

Pre-Election Anti-Austerity Protest amidst Police Violence

By [Shamus Cooke](#)

Global Research, November 05, 2012

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

It's difficult to build a pre-election protest with so many labor and community groups busy campaigning for Democrats. Nevertheless, over 1,000 people marched the streets in Portland, Oregon on November 3rd against austerity cuts to education and other public services and the consequent debt accumulated by students.

The specific date of the pre-election protest was set to educate the public about the bi-partisan plan of national austerity cuts, which are expected to occur post-election and likely include massive cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment insurance, public education, and Social Security.

The Portland demonstration was endorsed or supported by six labor unions, including Portland's teachers and the largest public employee union in Oregon. Over a dozen community groups endorsed the event.

But the police came ready to start a fight. There was a fleet of bicycle police and dozens of riot police, including those mounted on horseback. The police created confrontations by blocking streets on the marching route and pepper spraying marchers if they got too close. About 24 people were pepper sprayed, including several high school students and an elderly woman.

It should be noted that Portland's mayor is the first openly gay Mayor in the country and a "liberal" Democrat.

Despite the police's repeated attempts to dismember the march, the day was an overall success. The demonstration gained enough coverage to teach the city what austerity is, while speakers and fliers offered alternatives that would make austerity cuts unnecessary, such as taxing the rich and corporations instead of making cuts to education and social programs.

Also, the organizational framework has been created for further coalition building against austerity, with labor and community groups finding common purpose against a bi-partisan policy that is destroying the social safety net while being used as an excuse to attack unions.

This is important because future state budget deficits are expected in Oregon. Instead of raising taxes on the rich, whose tax rates have declined for the past three decades, the Democratic governor will likely try again to implement austerity cuts in response to a budget deficit. In other words, he will try to resolve the deficit at the expense of working

people and the poor. Cuts will also likely be attempted again on the city level in Portland, in response to yet another budget deficit.

The economic crisis is not over for working people, who are likely to experience years of austerity budgets on all levels of government, while corporations, too, attempt to implement austerity wage and benefit cuts to their workforce in order to “remain competitive.”

If labor and community groups unite the broader population with common goals and collective, massive action, we can build a powerful social movement capable not only of defending ourselves from austerity, but changing the power dynamic in this country to the benefit of working people.

If united in massive numbers, we’ll have the strength to make the rich and corporations pay for this crisis they created.

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action (www.workerscompass.org) He can be reached at shamuscooke@gmail.com

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