

Assailant charged with murder following Toronto van attack

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Twenty-five year-old Alek Minassian, who ran over pedestrians in Toronto's north end Monday afternoon killing 10 people and causing panic and mayhem, has been charged with 10 counts of murder and 13 counts of attempted murder.

Minassian is accused of mounting the sidewalk with a rented white van multiple times, so as to deliberately target pedestrians on a busy, more than kilometer-long section of Yonge Street, Toronto's principal thoroughfare.

At the conclusion of this spree, he surrendered, after first disembarking from the van and repeatedly urging a cop, "Kill me."

The political establishment and corporate media have responded to Monday's atrocity with a combination of perplexity, reaction, and Canadian nationalism. Alongside a torrent of newspaper articles that insist Minassian's outburst of homicidal violence defies explanation, there have been shrill calls for the state to be given additional surveillance and other powers to keep citizens "safe." Just one day after the attack, at a previously scheduled meeting of G-7 public safety or interior ministers in Toronto, one of the major topics of discussion was the need for additional state powers to combat attacks on so-called "soft targets."

Meanwhile, the fact that police induced Minassian to surrender, rather than simply gunning him down, has been cited ad nauseam as proof Canada is different and superior to the US, and Canada's police benign. In fact, there are numerous instances of Canadian police killing people in evident mental distress, to say nothing of their role in suppressing the 2012 and 2015 Quebec student strikes and the 2010 anti-G-20 protest in Toronto.

In comments from Parliament Hill Tuesday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau offered platitudes about all Canadians "standing united" in the face of the "senseless" attack. The next day he remarked that its motive may never be uncovered.

Much ink has been spilt speculating on Minassian's evident psychological distress and its roots, including the fact that in his teens he attended a program for special needs students, was bullied at high school, and lacked friends. Former classmates invariably said that to their knowledge he had never indulged in any violent or deliberately threatening behavior, but was socially awkward, had strange tics and mannerisms and likely

suffered from a neurodevelopment disorder.

According to a CBC report, Minassian was about to graduate from Seneca College and was looking for work as a software programmer. During his college studies, he had worked several part-time jobs as a developer, but despite having what were described as formidable skills failed to land full-time work. According to a *Toronto Star* report, one recruiter described him as "the best hire we never hired."

While many things remain to be determined about Minassian's psychological makeup, as well as the specific trigger for his violent outburst, attempts to explain Monday's attack by focusing solely on Minassian's state of mind are wide of the mark. The fact that Minassian decided to unleash such brutal violence on his victims, none of whom he knew personally, is bound up with and, in the final analysis, a product of malignant tendencies within an increasingly dysfunctional Canadian society.

Violence, anxiety and fear increasingly pervade Canadian society.

Last Monday's violent outburst occurred under conditions in which Canada, in alliance with US imperialism, has been engaged in virtually uninterrupted imperialist wars of aggression for the past quarter-century, that is the entirety of Minassian's life. Canadian authorities have hailed the use of ruthless and murderous violence as necessary and salutary during military interventions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Somalia.

These wars have not only affected the civilians and soldiers directly caught up in them, but have profoundly influenced social and political life. Violent militarist propaganda on the news media and in political discourse has become a fact of daily life. It was, after all, former Prime Minister Stephen Harper who celebrated Canada's reputed battlefield prowess, by trumpeting Canada as a "warrior nation."

Minassian was himself attracted to the Canadian Armed Forces. He entered the Canadian military last August, only to request a discharge in October after less than two weeks of basic training. A fellow recruit told CBC he was repeatedly disciplined for failing to understand or properly follow orders.

Murderous violence, especially mass shootings, have not attained the same level in Canada as in the US, but violent

outbursts directed at persons unknown to the attacker are becoming more frequent. In October 2014, a Quebec man rammed a vehicle into two armed forces personnel in the town of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu killing one; just two days, later Michael Zehaf-Bibeau opened fire on Parliament Hill, after claiming the life of a Canadian soldier on guard at the War Memorial.

The political establishment responded to these attacks by implementing a battery of anti-democratic measures as part of Bill C-51, granting the intelligence agencies more surveillance powers and Canada's premier spy agency, CSIS, the right to break virtually any law in actively "disrupting" vaguely-defined "threats." Trudeau's Liberal government retained the fundamentals of these reactionary measures in its Bill C-59.

In January 2017, a youth in Quebec City, who was a xenophobic Quebec nationalist and admirer of Donald Trump and France's National Front, opened fire in a Quebec City mosque, killing six worshippers. In October, a Somali refugee, apparently driven to desperation by his plight, drove a van at high speed through downtown Edmonton, injuring five people. Notwithstanding media efforts to hype up the incident as an act of Islamist terrorism, Abdulahi Hasan Sharif ended up facing no terrorism charges and instead will stand trial on five counts of attempted murder.

Before Minassian's identity was released Monday, far-right media outlets as well as several journalists employed by the so-called mainstream media eagerly sought to portray the attack as an act of Islamist terrorism. CBC reporter Natasha Fatah tweeted at 2:36 PM Monday afternoon, "#BREAKING Witness to truck ramming into pedestrians tells local Toronto TV station that the driver looked wide-eyed, angry and Middle Eastern." Candice Malcolm, a columnist with the right-wing *Toronto Sun*, joined in, claiming that in terms of methods, the attack was inspired by ISIS. *Sun* editor Anthony Furey wrote, "Please stop telling angry Torontonians to not call this assault on our great city a terror attack. Yes, there are still facts unknown, but this vehicular ramming fits the bill of what terror groups repeatedly called for in Canada. And people are rightfully mad."

These right-wing forces, together with far-right sites like Rebel Media and Infowars which pushed the same line, were clearly hoping to exploit the narrative of an Islamist terror attack to advance their own political agenda before the bodies had even been removed from the street.

The day after the attack, the official opposition Conservative Party pressed parliament to adopt a motion urging the Trudeau government to prevent migrants fleeing the Trump administration's anti-immigrant witch hunt from entering Canada. Should the government fail to protect "our borders," Canadians will "rapidly" withdraw their "social license for immigration," vowed Tory opposition critic Michelle Rempel.

Like the other imperialist powers, Canada is riven by unprecedented levels of social inequality that are provoking

explosive social tensions. In the Toronto area, homelessness has risen sharply, amid a property bubble that has driven housing costs through the roof. And tens of thousands of traditional industrial jobs have been replaced by precarious, temporary and/or part-time employment.

These developments, rooted in the crisis of the capitalist system, are having a devastating impact on the lives of working people already struggling to make ends meet. Under such conditions, it is not at all surprising that a psychologically unstable and isolated individual like Minassian snapped and sought a violent way out of his predicament.

This is even more so given the prominence of reactionary, right-wing political forces, which channel the social anger and frustration of the most demoralized and backward sections of the population in an anti-social and misanthropic direction.

Evidence has emerged that strongly suggests Minassian's murderous rampage was fueled by right-wing political conceptions, specifically those of the so-called "incel" or involuntary celibate movement. The incel movement, which rages against women for denying men sexual relations and excluding them from social life, is associated with alt-right and right-wing extremist groups.

Immediately prior to launching his attack, Minassian published a Facebook post in which he declared that the "incel rebellion has already begun," and praised Elliot Rodger, a 22-year-old California man who killed six people in 2014 before taking his own life. Prior to his attack, Rodger posted a 140-page manifesto online vowing to wage war on women.

Although all the victims of Monday's attack have yet to be officially identified, Toronto police have confirmed that the casualties were predominantly women. Anne Marie D'amico, who worked for an investment organization and also engaged in volunteer work, and Dorothy Sewell, an 80-year-old grandmother, have been identified as victims by family and friends. It has also been reported that a single mother of a seven-year-old boy was killed after completing her first day at a new job working at a school cafeteria. Reflecting Toronto's multi-cultural population, reports indicate two South Korean nationals and a Jordanian man were also among the dead.

Whatever may yet come to light regarding Minassian's specific motivation for ploughing through pedestrians with a van last Monday, the growing symptoms of societal breakdown expressed in all areas of social and political life guarantees that it is only a matter of time before a similar horrific incident takes place.



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