

# Police march en masse at Toronto funeral

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This past Tuesday, residents of Toronto and Canadians right across the country bore witness to one of the most heavily publicized and cynical police propaganda campaigns ever launched in Canada.

On that day, 12,000 uniformed police officers from all parts of the country marched in a solemn procession through Toronto's downtown core to attend a fallen officer's funeral service held at the city's convention centre. The demonstration of police solidarity—the largest such funeral procession in the history of the country—was purportedly to honour the memory of Toronto police sergeant Ryan Russell, who had been run over and killed last week by a man erratically driving a stolen snow plough. The event and the media coverage that accompanied it had all the hallmarks of a state funeral but for the fact that prior to the tragic events of last week Sergeant Russell was largely unknown beyond his circle of family, friends and colleagues.

In the run-up to the funeral, the city's broadcast news airwaves and newspaper columns were filled with paeans to the dead officer, who left behind a wife and a two-year-old son. The city's police chief, Bill Blair, immediately after Russell's death, branded Richard Kachkar, the homeless man who drove the stolen vehicle as a "murderer." He now lies in the hospital recovering from gunshot wounds inflicted by Emergency Task Force members. Even the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's sports department weighed in on the matter, allowing Don Cherry, the CBC's bombastic hockey commentator on the network's iconic "Hockey Night in Canada" telecast to pay tribute to Russell while at the same time branding Kachkar a "wacko".

On the morning of the procession, major downtown street arteries were closed, flags on government buildings were placed at half-mast and local and national television stations pre-empted regular programming with "live" saturation coverage of the event that extended well into the late afternoon. The country's national broadcaster, the CBC, breathlessly covered the entire three-hour-long funeral orations. On the streets of the city and in the suburban neighbourhoods, on-duty police cruisers, some marshaled into small convoys, blared their sirens and flashed their "cherry tops" at pre-appointed times. As the thousands of police officers exited the convention centre in the gathering twilight, the Canada Lands Company, a Crown Corporation, saw fit to illuminate Toronto's famous CN Tower

in "police blue".

In the media's coverage of the event, no embellishment was beyond the pale. CTV news anchor Lloyd Robertson gushed that members of the public "streamed" out of downtown bank towers to pay their respects—in fact, aside from members of the constabulary and other security-related outfits, barely two thousand spectators lined the procession route. More than one television commentator noted that even the grey skies over rainy Toronto "wept" that day. Rosie DiManno, a long serving police/military sycophant at the *Toronto Star* wrote that during the procession even "the canine unit's German Shepherds began to whimper as if sensing the anguish of the city".

What anguish? Certainly there was present amongst much of the population, a genuine human sympathy, particularly for the policeman's widow and baby boy—a fact not lost on the nation's news editors who covered, a la John John Kennedy, their morning editions with full colour photographs of the angelic little boy attending the service. But if there is anguish in the city, it is a direct result of growing poverty, hunger, wage cuts, evictions, homelessness and the family break-ups that often painfully ensue—all occurrences perpetrated by a ruling elite gorging with super-profits derived from this misery and defended by an ever-more brutal constabulary enforcing their will.

Despite a total blackout of these realities by the media, one could get a flavour of the real sentiments amongst whole sections of the population through a perusal of the various "cyber comments" sections appended to news service articles on the funeral.

"I think most cops are just thugs who hide behind a badge, and think they are above the law which they are hired to uphold", wrote a reader of the *Canadian Press* coverage. Another wrote, "I never thought one way or another bout the police. However, given the circumstances, what I viewed on television today made me nauseated. What a bunch of egotistical people so filled with visions of self-importance. The circumstances were sickening. I had to turn it off." Felix P. commented, "It's too bad the cop-worshipping media don't make a big circus out of it when they murder somebody. How many of those parasites showed up at the funeral of Robert Dziekanski (tasered to death by four RCMP officers)? Yeah, the cops are a family alright. So is the Mafia." Giron F. remarked, "100,000 are homeless, go hungry with no place. Children

going to school without good food...and look here what we see.” Lai Justin simply posted a list of 18 citizens killed at the hands of the Canadian police over the past period.

One commentator asked succinctly, “Who pays for all of this?” In fact, the monies for the rental of the Metro Convention Centre and the lavish funeral ceremony came from the budget of the Toronto Police Services whilst much of the travel costs and hotel accommodations for the out-of-town officers were also provided from public funds.

Lost in all the pro-police propaganda has been the plight of the alleged perpetrator, Richard Kachkar. The 44-year-old drifter, with no previous police record save for a bicycle by-law infraction, had hijacked the idling snow plough in the early morning hours, running through the snow in bare feet, then careening through the city in a low-speed police chase before striking and killing Sergeant Russell.

Kachkar had just left a homeless shelter where he had been staying earlier that night. Acquaintances gave statements that Kachkar appeared agitated and unstable over a failed marriage. A heavy-machine operation instructor noted that Kachkar had recently failed a test for an operator’s license. Prior to coming to Toronto acquaintances in St. Catherines, Ontario said Kachkar had occasionally lived in a dilapidated, heatless storage building that he had bought for \$29,000 some years ago. Whilst being “taken down” by the Emergency Task Force who had stopped the snow plough on a downtown front yard, Kachkar, who was not armed, was reportedly shot three times by the police.

In an article published in *Globe and Mail*, reporters gave the real reason for the massive police display in the streets of Toronto on Tuesday. “Sergeant Russell’s death has turned a tide of public support in favour of Toronto Police after a difficult year that included accusations of brutality and misconduct following the G20 summit.”

Indeed. Over the G20 weekend held last June in Toronto, while world leaders met behind a barbed-wire perimeter at the very same venue at which Tuesday’s services were held to discuss another round of austerity measures against the international working class, the 14,000 strong “Integrated Security Force” had rampaged through the ranks of peaceful demonstrators, arresting over 1,000 individuals and incarcerating them in a filthy, make-shift holding pen in the city’s east end.

Over the course of 72 hours, protestors were bludgeoned, kicked, tear gassed, trampled by police horses and shot at with rubber and plastic bullets. Homes were raided for “preventative arrests” without a warrant being shown. Journalists covering these unprecedented events were arrested and assaulted.

Demonstrators were hauled into detention cages, strip searched and denied legal counsel. There, detainees suffering from concussions and deep lacerations were denied medical attention. A diabetic entering into shock was denied treatment

for four hours.

The “kennel” as it was dubbed by police guards, was crammed with people arrested for such egregious offences as carrying “dangerous weapons” such as protest signs and noise-makers. Smokers carrying lighters were accused of possessing “incendiary devices”. Youth with the temerity to wear black clothing were swept up by the police dragnet in a program dubbed “catch and release” by rank-and-file cops.

In one particularly provocative action, hundreds of heavily armed riot police corralled some 200 people at a downtown street-corner, forcing them to stand in a driving thunderstorm for four hours. This “kettling operation” detained not only a handful of youth demonstrating against the G20 but commuters heading home from weekend shopping, dozens of citizens departing from World Cup soccer celebrations, journalists covering the police build-up and entire families living in the area. The scenes of drenched and shivering people, crying children and distressed family pets struck a chord amongst broad layers of the city’s populace disgusted with the actions of the police.

Since the G20 summit held in Toronto this past June, Canadians have continued to hear (and see video clips) of grievous police brutality including defenseless and innocent citizens being brutally kicked by officers in Ottawa and Kelowna, British Columbia.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, “The events in Toronto are a serious warning. The level of official violence is being ratcheted up. In the face of the upheavals to come, the state in every country is working up plans for mass repression. What dominates the politics and social relations of every country is the global economic crisis, which has reached an advanced stage. All the emphasis must now be placed on the development of a consciously socialist and internationalist movement of the working class, the only progressive response to the police state provocations and violence of the ruling elites.”

The massive show of police “solidarity” on the streets of Toronto this past Tuesday, and the shameless response of the country’s media only underscores the urgency of this task.



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