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Confronting Trump's Police and the Fascists Who Support Them

A Report from the Streets of Phoenix, August 22

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On the night of August 22, following a turbulent week in which Trump's sympathies with far-right and fascist groups became even clearer, Trump made an appearance in Phoenix, Arizona to rally his far-right base in a state already divided by ugly conflicts over race and immigration. In a classic move from the totalitarian playbook, Trump denied that the massive protests outside his speech existed at all, while heavily-armored riot police prepared to attack them with chemical weapons. Behind Trump stood a token black man who has appeared at several of his rallies, an inept attempt to distract from the ways that Trump is smoothing the way for racists like the one who murdered a demonstrator last week in Charlottesville. This report recounts the experiences of those outside Trump's speech, facing down far-right violence and police attacks to open up a space for opposition.

If you live in Arizona, getting in your car and driving with your affinity group to Phoenix to protest white supremacy is something you do regularly. The potential costs of struggle have always been high for us. We have no illusions about the burden of prison time, what it can mean to be separated from family. The potential for violence from Neo-Nazis and the state is always a clear and present danger. This time however, it felt different.

Recently, many of us have been considering the possibility that we may not come home from the next anti-fascist action we attend. We spent our time preparing and having really hard conversations with our children, parents, and loved ones. This past year has been devastating. I feel honored to be out on

the streets with comrades who are weighing the risks and still showing up.

Puente organized the march—a grassroots migrant justice organization based in Phoenix, Arizona that focuses on education and empowerment within migrant communities to protect and defend families. They have been at the forefront of the struggle against the deputization of the police and against the racist enforcement policies of Joe Arpaio. Their years of tireless struggle were part of the reason that Arpaio didn't get re-elected last time. That, and his bizarre mafioso-style feuds with other political opponents.

Thousands turned out to protest in the 107 degree heat: a mixed and diverse crowd with lots of energy and many creative signs. People showed a lot of strength and dedication, considering that even after sunset, it was still 100 degrees. A shout out to those that arranged for bags of ice to be distributed—it kept the numbers of people treated for heat exhaustion and heat stroke to a relative few.

We were outnumbered by the Trump supporters; there were thousands of us, but there were well over 10,000 of them. Until the end of the night, scuffles between sides were isolated to sporadic incidents outside the convention center. It was a charged and unpleasant environment.

I witnessed a Trump supporter spit on a Latino youth, assault him, and attempt to carry out a “citizen’s arrest.” Other people pulled the young man up from the ground, and he kept at it into the night with his affinity group, a very sweet group of people. That Trump supporter felt he was well within his rights starting a street fight, spitting on a young kid, and putting

him in a chokehold on the ground. He figured that if he “arrested” this kid, the police would be on his side. This highlights ties between the police, the military, and grassroots fascists. Thankfully, the kid got away, but it’s instructive that the Trump supporter felt so emboldened. Individually, many of the police are white supremacist sympathizers, and structurally, they are the armed wing of the state upholding white supremacy and democracy in all its genocidal glory.

Just as in Charlottesville, the police came out to assist the right-wing and fascists. Police provided Trump supporters escort back to their vehicles. It was only after most Trump supporters had safely left the area that they deployed gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets in the areas with the highest concentration of protesters. There was some back and forth in the streets—protesters throwing back the canisters of poisonous gas they shot at us. The claims that our side deployed our own gas are laughable, utterly dishonest propaganda. I’ve never understood why the police get so upset when people throw gas canisters back at them. What the fuck do they expect?

A lot of people were gassed and hit with projectiles, and three people were arrested. Yet overall, the evening did not end as terribly as we had all been worried it would. Many people were not prepared to deal with chemical weapons or engage in street battle, but a lot of enthusiastic locals showed up and gave it their all—and that felt great! Step by step, we are building the capacity to face the violence of the police on a community-wide level.

The preponderance of arms on all sides felt disturbing and tactically inappropriate. I do not question the commitment to

struggle when anarchists carry arms to a protest, but I would ask this: in Phoenix and Charlottesville, when your friends were engaged in physical altercations with white supremacists and police... what did you do? Did you stand on the sidelines with your guns and watch? I mean, thank you for not shooting anyone. I think a three-way gun battle is not something any of us are prepared for, nor do I think it would advance the struggles we are participating in. What does this militancy provide us from a practical perspective? Is it serving a tactical purpose, or is it empty posturing? We need more solidarity in the streets, we need to prepare for the fights ahead, and we need to be honest with ourselves about the very real potential outcomes of our actions. This question warrants further discussion, and I hope it will take place.

Trump is still considering a pardon for Joe Arpaio. As recently as this June, inmates were still being housed in Tent City outside when temperatures spiked to 110 degrees. I would like to call on Maricopa County to keep Tent City open with Joe Arpaio as its only occupant. When Trump pardons that racist sociopath, be sure to pack some liquid antacid (like unflavored Maalox) and water diluted 50/50 in a spray bottle, clean rags to wipe down with, disposable masks, and a camelback with water.

Stay safe until then. We’ll see you in the streets.