

Quebec Court of Appeal covers up violent activities of far-right

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Raphaël Lévesque, a notorious Quebec neo-Nazi and the founder of the far-right group Atalante, has been found guilty on a charge of break-and-enter by a three-judge panel of the Quebec Court of Appeal. Last month's ruling overturns his acquittal by a lower court in June 2020.

Lévesque's break-and-enter conviction arises from a menacing provocation that he organized and led on May 23, 2018, at the offices of *Vice*, a print magazine and website focused on arts, culture and news. The case will now be referred back to the Quebec Court, which will hold a hearing to determine Lévesque's sentence.

Lévesque formed Atalante in 2015 under the guise of fighting the "migratory subversion" of Quebec. In particular, the group has targeted immigrants and refugees fleeing the misery, violence and destruction wrought in their countries of origin by American imperialism, with the full complicity of Canada.

Atalante takes its inspiration from European fascist writers who advocate the xenophobic and Islamophobic theory of the "great replacement" of European peoples by immigrants. The members of Atalante are neo-Nazis who virulently oppose immigration and advocate "remigration"—the forcible expulsion of immigrants—while denouncing globalization and socialists. They are encouraged to practice boxing to "defend their ideas on the ground."

Lévesque was associated with Quebec and European neo-fascist movements long before the founding of Atalante. In 2009, under the name Raf Stomper, he founded the music group *Légitime violence* (Legitimate Violence), of which he is the leader and singer. The songs composed or performed by Lévesque/Stomper are filled with explicit calls for violence, anti-communism and anti-Semitism. There are exhortations to "prepare Zyklon B!" (the gas used by the Nazis to kill Jews in extermination camps) and to "stab" the "effeminate leftists."

On May 23, 2018, Lévesque and six other members of Atalante invaded the Montreal offices of the media group Vice Quebec after gaining entry under false pretenses. With the exception of Lévesque, the men all wore masks bearing the colors of the Quebec flag. Throwing flyers and clown noses, they handed a derisory prize for "media trash 2018" to journalist Simon Coutu, accusing him of belonging to the "extreme left" and of inciting, through his reporting on far-right groups in Quebec, "a war" between Atalante and so-called "Antifa" activists.

The intended message of this act of intimidation was clear:

journalists in Quebec who report on the extreme right do so at their peril.

Charged with break-and-enter, harassment, intimidation and mischief, Lévesque was acquitted on June 10, 2020, by Quebec Court Judge Joëlle Roy. In her judgment, which was sympathetic to Lévesque, Judge Roy stated that "no criminal act had been committed" because Lévesque's action was "justified and legitimate." The accused had "delivered a message and communicated information" without "intent to threaten or intimidate," the ruling claimed.

In order to render such a judgment, Roy banished from the court proceedings any reference to the broader context of the incident—including the fact that Lévesque is a neo-Nazi, the author of songs reeking of fascism, and the founder of an organization whose logo is inspired by that of the infamous Nazi organization, the SS.

While all of these elements are clearly relevant to a criminal trial meant to determine the import and legality of Lévesque's actions, Judge Roy barred the prosecution from introducing them as evidence or even mentioning them.

In July 2020, the Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions (DCPP), an agency of the Quebec Ministry of Justice that acts as the Crown prosecutor, decided to appeal Roy's judgment, but only on the mischief and break-in charges.

Despite the fact that Roy's ruling trivialized the activities of a violent far-right group and excused what was clearly an attempt to intimidate a journalist, the DCPP declined to appeal Lévesque's acquittal on the intimidation and harassment charges. The DCPP also declined to challenge the judge's decision to ban all references to Lévesque's background and Atalante's activities.

The Quebec Court of Appeal partially upheld this limited appeal on April 12. It found that Judge Roy had made several "errors of law" in her legal analysis of the elements of the crimes with which Lévesque was charged. It found Lévesque guilty of break-and-enter, but declared a stay of proceedings on the mischief charge against him on the basis of a legal technicality: since this second offense was committed "in the same criminal transaction," it would constitute a multiple conviction for the same event, which is prohibited under criminal law.

Although the Court of Appeal convicted Lévesque on one charge, its ruling continues the efforts to downplay the broader significance of Lévesque's far-right criminal activities. The three judges remained completely silent about his motivation. Echoing

Lévesque's own description of Atalante at the trial, they characterized it as "a group that describes itself as nationalist, revolutionary and an advocate for Quebec independence." The words "neo-Nazi" and "far-right" are not included in the judgment, and the reason why the reporter Coutu was targeted by Atalante is not explained.

A person learning of the events of May 23, 2018 from a reading of the Appeal Court ruling could only conclude that a simple break-in was committed at the offices of a media outlet by an individual belonging to a nationalist group, with no particular motive other than to throw leaflets and clown noses. For such a person, the motivation and import of Lévesque's criminal actions would remain entirely unexplained and inexplicable.

The ruling demonstrates that workers cannot rely on the bourgeois courts and other institutions of the capitalist state—including the mainstream political parties—to stem the rise of the extreme right. Instead, these establishment forces are covering up the crimes and violent acts of far-right groups, giving them a veneer of respectability, promoting them when it serves their purposes, and using them when needed to intimidate and crush working-class resistance.

In June 2020, the *World Socialist Web Site* analyzed the significance of the Quebec Court ruling exonerating Lévesque on all counts:

Judge Roy's ruling and behavior are bound up with the rapid intensification of class conflict. In Quebec, throughout Canada, and around the world, the capitalist ruling elite is embracing reaction and cultivating the extreme right as a weapon against the working class, because it fears that the immense social tensions generated by social inequality, and exacerbated by the health and socio-economic disaster triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, are fueling the growth of a mass anti-capitalist movement.

In the two years since this article was published, the situation it describes has only intensified. Large sections of the ruling class in Quebec and across Canada are cultivating the extreme right, including through the promotion of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant chauvinism, to subjugate the working class to their pandemic policy of putting profits before lives.

A powerful faction of the Canadian ruling elite—including the official opposition Conservatives, much of the bourgeois media and sections of big business—encouraged the menacing and illegal occupation of Ottawa, Canada's national capital, by far-right activists for several weeks last January and February. The so-called Freedom Convoy flouted and attacked those adhering to anti-COVID protocols, and demanded the immediate lifting of all public health measures. Its broader political goal was the destabilization, if not the overthrow, of the federal Liberal government of Justin Trudeau by threatening political violence.

The far-right Convoy was used as a pretext by the federal and provincial governments to abruptly dismantle almost all anti-

COVID measures.

Then, when extreme actions by Convoy supporters—such as blockading Canada-US border crossings—threatened the economic and geostrategic interests of the Canadian ruling class, the Trudeau government, with the full support of the social democratic NDP and the trade unions, invoked the Emergencies Act. The invocation of this hitherto never-before-used law to give the capitalist state sweeping arbitrary powers sets a dangerous precedent, one that threatens the basic democratic rights of the working class.

The rise of the far-right is an international phenomenon.

On January 6, 2021, US President Donald Trump used fascist militias, such as the Proud Boys, as shock troops to storm Capitol Hill with the aim of preventing the certification of his Democratic rival, Joe Biden, as the president-elect, and overturning the 2020 elections. Although the Democratic Party has called the events of January 6 an "insurgency," it has limited its timid criticisms to Trump as an individual, while ignoring the support that large sections of the Republican Party and the military-security apparatus gave to his attempted coup.

In Europe, far-right forces such as the AfD in Germany have gained substantial influence with the complicity of the state and the traditional bourgeois parties, which have adopted whole swathes of their reactionary policies, particularly on immigration.

In France, the neo-fascist Marine Le Pen reached, for the second time in a row, the second round of the country's presidential election, facing off against the "president of the rich" Emmanuel Macron, who spent much of his first five years in power cultivating the far-right. Macron violently repressed the "Yellow Vest" protests against social inequality, praised the memory of Marshal Philippe Pétain, the head of the Nazi collaborationist Vichy regime, and repeatedly attacked Le Pen from the right for being "too soft" on Islam.

All over the world, the axis of bourgeois politics is shifting sharply to the right with the deepening of the capitalist crisis. Only an independent political movement of the working class can defeat the threat posed by the far-right groups that are being cultivated and promoted by the capitalist state and the ruling class.



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