Canadian political establishment united in smearing Gaza genocide protesters as antisemitic

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16 February 2024

The Canadian political establishment united this week to smear protests against the ongoing imperialist-backed Israeli genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza as antisemitic after a demonstration passed by Mount Sinai Hospital in downtown Toronto Monday night.

As many as 3,000 people had gathered outside the Israeli consulate to protest the onslaught against Gaza, which has already officially killed 28,000 people, and over 35,000 if one includes the more than 7,000 people declared missing. Tens of thousands more have been wounded. The emergency protest was sponsored by the Palestinian Youth Movement Toronto, Toronto 4 Palestine, and Jews Say No To Genocide to demand the Canadian government back a ceasefire and protest Israel's imminent attack on the southern city of Rafah, where more than 1.4 million displaced Gazans are currently crammed together in makeshift tents.

As with other anti-war protests in the city over the last four months, demonstrators marched through downtown without incident. They passed by the Ontario Legislative Building at Queen's Park and down University Avenue before ending at the Eaton Centre near Toronto City Hall. Along this route the peaceful protest passed by Mount Sinai Hospital as well as Toronto General Hospital.

Mount Sinai—established in 1924 by Jewish immigrants—was not the target of the protest. However, a person in a black Spiderman costume held up a Palestinian flag on scaffolding outside the building to encourage marchers as they passed. The same person with the flag climbed a light pole elsewhere along the route and was also seen on top of the Eaton Centre.

Flagged by the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center Canada, a Zionist advocacy group led by former Liberal MP Michael Levitt, the image of a person holding the Palestinian flag outside Mount Sinai Hospital sparked an outpouring of exaggerated outrage from politicians on their official Twitter/X accounts.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau denounced the protest as "reprehensible" and a "display of antisemitism." Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, who is best known for her efforts to cover up her grandfather's background as a Ukrainian Nazi collaborator, professed "shock" at the purported "act of antisemitism."

The phrase those who live in glass houses should not throw stones comes to mind. In September last year, Trudeau and Freeland, along with the entire Canadian Parliament, rose to applaud Ukrainian Nazi Waffen-SS war criminal Yaroslav Hunka. Moreover, the Liberal government has developed intimate working relations in Ukraine with genuine anti-Semites, like the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, which has received high-level training from the Canadian military.

Not to be outdone, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh also defamed the protesters, declaring without providing a shred of evidence that the hospital was "targeted because of its ties to the Jewish community in Toronto." Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow said the protest was "unacceptable," and as an expression of hate and antisemitism "has no place in our city." And in an especially fanciful flight from reality, Ontario Liberal leader Bonnie Crombie stated that protesters were "infiltrating" the hospital and "intimidating Jewish patients and doctors."

The far-right leader of the Conservative Party, Pierre Poilievre retweeted a statement from his deputy Melissa Lantsman in which she called the protest a "mob" which had targeted the hospital because of its Jewish background. When asked about the incident at a press conference, Ontario Tory Premier Doug Ford called the protest "absolutely terrible" and took a law-and-order tack, recalling that the Trudeau government had made it a federal offense to intimidate healthcare workers or obstruct access to a healthcare facility.

Following this geyser of slander, the Toronto Police Service told CBC News that it is investigating the incident outside Mount Sinai and will increase patrols outside the hospital and along University Avenue.

The three groups that organized Monday's protest quickly issued a statement refuting the slanderous denunciations. "The protest," it noted, "marched from the Israeli Consulate for four hours, and concluded at Yonge-Dundas Square, passing many buildings and monuments across the city, with some attendees climbing structures and scaffolding to raise the Palestinian flag at various points along the way: none of which were targeted.

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"We condemn the Canadian politicians incorrectly portraying the protest as targeting the hospital."

Significantly, but not surprisingly, none of these politicians, beginning with Trudeau, has issued an apology or in anyway tried to walk back their poisonous remarks.

Taken as a whole, the universal condemnation of the protesters by the political establishment is chilling. The parliamentary parties are making clear that no opposition to Canadian imperialism's complicity in genocide will be tolerated. Anyone who dares to question Ottawa's involvement of wars of aggression abroad, which goes hand-in-hand with savage attacks on workers' wages and conditions at home, will be demonized by every level of government and the state's institutions, and be confronted with the full force of the law. This is an international trend, as shown by the widespread banning of pro-Palestine protests in Germany, the witch-hunting of student activists and faculty members at US universities as antisemites, and the savage repression meted out by the Macron government in France to protests against his pension reform, which was explicitly linked to the need to dramatically hike the military budget.

The minority Liberal Trudeau government, which is propped up by the NDP, has fully backed the Gaza genocide since it was launched in October, repeatedly rejecting popular calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. In January, Trudeau summarily dismissed South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice and quickly followed the United States in cutting off funding to UNRWA, the main humanitarian aid organization in Gaza.

In this context, the joint letter released Wednesday by Trudeau and the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand calling for a ceasefire amid the imminent attack on Rafah is entirely hypocritical. No doubt aimed at saving face after months in which thousands have been killed and the entire population displaced from their homes, the statement also provides cover for Canada's closest ally, American imperialism, as it gives Israel the green light to press ahead with its onslaught on Rafah. The Prime Ministers are concerned above all that the push by Israel to finally displace the Palestinians from Gaza will produce an outpouring of anger in the working class in their countries and around the world.

The support of the Canadian government and political establishment for the genocide in Gaza has been accompanied by an assault on democratic rights at home. The political attack on Monday's protest is only the latest in a string of anti-democratic actions aimed at silencing dissent and suppressing anti-war opposition.

The tone was set early on when the NDP threw Sarah Jama, a member of the Ontario parliament, out of the party's Ontario legislative caucus after she made a statement describing Israel as an "apartheid state" and declaring her solidarity with the Palestinians. The NDP's actions gave the hard-right Ford government a free hand to impose an unprecedented ban on Jama speaking in the legislature until she repudiated her October 10 statement.

Regular protests by a pro-Palestinian group on the Avenue Road overpass over Highway 401 in Toronto were banned by Toronto Police in early January on the pretext that they were distracting drivers and posed a risk to public safety. Three people were arrested last month for violating the ban.

Meanwhile, eleven anti-genocide, pro-Palestinian activists in Toronto continue to be pursued on mischief charges in relation to a protest in November last year against billionaire Indigo Books CEO Heather Reisman. The protest, which targeted Reisman over her charity's support for "lone soldiers" in the Israel Defense Forces, has been depicted in the mainstream media as part of a purported surge of antisemitism in Canada.

Last month, a 41-year-old man was charged with "public incitement of hatred" after he allegedly flew the flag of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine during a protest in Toronto. And in November Wesam Khaled was arrested by police in Calgary, Alberta, after chanting "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." Khaled was charged with causing a disturbance, an addition of hate motivation to the charge was subsequently stayed.

Pen Canada recently reported that three writers were disinvited from an event last month at the Supreme Court of Canada over pro-Palestinian remarks they made on social media. El Jones, former Halifax Poet Laureate and Pen Canada board member, DeRico Symonds, director of justice strategy with the Africans Nova Scotian Justice Institute, and Benazir Tom Erdimi, an Ottawa-based student and founder of The People of Tomorrow, were disinvited because, as the *Toronto Star* reported, their anti-war statements made law clerks feel "unsafe" and "harmed in their mental health."

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