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LIVING

# Pro-Palestinian protesters clash with white supremacists in Missoula during the weekend

One arrested as hate group preaches hatred of Jews

BY: **BENJAMIN RUBIN** - OCTOBER 24, 2023 5:29 PM



A rally of support for Palestine clashed with white supremacists who used the rally as a platform to target the Jewish community and Israel in Missoula on Oct. 21, 2023 (Photo by Hayden Blackford for the Daily Montanan).

Outside the Missoula County Courthouse, a pro-Palestinian demonstration on Saturday turned tense after a crew of white supremacists arrived.

A shouting match started across an intersection between the two groups, with police in between, lasting for about 35 minutes before one man from the hate group was arrested and pro-Palestinian

demonstrators denounced the group. The pro-Palestinian side then left, concerned for their safety.

“It’s challenging to live in Montana and to see the hate like literally right in front of you,” said Lily Sussman, a pro-Palestinian demonstrator, as she looked on to the other group across the street.

Behind the incident were hints of a larger political conversation about anti-Semitism versus anti-Zionism. During the confrontation, the white supremacists attempted to unify themselves with the pro-Palestinian group under a shared banner of hatred against Jewish people. In turn, the pro-Palestinian group had to define their stance.

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Protests initially began at noon in front of Missoula County’s courthouse, with people holding up signs decrying the bombing of Gaza in the recent war between Israel and Hamas. Led by the group Montanans in Solidarity with Palestine, Saturday’s protest was the second of its kind in Missoula after an [event](#) last week. Missoula’s anti-war protest that day was just one of several similar gatherings [across the world](#).

Approximately 30 minutes into the protest, word began to spread in the crowd that a hate group had been spotted across town on Russell Street at Har Shalom, a synagogue. Prior to crowding the sidewalk in front of Har Shalom, the hate group had protested outside the International Rescue Committee, a refugee-assistance organization.

A rough count of about 24 men were present, according to [a statement](#) released later that day by Har Shalom. All of the men’s faces were concealed behind masks. They held up signs that rejected refugees and claimed a genocide against whites.

While the men appeared to be members of a few different organizations from “[s]everal branches of the Active Club Network,” according to the statement, there were [a few regional white supremacist groups](#) pinpointed.

Active Clubs are local or area organizations of people who see themselves as fighters who believe that the government is actively plotting against the white race, and often hand out propaganda, literature and demonstrate publicly, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

“We saw shirts identifying club members as the Big Sky Active Club, and also the Evergreen Active Club,” read the statement. Flyers handed out by the group indicated a connection with White Lives Matter as well.



□ A rally of support for Palestine clashed with white supremacists who used the rally as a platform to target the Jewish community and Israel in Missoula on Oct. 21, 2023 (Photo by Hayden Blackford for the Daily Montanan).

In response to the hate group’s presence on Russell Street, police and a crowd of people showed up. Counter protesters brought out Black Lives Matter signs.

The IRC did not respond to a request for comment for this story.

Meanwhile, at about 1 p.m. the pro-Palestinian crowd—numbering

somewhere between 100 and 150—marched two blocks away to stand outside of U.S. Sen. Jon Tester’s office, demanding the legislator support a ceasefire in Gaza.

At about 1:20 p.m., by the time protesters marched back around the street from Higgins to the corner of Broadway and Ryman, the pro-Palestinian demonstrators spotted the hate group outside the courthouse.

As the white supremacists and pro-Palestinian demonstrators encountered each other, police kept the two divided between the road. But that didn’t stop a verbal exchange between the groups, which quickly became hostile.

“From the river to the sea, Palestine will soon be free!” pro-Palestinian demonstrators chanted, continuing with their message.

One man from the hate group, brandishing a swastika on his chest, yelled back into a megaphone “hip hip Hamas! Hip hip Hezbollah!” celebrating the Palestinian and Lebanese militia groups, respectively, that have combated Israel.

Members of the hate group began gesturing Nazi salutes.

“Show your faces you f–king cowards!” yelled one pro-Palestinian demonstrator.

“Go home Nazis!” pro-Palestinian protesters chanted. “No more Nazis!”

Carly Fuglei, a leading organizer of Montanans in Solidarity with Palestine, was so caught off-guard by the whole encounter that she took a moment to meditate in an attempt to calm herself down.

“It was surprising and shocking to see the neo-Nazis turn up,” Fuglei said later on. “So that was admittedly a bit scary when I turned the corner and there they were trying to start some sh-t with us.”

Those in the hate group attempted to unify with the pro-Palestinian rally, suggesting that both had a common enemy – Jewish people.

As pro-Palestinian demonstrators continued chanting “free, free Palestine!” the white supremacist with the megaphone responded: “the Jews have to be stopped if you want to free Palestine.”

At that moment, members of the hate group unfurled their banners to face the other protesters, displaying messages that read “White Pride Worldwide,” “Refugees Not Welcome” and “Diversity = White Genocide.”

“Thank you for coming out to support us today,” said the man with the swastika and megaphone. “We couldn’t have done this without you.”

After about 15 minutes into the encounter, the man holding the megaphone was arrested. Later, the man was identified as Larkin M. McIntyre, 46, of Washington state, as first reported by the Missoulian.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators applauded, then mobilized to capture photos of the man in police custody as multiple officers handcuffed him and removed his mask.

A news release from the police said that the man was arrested for disorderly conduct after officers “noticed a concerning escalation in (his) behavior.” The man was subsequently cited and released.

The individual had antagonized a few Native American people on the scene by shouting racial slurs and derogatory comments, Public Information Officer Whitney Bennett clarified in an interview.

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On the pro-Palestinian side, across her 15 years involved with international activism, Fuglei had never quite seen anything like what happened on Saturday. After calling another activist friend for advice, she figured out a strategy with her co-organizers.

It was determined that after denouncing the hate group's views, the best approach would be to move the protest elsewhere.

For several minutes, pro-Palestinian demonstrators expressed their message that the two groups were not aligned.

“We love refugees! We love queer people!” Brendan Work, a lead organizer of the event yelled into a megaphone as the crowd cheered. A few hours later, Montanas in Solidarity with Palestine released a [statement](#) on Facebook, denouncing the hate group.

“We offer our unqualified solidarity with the Jewish and immigrant communities in Missoula against fascism and anti-Semitism,” the statement read.

“It’s important in Missoula, when Nazis come to town, we shout them down,” said Paul Kim, another organizer of the event. “Nazi values are not welcome in Missoula, and the pro-Palestinian movement in Missoula wholeheartedly rejects Nazis and their vile anti-Semitism.”

By about 1:55 p.m., pro-Palestinian demonstrators marched to the Beartracks Bridge on Higgins Avenue.

“We de-escalated the situation and ended up moving our protest away to be targeted at the general public again, rather than just in getting into a screaming battle with those people,” Fuglei said.

Fuglei felt proud of how everything was handled and the diverse community she rallied alongside.

“I would just reiterate that our movement today included Indigenous people, included members of the refugee community in Missoula, it included many Jewish people, it included many queer people,” she said. “It was a very intersectional and beautiful event with amazing representation.”

After the pro-Palestinian demonstrators left, a member of the hate group took over the megaphone and continued announcing hate speech to passersby.

“Chris,” a member of the Active Club who asked to use a fake name for fear of his identity being posted online, said that his group didn’t know there would be a pro-Palestinian rally, but they weren’t surprised to see one. He explained that his group went to Missoula specifically to spread their own messages. Chris presented flyers that espoused ideas about Mexican drug cartels and Jewish-controlled media.

When asked why he and others in his group chose to wear masks, he spoke of concerns around losing his job based on his political viewpoints.

“We’re just regular people,” said Chris. “We live here, we work here. We just want to live our lives. We want to be able to express our belief without the consequence of literally—I mean it’s a life or death situation. You lose your job, that’s food, that’s home, that’s everything.”

Other members of the hate group present declined to comment.

In a phone interview the following day, Rabbi Chezcky Vogel, head of the Chabad Jewish Center of Missoula, said that the FBI had warned him on Friday there would be an upcoming white supremacist gathering. After the protests, police had called him to say they’d increase patrols nearby the Chabad on Saturday night.

Vogel has been vigilant since the recent escalations in Israel, and maintains regular contact with both the FBI and Missoula Police for the presence of hate groups.

Word soon spread around Missoula and on social media about the confrontation, with both mayoral candidates [Andrea Davis](#) and [Mike Nugent](#) posting against hate on their campaign Instagram accounts.

Reflecting on what had unfolded that day after everyone had dispersed, Brendan Work felt that despite the confrontation, he and his community of pro-Palestinian activists were steadfast in their mission.

“I think it was important to show people within our movement, and outside our movement, that we are greater in numbers, more powerful in message, and more courageous than the smaller, more weaker, more cowardly white supremacists on the other side,” said Work.

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Benjamin is a freelance journalist originally from Brooklyn, New York. Currently based in Montana, he tends to focus on issues around politics, housing and poverty, but is drawn to any stories that help offer a voice to the unvoiced.

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