

The Spark and the Flame

An up-close look at four historic protests at the Thompson Elk Fountain

Lownsdale Square and the Thompson Elk Fountain have served as a backdrop for political protests, rallies, controversial speech, and spirited discussions since the fountain was placed next to the park in 1900. While the tone and tenor of politically motivated action changed over the course of the 20th century, this space was always used by Portlanders to push, and occasionally exceed, the bounds of what was considered by the state to be acceptable free speech. The following people and their stories, as told through newspaper articles, offer a look at how Lownsdale Square became a public forum where a multitude of ideas have always been expressed, all under the gaze of the Thompson Elk.

Carl Rave

On July 9th, 1906 Carl Rave was arrested on the corner of 4th and Main, most likely at Lownsdale Square, for defying an order to stop delivering a speech on what was perceived to be “socialism.” After his arrest Rave stated that his proclamations concerned religion, but patrolman B.F. Wade saw no difference between the two subjects; the officer claimed that Rave was being held in part because he was heard to “declare that God is a myth.”¹ It’s possible that Wade’s accusation was based more on Rave’s reputation; he was a known member of the Socialist Party and lectured on “political economy” at a “free night school” operated by the group around this time.²

¹ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON JOURNAL\) - July 9, 1906 - page 9](#)

² [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON JOURNAL\) - June 19, 1906 - page 7](#)

Ten years later on June 19th, 1916 Rave was detained by police for selling a booklet called “Family Limitation” during a public lecture at the Heilig Theater by its author Margaret Sanger, a birth control activist and founder of the organization that eventually became Planned Parenthood.³ Rave, along with E.L. Jenkins and Ralph Chervin was represented by C.E.S. Wood. Lawyer, writer, and self-described “philosophical anarchist” who was Portland’s most influential cultural figure at the time. Wood had introduced Sanger at the event where the trio were arrested and he would also serve as her counsel in the matter.⁴ Rave and the two other men were found guilty of distributing obscene matter; Margaret Sanger, Marie Equi, Maude Bournier and “Mrs. F.A. Greatwood” were found guilty of the same charge in a separate trial. Judge Arthur Langguth ruled specifically that three pages in the booklet contained material that he deemed obscene. They were each issued a suspended sentence of a \$10 fine.⁵

Rave was arrested again on September 9th, 1916 for selling the same pamphlet, this time with the “obscene” passages edited out.⁶ In a bizarre scene, Rave entered the dental office of Dr. Emmett Drake while he was treating U.S. District Attorney Barnett H. Goldstein and attempted to sell the dentist a revised edition of the booklet. Dr. Drake became angry when Rave pressed him after an initial rebuff and Barnett advised the former to call police. Rave attempted to flee, but he was detained by dentist and patient until a patrolman arrived to arrest him.⁷ Rave was again found guilty by Judge Langguth, who advised the defendant’s lawyers that

³ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - June 20, 1916 - page 2](#)

⁴ [Two Birth Control Trials in Court Defendants - Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian\) - July 1, 1916 - page 16](#)

⁵ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON JOURNAL\) - July 7, 1916 - page 1](#)

⁶ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON JOURNAL\) - September 8, 1916 - page 6](#)

⁷ [Pamphlet Seller Held Carl Rave Arrested for Birth - Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian\) - September 9, 1916 - page 9](#)

his penalty would be more substantial than his previous punishment.⁸ It's unclear what happened to Rave.

Lambo Mitseff

On September 4th of 1930 Lambo Mitseff was arrested on 3rd Street near Stark Street (now Harvey Milk Street). Mitseff, secretary of the local branch of the Communist Party, had addressed the group as they held a meeting at Lownsdale Square just prior to his detention. Initially police took him to their headquarters, ostensibly on a vagrancy charge, but they notified immigration authorities when police discovered that Mitseff was a literal card-carrying communist upon searching his pockets. It's likely that police were already aware of him, as he had been the default head of the Communist Party for two years (the group was without an official president) and had a long history of public left-wing activism. He had addressed a group of 30 communists earlier that year in front of Portland City Hall on May 6th. In an eerie bit of foreshadowing, Mayor George Baker walked onto the platform the group had erected that day and told the assembled crowd to "get on some boats and go back to Russia."⁹

Law enforcement officials also arrested Vasil Gosheff at the same time they apprehended Mitseff. This was actually the second time the duo had been arrested during a crackdown on a leftist political organization; in 1919 they were jailed for being associated with the International Workers of the World. Mitseff was arrested with "a suitcase filled with Wobbly material" on Minnesota Avenue earlier in early December of 1919 and Gosheff was

⁸ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON JOURNAL\) - September 12, 1916 - page 9](#)

⁹ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - September 5, 1930 - page 10](#)

detained on the 29th during a month-long flurry of arrests that would ultimately net 23 members of the I.W.W.¹⁰

While Mitseff was being held at their headquarters, police went to his home at 2117 East Glisan and seized additional information including member lists for the organization. Two other men, Steve Okicich and Milo (Miro) Loukas, were taken into custody the following night.¹¹ Most of the information about the group's activities was given to the police by immigration officials, who had been surveilling the organization's office and rallies. Investigators included Boyd Reynolds, Frank Hord and Roy J. Norene.

On September 10th more members of the group were arrested at their meeting hall in the Worcester Building. Half of the 16 men told the police that they were U.S. citizens; Mike Genceff, Ellis Bjorkman, John Moore, Ruben Sandstrom, Arthur Brown, John Torkko, James Howell and Jacks Henderson. Tom Evanoff, Dan Stoeff, George Johnson, Ed Levitt, Pete Males, Englebrecht Nillson, Bill Woral, and Claus Strav were advised that they faced deportation.¹² George Twukkanen (also spelled Tukanen and Tunkkanen) was arrested a day later and faced deportation as well.¹³

About a week later, on September 13th 1930, three hundred people attended a rally at Lownsdale Square to protest efforts to deport Mitseff and the others. Allen Andrew of Seattle was arrested at First Street and Madison for distributing handbills for the event. Text from the handbills called for the release of the 18 members of the communist party facing deportation

¹⁰ [23 I. W. W. Arrested Here in December. Some - Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian\) - December 30, 1919 - page 7](#)

¹¹ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - September 5, 1930 - page 10](#)

¹² [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - September 12, 1930 - page 16](#)

¹³ [Oregonian \(published as The Sunday Oregonian.\) - September 14, 1930 - page 19](#)

and states that the men faced “horrible torture and certain death” if returned to “Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Italy, Japan and other fascist countries,” and exhorted “workers to smash the bosses’ terror- fight against the deportation of foreign-born workers.”¹⁴

On October 7th, 1930 deportation proceedings began against those 12 members of the party who were not U.S. citizens. They were defended by Irvin Goodman, who argued that membership in the organization did not constitute a violation of the 1918 Immigration Act. The local immigration commissioner, R.P. Bonham, represented the federal government.¹⁵ On December 13th of 1930 all but 3 members of the group were ordered deported back to their countries of origin; Steve Okicich, George Twukkanen, and George Johnson were all allowed to stay in the United States.¹⁶ This didn’t stop the 9 who were ordered to leave the U.S. from continuing to protest and speak publicly as Goodman appealed their verdict.

Just over two months after they received their expulsion orders, members of the Communist Party staged a massive rally on February 25th, 1931. The crowd, some 2,500 people strong, gathered at Lownsdale Square and drafted a list of demands that would be presented to the city council. The request included provisions calling for an end to eviction for nonpayment of rent, abolition of vagrancy laws, and reduction of the police force. The list of demands was presented to the city council by a delegation comprised of “five men, two women, and one child” while the crowd waited outside. Mayor Baker’s response was “no.” The crowd also adopted a resolution calling for the release of communists being held in Oregon and being threatened with deportation, including the meeting’s organizers, among them Lambo Mitseff.¹⁷

¹⁴ [September 14, 1930 | Oregonian \(published as The Sunday Oregonian.\) | Portland, Oregon | Page 1](#)

¹⁵ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - October 7, 1930 - page 1](#)

¹⁶ [Oregon Journal \(published as Oregon SUNDAY Journal\) - December 14, 1930 - page 9](#)

¹⁷ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - February 26, 1931 - page 2](#)

On June 15th, 1931 the deportees learned that their conviction had been upheld by the circuit court of appeals in San Francisco and despite their lawyer petitioning to have the case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court, this verdict was final. On June 23rd R.P. Bonham received a letter from Irvin Goodman, presenting a request from his clients that they be allowed to leave the U.S. voluntarily at their own expense to avoid going back to their counties of origin.¹⁸ A majority of the men indicated that they would go to Russia if allowed to do so. After balking¹⁹ for several months,²⁰ on November 23rd of 1931 the federal government approved the request to allow several of the men to leave for the Soviet Union.²¹ The first of the group disembarked from the U.S. a week later.²²

Mitseff, along with Vasil Gosheff, and Peter Males left Union Station on January 25th 1933 bound for Russia. Two-hundred and fifty people saw their train off with speeches and singing.²³ The group arrived in Russia sometime around February 8th, 1933.²⁴

Dirk de Jonge

On July 27th, 1932 the city of Portland denied a permit to the United Front Anti-War Day committee for a parade and rally on the first of August. Dirk de Jonge, a spokesman for the group, addressed the city council and stated his belief that “the basis of an attack on the soviet union (sic) is being laid in the far east,” referencing increased military activity by Imperial Japan.²⁵ In an oddly contradictory moment, Mayor Baker indicated that no one would stop a

¹⁸ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - June 24, 1931 - page 7](#)

¹⁹ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - July 28, 1931 - page 11](#)

²⁰ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - September 4, 1931 - page 17](#)

²¹ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - November 23, 1931 - page 20](#)

²² [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - November 29, 1932 - page 7](#)

²³ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - January 25, 1933 - page 12](#)

²⁴ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - February 8, 1933 - page 2](#)

²⁵ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - July 28, 1932 - page 9](#)

parade if it were “conducted orderly.” De Jong advised that the group would meet at Lownsdale Square on the date proposed and the crowd would vote to proceed or abandon the event, with or without a permit.²⁶

Three days later, Dirk de Jonge addressed an unrelated group billing itself as “a new bonus army” being sponsored by the Communist Party at Lownsdale Square. This meeting was in response to the recent rout of the Bonus Expeditionary Forces by federal forces in Washington D.C. The veterans were seeking early payment of a bonus promised to them as a way to ameliorate the widespread economic hardships facing Americans in the midst of the Great Depression.²⁷ Following the rally, Harry L. Gross, who had been previously involved with the Bonus Army, attempted to distance the B.E.F. from the Communist Party. Gross had spoken at the same event with Dirk de Jonge and claimed that there was no overlap between the two groups.²⁸

Confusion among participants and attendees of the rally was reasonable, given that veterans groups have also historically used Lownsdale Square as a meeting place for various purposes. There was a long history of Memorial Day celebrations taking place on the site; in 1907 U.S. Civil War Veterans, organized as the Grand Army of the Republic, gathered at the Plaza Blocks after a march that ended at Lownsdale Square to remember fallen Union soldiers during their annual event. Some veterans, unable to walk the route, rode in carriages provided by the family of the late D.P. Thompson to the plaza blocks that host the namesake fountain.²⁹

²⁶ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - July 27, 1932 - page 14](#)

²⁷ [Oregon Journal \(published as Oregon SUNDAY Journal\) - July 31, 1932 - page 4](#)

²⁸ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - August 1, 1932 - page 2](#)

²⁹ [G. A. R. Members Talk At Schools Aged Veterans - Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - May 30, 1907 - page 10](#)

The previous year's celebration saw Oregonian editor Harvey W. Scott deliver a speech before the formal unveiling of the (still in situ) Spanish-American War Soldier's Monument at Lownsdale Square.³⁰ Portland's contingent of the B.E.F. held numerous meetings at the Plaza Blocks before heading east to join the ill-fated encampment in Washington D.C, just months before the disputed rally.³¹

It's also worth noting that Dirk de Jonge had been involved with an earlier effort to gain access to the veteran's bonus the year before, and the manner in which the attempt unfolded most likely provoked Mayor Baker's odd reference to orderly conduct in response to the United Front's permit request. De Jonge's previous group, the United Veterans Employment League, paraded through downtown with banners bearing slogans such as "bonus and beer" and signs expressing support for the Soviet Union.³² De Jonge was arrested and fined³³ for organizing the event that began with a rally at the "Plaza Blocks" (most likely Lownsdale Square) in October of 1931, in defiance of the city council and mayor previously denying him a permit to stage a parade.³⁴ After his trial, the group reconstituted under the name "The National Veterans' Association of Enlisted Men" and vowed that they had "eliminated the communist element of the former organization."³⁵

As promised, on August 1st the crowd gathered at the Thompson Elk and marched to the Japanese Consulate. The parade was photographed and those images were stored by the

³⁰ ["Will Celebrate Memorial Day Portland Will Honor the Brave Who Died for Their Country. Unveiling." Oregonian, 30 May 1906, p. 9.](#)

³¹ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - April 29, 1932 - page 17](#)

³² [Oregonian \(published as The Sunday Oregonian.\) - October 4, 1931 - page 18](#)

³³ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - October 27, 1931 - page 11](#)

³⁴ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - October 1, 1931 - page 6](#)

³⁵ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - November 3, 1931 - page 7](#) [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - November 3, 1931 - page 7](#)

Portland Police Bureau's "Red Squad." Clearly visible are banners referencing the Bonus Army, probably reflecting Dirk de Jong's newly created alliance between a faction of the B.E.F. and the Communist Party.³⁶ Days after the parade, Dirk de Jonge announced he was running for mayor of Portland as a Communist.³⁷ He lost by a wide margin.³⁸

The would-be politician was thrust into the national spotlight a few years later, following a headline grabbing arrest that would result in him being brought before the Supreme Court of the United States. On July 18th, 1934 Kirk De Jonge was detained with 35 others during raids on the Communist Party headquarters and the Marine Workers Industrial Hall. De Jonge was convicted under Oregon's syndicalism law and sentenced to seven years in prison on November 26th.³⁹ The verdict was upheld on appeal in the Oregon Supreme Court on November 26th of the same year.⁴⁰ Dirk de Jonge was released from prison in September of 1936 pending appeal and a few weeks later the U.S. Supreme Court announced that they would hear his case. On January 4th, 1937 The United State Supreme Court ruled that Oregon's syndicalism law was invalid and vacated Dirk de Jonge's conviction.⁴¹ He returned to Oregon and settled in Newberg, where he resided until his death on March 17th, 1976.⁴²

The Killing of Ricky Charles Johnson

Portland Police officer Kenneth Sanford shot and killed 17 year old Ricky Charles Johnson inside of a vacant North Portland house in the early morning hours of March 14th, 1975 during a

³⁶ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - August 1, 1932 - page 15](#)

³⁷ [Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian.\) - August 4, 1932 - page 4](#)

³⁸ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - November 11, 1932 - page 7](#)

³⁹ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - November 26, 1934 - page 1](#)

⁴⁰ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - November 26, 1935 - page 1](#)

⁴¹ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON DAILY JOURNAL\) - January 4, 1937 - page 1](#)

⁴² [March 18, 1976 | Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON Journal\) | Portland, Oregon | Page 25](#)

hastily planned sting operation. Johnson was Black and Sanford was white. On March 12th police had received a call from a cab driver who had been robbed while delivering food to 3973 N. Gantenbein Ave. after 1:00 a.m. The taxi company received a similar phone call 48 hours later, requesting delivery from the same restaurant to the same address. The cabbie immediately called the police.⁴³

Portland Police officers gathered on a street corner nearby and devised a plan to have an officer put on the cab driver's clothing, conceal a pistol in an empty restaurant take-out container, and catch the robbery suspects in the act. Sgt. Melvin Nilsen selected Kenneth Sandford for the operation, based on his belief that the officer was "stable and mature."

Upon being let into the house by 17-year-old Homer Zachary, Sanford was confronted by Ricky Charles Johnson, who was brandishing a pistol. According to Sanford, Johnson demanded money and threatened to shoot the undercover officer. Sanford said that he identified himself as a police officer and as Johnson turned away, Sanford shot him in the head. Homer Zachary ran out the front door as the shots were fired and though he was unarmed, Sanford ran out onto the porch of the house and fired at him as he fled. The 17 year old stopped immediately and surrendered to officers who had been posted outside during the sting operation. Officers discovered that the pistol Johnson had been holding was empty after he was killed. Johnson was the 4th Black person killed by PPB in 12 months.⁴⁴

Portland's Black community immediately mobilized; the NAACP called on the District Attorney to investigate the shooting. On Saturday March 23rd, 1975 Multnomah County District

⁴³ [Oregonian \(published as The Oregonian\) - March 15, 1975 - page 1](#)

⁴⁴ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON Journal\) - April 3, 1975 - page 9](#)

Attorney Harl Haas granted the request and announced that there would be a special inquest with a six juror panel that would be tasked with determining if the shooting of Rickey Charles Johnson was justified.

Less than an hour after the inquest was announced, about 100 Black Portlanders surrounded the PPB headquarters at 222 SW Pine St., calling for Police Chief Bruce Baker to be fired. Six representatives met with Chief Baker with a list of demands and after an hour departed for a planned rally at the center of Lownsdale Square. A photo of the rally was on the front page of the Sunday Oregonian the next morning.⁴⁵ The paper was also critical of the decision to conduct a sting operation and like many in the community, questioned why Johnson was shot in the back of the head.⁴⁶

On April 3rd, 1975 the inquest was conducted in a packed courtroom; only 96 members of the public and press were allowed in. Kent Ford, founder of the Portland Black Panther chapter, was admitted after a brief skirmish with Deputy Brian Reynolds of the Portland Police Bureau. Trailblazer's center Bill Walton also attended the hearing in person. Two hundred others watched on CCTV from a hearing room in the same complex, and 100 people were turned away.⁴⁷

The jury ruled the shooting was justified. This shooting and ruling would continue to be a flashpoint with the Black community in later years.⁴⁸

Listening Post Quote

⁴⁵ [Oregonian \(published as The Sunday Oregonian.\) - March 23, 1975 - page 1](#)

⁴⁶ [Oregonian \(published as The Sunday Oregonian.\) - March 23, 1975 - page 49](#)

⁴⁷ [Oregonian \(published as The Oregonian\) - April 3, 1975 - page 48](#)

⁴⁸ [Oregon Journal \(published as OREGON Journal\) - April 4, 1975 - page 2](#)

In the Listening Post column published in the Oregonian on July 17th 1921, the writer asserted that “You can get into any kind of argument at Lownsdale Square. In the olden days the Roman, shrewd judges of human nature, provided a forum as a safety valve for their population. In London Hyde park is the place where the public airs its views and grievances. In New York and other large American cities they have spots set aside for public debate. Portland’s safety valve is in Lownsdale Square and here they come to blow off pressure.”⁴⁹ Perhaps this tradition continues into the 21th century. In recent years we have seen the Thompson Elk and Lownsdale Square feature prominently in protests, most notably during the 2011 Occupy Portland encampment and nightly protests during the summer of 2020 in the wake of George Floyd’s murder at the hands of Minneapolis Police Officers.

⁴⁹ [The Listening Post - Oregonian \(published as Morning Oregonian\) - July 17, 1921 - page 6](#)