

Canadian government summits on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: a political fraud

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Over the course of two days this week, Canada's federal Liberal government is holding two separate "emergency summits" on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. These meetings will do nothing to uproot anti-Jewish or anti-Muslim hatred. Rather, they are grotesque political stunts, organized to obscure the real issues behind a spate of violent anti-Muslim attacks and a troubling growth in hate crimes targeting Jews; and to shape public discourse in line with the domestic and global interests of Canadian imperialism.

The government used Wednesday's "National summit on Antisemitism" to equate left-wing opposition to the crimes of the Israeli state and Zionism with anti-Semitism. Today, they will pretend that the past two decades of Canadian history did not happen. The complicity of Canadian imperialism in the scapegoating of Muslims, its staunch support for the Israeli state's ongoing dispossession and repression of the Palestinian people, and its alliances with far-right forces—including those who promote hostility to Jews and Muslims—whenever politically expedient, will be covered up with weasel words. Everything will be chalked up to "racism" and empty appeals for "Canadians of all faiths to come together" will be made. But the fact remains: the violence which the Canadian state condones and perpetrates against Palestinians, Afghans, Libyans, Syrians, Yemenis and Iraqis, and has justified in the name of a spurious "war on terror," is spilling over into far-right attacks on Muslims in Canada.

The twin summits are the Liberal government's pragmatic, impromptu response to several recent events. Israel's latest eruption of genocidal violence against the Palestinians, which claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, sparked widespread public outrage and large demonstrations in Canadian cities. The brutal June 8 attack in London, Ontario that killed four members of a Muslim family, the Afzaals, shocked the country.

On June 10 the Liberals poached one of the three Green Party MPs, Jenica Atwin. She had clashed with Green Party leader Anamie Paul, a staunch Zionist, including over tweets labelling Israel an apartheid state, and had been threatened by Paul aide Nathan Zatzman, with deselection as a Green candidate for her criticisms of Israeli state violence. Trudeau and his top advisers viewed Atwin's defection as a pre-election coup. But the government immediately came under fire for embracing an "apologist for Hamas" from much of the corporate media, the Conservative opposition and sections of the Liberal caucus. The Liberal top brass quickly prevailed upon Atwin to make dutiful public mea culpas. But even before then, and as part of the same effort in political damage control, they decided to act on demands from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the country's leading pro-Zionist organization, and B'nai B'rith for an emergency summit on anti-Semitism.

As this was playing out, the NDP, taking up a call from the National Council of Canadian Muslims, pressed for a national summit on Islamophobia in response to the London terrorist atrocity. Initially Trudeau was non-committal, but on June 11, the same day the government

announced its national summit on anti-Semitism, the House of Commons unanimously adopted a non-binding motion from the NDP MP for London-Fanshawe, Lindsay Mathysen, calling for the emergency summit on Islamophobia.

The very fact that the government has chosen to convene separate "emergency summits" speaks volumes as to their worth. It wants to frame anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as if they are entirely separate maladies: one, say a cancer-like disease and the other a psychosis of the mind. In reality, they are two symptoms of a malignant capitalist body politic. Far-right elements have been emboldened by the sharp shift of establishment politics in Canada and internationally ever further to the right, including the vilification of immigrants as threats to Canadian and Quebec "values" and the promotion of militarism and imperialist violence.

Canada's ruling elite fully embraced Washington's "war on terror," which demonized Muslims in the Middle East and at home as extremists and potential terrorists. For a decade and a half the "war on terror" played a central role in Canadian political life, serving as the pretext for foreign aggression and war and for a massive expansion of the powers and reach of the national security apparatus. All the while, Ottawa and Washington had, and continue to have, a completely mercenary relationship with Islamist extremist organizations, at times using them as proxies in their regime-change operations, as in Libya and Syria, and other times citing their presence to justify new foreign interventions.

Muslims have been the targets and victims of some of the most egregious crimes of the Canadian ruling class and its state over the past two decades. These include:

- The invasion and decade-long occupation of Afghanistan by Canadian troops, which featured house-to-house searches and arrests and the transfer of Afghan captives to be tortured by the CIA without any due process whatsoever.
- The provision of covert diplomatic and military support for the US invasion and destruction of Iraq in 2003, including weapons, Canadian Navy ships, refuelling and intelligence. Canada was deeply complicit in a war that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands and destroyed Iraqi society.
- The Canadian military's participation in the destruction of Libya during the NATO-led air war of 2011.
- The extra-legal torture and persecution of Maher Arar, and the vilification directed at Omar Khadr, a Canadian child soldier in Afghanistan, who, with Ottawa's complicity, was tortured and detained at Guantanamo Bay for 10 years.
- The campaign of the Harper Government against "barbaric cultural practices," which sought to whip up animosity against Muslims.
- The chauvinist campaign Quebec's ruling elite has mounted to depict immigrants, especially Muslims, as a threat to Quebec values. This has resulted in Bill 21, which bans the wearing of religious symbols, such as the hijab, by teachers and public officials in positions of authority, and denies public services to Muslim women who wear the niqab or burqa.

The unbroken record of pandering by Conservative and Liberal governments to India's far-right, Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, which has systematically persecuted the country's Muslim minority. This has also involved Canada's two main parties fashioning electoral appeals to BJP sympathizers among Indo-Canadians.

Could the murder of the Afzaal family by a right wing-terrorist and ongoing violent attacks on Muslim women in Edmonton have something to do with this sorry history? No effort will be spared at today's conclave to cover up these connections.

If the conference on Islamophobia aims to cover up the horrific record of Canadian imperialism in devastating the lives of millions of people throughout the Middle East, the conference on anti-Semitism is aimed at criminalizing left-wing opposition to militarism and war. By labelling virtually all criticism of the far-right Israeli government's brutal suppression of the Palestinian people as anti-Semitism, the Trudeau government and other backers of the summit are adding fuel to an international slander campaign that aims to tar left-wing criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic.

The anti-Semitism conference was not aimed at exposing the far right, which is the real source of anti-Semitic hatred and violence and is on the rise in Canada. On the contrary, the Canadian ruling class is increasingly politically aligned with these elements. It is significant in this regard that Canada's corporate media has remained virtually silent on the vicious Islamophobic campaigns by close international allies, like French President Emmanuel Macron, and the support extended by the German ruling elite to the anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), now the official opposition in the German parliament.

Instead, the political establishment has focused in recent years in denouncing and trying to effectively criminalize criticism of Israel from the left. Both the federal government and Ontario provincial parliament have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, which equates criticism of the Israeli government and the Zionist project of creating an exclusivist Jewish state through the dispossession of the Palestinians, as anti-Semitic. This was the definition used by the British ruling class and the Blairite right within the Labour Party to witch-hunt former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters by branding them anti-Semites. As the *World Socialist Web Site* previously observed, "The level of cynicism involved" in this smear campaign "beggars belief. Anti-Semitism, racial hatred directed towards the Jews, is historically identified with the far right, especially with Nazi Germany, though it had many adherents within the British ruling class, including among the Royal family. Now the left is being targeted as the source of anti-Semitism even as the fascist Alternative for Germany has been elevated to the position of official opposition in the Bundestag and similar formations, including Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France, are being cultivated by the ruling elite throughout Europe."

The increasing willingness of many people to publicly call Israeli state crimes by their proper name has disturbed the ruling class. The rampages of right-wing Israeli mobs through the streets of East Jerusalem crying "Death to Arabs!"—a call for genocide effectively endorsed by the Israeli government, whose supporters were shouting the slogan—occasioned large public demonstrations of protest in Canadian cities. The Israeli and Canadian authorities immediately sought to spuriously conflate these demonstrations with anti-Semitism. Likewise, left-wing political figures have been targeted. Niki Ashton, a New Democratic Party MP who is fraudulently portrayed as a "socialist" by various pseudo-left groups, was the object of a vicious smear campaign in March for agreeing to speak alongside Corbyn at an online meeting. Palestinian activists at a Toronto demonstration who defended themselves against a violent assault carried out by the local leader of the Jewish Defense League were accused of "anti-Semitism" by Toronto Mayor John Tory.

There has also been a rise in real anti-Semitic attacks, which themselves are facilitated by the deliberate conflation of the state of Israel with Judaism on the part of the ruling class. In May a shop in Toronto's Kensington Market was spray painted with anti-Semitic graffiti. A young man "of no fixed address" was arrested and charged with a hate crime.

Tellingly, the man tasked with pointing the finger at "left-wing anti-Semitism" at yesterday's summit was Irwin Cotler, a "human rights" lawyer, former Liberal cabinet minister and the Trudeau government's "Special Envoy for Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism." Cotler, who chaired the anti-Semitism event, earned his "human rights" credentials defending the far-right Russian dissident/Israeli politician Natan Sharansky in his bid to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel in the 1980s. Sharansky, who held several cabinet positions in Israeli governments 20 years ago, was a vocal supporter and architect of Israeli expansion into the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Cotler has made a lucrative career conflating expressions of political opposition to Israeli state crimes against the Palestinians with "anti-Semitism," and in recent years has been among the most strident voices in the Canadian establishment calling for aggression against Iran and China.

The claim that political opposition to Israeli state crimes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is tantamount to "anti-Semitism" hobbles the fight against real acts of anti-Semitism, which is a scourge, and as the events of the 20th century demonstrated, a mortal threat to the working class.

But the Canadian government is determined to cover up the source of that threat, which is not principled political opposition to the crimes of the Israeli state and its imperialist patrons, but rather the political far right, including active fascist networks which operate freely inside Canada's own military and police ranks. Just last year, an individual inspired by these elements attempted to assassinate Prime Minister Justin Trudeau! The same political elements who attempted the overthrow of American democracy on January 6 are active in Canada, with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as their stock in trade. One can only imagine what "position" the Canadian government would have contorted itself into had a fascist coup in the capital of its closest political ally succeeded.

Perhaps a clue can be found in Ukraine, where the Canadian state is happy to align itself with an ultra-right regime led by parties that celebrate far-right Ukrainian nationalists who collaborated with the Nazis and in the Holocaust. Canada's own deputy prime minister, Chrystia Freeland, has been engaged in a desperate campaign to cover up her own grandfather's past in Ukraine as the publisher of a pro-Nazi newspaper during WWII. How can this be squared with "combatting anti-Semitism"?

This week's Canadian government-sponsored summits will solve nothing, and their utterly fraudulent character will be apparent to a growing number of workers who see that the Canadian state condones and facilitates the very crimes it claims to be so outraged by.

The fight against Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, which are crucial questions for the world working class, requires a principled commitment to historical truth. The one thing the Canadian government cannot do is to undertake an historical investigation of how its own actions directly contributed to the murder of the Afzaal family, and to a climate where various ethnic and religious groups, including Jews, can be scapegoated by the far right with impunity.

That task falls to the revolutionary socialist movement.



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