

Mass protests erupt across Canada against police brutality and Trump

Our reporters
6 June 2020

Tens of thousands of people are expected to take to the streets of Toronto today in the largest protest against police violence and racism in Canada to date. Today's rally comes after a week of protests from Halifax to Vancouver involving thousands of young people and workers of all races and backgrounds.

Major protests began last weekend, with demonstrations attracting thousands in Toronto on Saturday, and Montreal and Vancouver on Sunday. On Wednesday, at least 2,000 participated in a "Justice for all victims of police violence" rally in Calgary, Alberta, while around 5,000 protested in the southwestern Ontario city of Kitchener-Waterloo.

At the Calgary protest, which was the third in the city within a week, participants chanted "I can't breathe," "No justice, No peace" and "Black lives matter." Another protest Monday attracted over 1,000 people.

The immediate trigger for the demonstrations was the Minneapolis police's brutal murder of George Floyd, an African-American man, and the mass multi-racial, multi-ethnic working class protests that have erupted in its wake in hundreds of cities across the United States.

But protesters were also angered by systemic police brutality and harassment of Afro-Canadians, immigrants, and indigenous people, as well as the broader social crisis that has dramatically intensified as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the ruling elites' criminally negligent response.

Jenny, a participant at the Kitchener-Waterloo protest, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I've been out of work for a few months now because I was a waitress and my restaurant closed. It doesn't look like it's going to open again either. I like that everybody here is wearing masks. This COVID thing is horrible. All my friends are out of work too. I'm totally pissed at all this racism and I'm totally pissed at being unemployed. I'm totally pissed about everything, if you want to know the truth."

Over 8 million Canadians—representing some 40 percent of the workforce—have applied for the federal government's makeshift Canada Emergency Response Benefit. It pays a miserly \$2,000 per month for workers who have lost their jobs or are unable to work due to the pandemic. Meanwhile, corporations are seizing on generous government support to restructure their operations and permanently layoff thousands of workers. The latest announcement in this regard came yesterday, when airplane manufacturer Bombardier unveiled plans to permanently slash 2,500 jobs.

Even as youth and workers were taking to the streets to show their solidarity with the US protests against state violence and denounce police abuse in Canada, there was a series of new incidents and exposures of police brutality from across the country.

British Columbia's Independent Investigations Office recommended May 29 that the Crown charge five police officers for illegal use of force and obstruction of justice in the July 2017 death of 35-year-old Dale Culver in Prince George. The indigenous man was attacked by the officers with pepper spray as they attempted to arrest him. He subsequently developed breathing problems and died.

Video also emerged of officers aggressively beating a man in Kelowna, BC, last Saturday during an arrest. In New Brunswick, a police officer shot and killed a 26-year-old Native woman during a purported "wellness check" Thursday in Edmundston. In Nunavut, a police officer faces a criminal investigation after being videoed driving a truck into an Inuit man Monday evening, whom he said he wanted to apprehend because he was intoxicated.

In response to George Floyd's murder, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other Canadian political leaders have made hypocritical statements about combatting racism. But they have refused to criticize US President Donald Trump for ordering a ruthless police-military assault on the protests against police brutality, overturning

constitutional prohibitions on the deployment of the military against US civilians, and seeking to establish a presidential dictatorship. Trudeau's 21-second silence Tuesday when he was asked by a reporter to comment on Trump's actions, and subsequent evasive replies speaks volumes about the commitment of the Canadian political establishment to basic democratic rights.

The Canadian ruling elite's cowardly and conniving response to the Trump-ordered police rampage and his assault on core democratic rights and the US Constitution is bound up with their predatory global imperialist interests, which depend on deepening their military-strategic partnership with the United States. It is also rooted in their fear that the US protests will have—and indeed already are having—a catalytic impact on the class struggle in Canada, where, as in the US, the past four decades have seen a dramatic deterioration in the social position of the working class.

The \$650 billion bailout of the banks and big business, organized by the Trudeau Liberal government and Bank of Canada and supported by all the parties in parliament, will further exacerbate unprecedented levels of social inequality, and is paving the way for a massive new class war assault on jobs, worker rights, and public services (see: “Canadian establishment shrugs off Trump's authoritarian power grab, voices “horror” over mass protests”).

While Trudeau remained tongue-tied on Trump's incitement of police violence, which has led to the deaths of several protesters, the injuring of scores, and more than 10,000 arrests, he found his voice Thursday when it came to denouncing Chinese repression in Hong Kong. Referring to Beijing's anti-democratic national security law, which strengthens the Chinese state's control over Hong Kong, Trudeau declared, “We have worked with some of our closest allies including the UK, Australia and others to condemn the actions taken by China in Hong Kong. We are extremely concerned with their stepping away from the one country, two systems agreement that was signed a few decades ago. We need to ensure that rights are defended around the world including in Hong Kong.”

As Trudeau's response to Trump's criminal anti-democratic actions demonstrates, Ottawa's championing of “human rights” in Hong Kong is a sham. Over the past decade, Canada has become fully integrated into Washington's reckless drive to thwart China's “rise,” including its advanced preparations for war with nuclear-armed China.

Trudeau's silence on Trump's actions enjoys quasi-unanimous support within ruling class circles. Bob Rae, a onetime Ontario New Democratic Party premier and later interim leader of the federal Liberal Party, tweeted his support for Trudeau saying, “The Prime Minister of Canada is not going to give a running commentary on US politics and President Trump.”

In contrast with the frightened, anti-democratic response within Canada's elite to the developing clash between the American working class and a fascist president bent on establishing a dictatorial regime, protesters who spoke to the WSWS expressed unequivocal support for the biggest protests in the US since the 1960s, and their opposition to police violence and the growing attack on democratic rights in both countries.

Jamal, a young retail worker attending the Kitchener protest, spoke about his personal experience with police harassment. “Racism is not just in the States,” he said. “None of my friends trust the cops. This corner of the park here is where a lot of us like to hang out, especially on summer nights. We always get inspected by the cops for just sitting around talking. But it's a big park and you never see them going into any other part where there are always a lot more people.”

Jamal also explained that while racism plays a role, the targets of police violence are the poor and oppressed of all races. “It's obvious they are profiling us because a lot of us are black,” he commented. “But you know, we have a lot of white friends too and they don't get treated any better where we hang out. It's even worse for the homeless guys who like to sleep in the area. I see them getting pushed around all the time.”

Dave, a student who joined the protest, added, “Watching that cop squeeze the life out of George Floyd was totally outrageous. I think people are starting to wake up. Enough is enough!” He also addressed the connection between police violence and the broader assault on public services and worker rights. “This town is surprising me. I was at that big teachers' strike rally downtown last February. That was something to see too,” he said, referring to a march organized by striking Ontario teachers in opposition to the savage austerity demands of the hard-right provincial government of Doug Ford.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact