerical superiority [in the immediate area] prevented any real fights. A photo of the confrontation:



clearly allowed the PBs/MAGAs to remain free to prey on people and roam more freely. However, it also meant that our march contingent made it back to the plaza. Once there, people relaxed. Someone ordered a stack of pizzas and the grubhub driver somehow got through the police line unmaligned with the food.

There was a small incident where a lone MAGA entered the plaza and was pushed back by protesters. Police who came forward were then forced back the antifascist shield wall. Once they were forced back to the edge of the plaza at K St, there was a brief respite before police charged in, arresting one person and pushing the shield wall back. At this point, a lively debate among protesters took place as to whether the shields should hold the space at a reasonable standoff distance from the police line at K or whether it was better to pull back to the center at I. Eventually the crowd backed off.

Dispersal at this point was a dilemma. Any large group marching out would attract both state and PB attention, but small groups trying to be stealthy could be jumped by roving PBs. Eventually though, the waiting game seemed to win out. An attempt was made to get people going in similar directions to group up for as long as they could for safety, which was reasonably successful. Our group successfully left the plaza and navigated without incident back to our lodging, encountering PBs only at a distance across a traffic circle.



As we moved further south, a more serious confrontation arose. At K Street, MAGAs/PBs first presented themselves in small numbers in our direction of travel. However, as police moved to wall them off, more approached from the east. It became hectic as the shield unit attempted to cover multiple directions at once, leading to pockets of shields intermingled in lines with those sans shields. Minor clashes broke out but were separated quickly. Police began to push our group west, requiring a determined withdrawal, towards yet another waiting police line. Instead antifascists made a fast turn north. As the main body of the march streamed up the street ahead of a police line now pushing north, a group of 8-10 fascists moved down the sidewalk to engage.

The following is an account from a person who confronted the fascists:

Police were behind us, shoving us north. A group of approximately 10 PBs came down the street we were going up. I noticed and quickly rallied 5 people to confront them and protect the flank of the march. We assembled a line in the street, facing the sidewalk. The PBs attempted to fight us almost immediately. One ran in and was rebuffed by the center of the line. A second tried to mace the person on the very end of the line. He got his shield up in front of most of it and then smacked the mace-carrier. A second rush at the line was rebuffed with determined shield shoves. At that point, the fight was cut short as the police line pushing from the south reached our detachment, shoving us hard with baton crosschecks to the north.

MPD had now trapped the antifascists in one block. Their southern line was solid, but their northern line was being pressured by a massive crowd of MAGAs/PBs, at least the size of the one that had confronted us to the south. Antifascists waited tensely – we were

completely boxed in. But MPD had their hands full. Slowly, their reinforcements arrived and pushed the PBs out of the intersection to the north and east, creating a buffer zone of an intersection.

The following is an account from a participant in the antifascist demonstration:

There was a kid in the “kettle” with us. I say “kettle” because the cops weren’t continuing to squeeze us in nor were they attempting to arrest antifascists at this time. This kid was dressed in street clothes, had a bike, and no other gear. He expressed to me that “he didn’t want to die” and that “he wasn’t supposed to be here”. I did what I could – I pointed out a recessed corner created by a pillar of the building we were next to on the sidewalk. If anything happens, I said, I’ll put my shield on the pillar and cover you. He agreed, but was clearly still in distress.

I decided to exercise all my options. I approached the bike line holding us from the north (and behind whom the west side of the intersection was clear). I communicated that there was a kid with us, who was alone and scared and not even supposed to be here. The police officer indicated that he would not let him leave. However, a few minutes later, a different officer who had overheard, said that the west exit was now considered safe, and after seeing him, allowed him through the line to go home.

At this point, the unruly fascist crowds had been pushed away from the intersection by more MPD. MPD officers then extended an offer to the crowd – passage back through the city to the plaza – although it’s unclear what the alternative was. We slowly made our way back down to the plaza, surrounded by lines of cops. This