

Declaring latest protest in Toronto antisemitic, Canadian political establishment escalates campaign to squash opposition to Gaza genocide

Niles Niemuth
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Protests continue across Canada in opposition to Israel's imperialist-backed genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. Demonstrators are demanding a ceasefire and that the trade union-backed Liberal Trudeau government ends its support for Israel's onslaught on defenceless civilians.

Fearing the growth of popular opposition to its policies of war abroad and attacks on social programs at home, the political establishment has escalated its campaign to squash opposition by declaring demonstrations to be antisemitic. These unfounded accusations are intended to intimidate those who have been consistently turning out to protest since October and to silence mass popular anger.

On Sunday, March 24, several hundred protesters rallied in midtown Toronto at the intersection of Yonge Street and St. Clair to "shut it down for Palestine." Co-sponsored by Jews Say No to Genocide and the Palestinian Youth Movement among others, the peaceful demonstration advertised as "family friendly" was menaced by police officers on horseback and others carrying "less lethal" bean bag guns.

One of the participants in the protest, Rae, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that she opposed the effort to use claims of antisemitism to shut down protests against the Gaza genocide: "As a Canadian Jew, I am disgusted that I am expected to prioritize my own perception of safety over the actual reality of what's happening to Gaza, to the Palestinians. It's disgusting. Never again means for everyone."

Despite its co-sponsorship by a Jewish organization, the protest was smeared as antisemitic for supposedly

targeting a Jewish neighborhood and due to an advertisement encouraging participants to bring noisemakers to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Purim.

MP Melissa Lantsman, the deputy for far-right Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre, was the most vitriolic in her attack, tweeting on Saturday: "Looking forward to seeing politicians denounce a 'family friendly' march to harass Jews in a predominately Jewish neighbourhood on a Jewish holiday... To those who don't see this as antisemitic, you are the problem."

Earlier this month, Lantsman proudly sported Israel Defence Forces dog tags while rejecting a parliamentary resolution presented by the New Democratic Party (NDP) calling for the recognition of a Palestinian state.

Last week, the Liberal mayor of the Toronto suburb of Vaughn, Steven Del Duca, proposed banning protests within 100 meters of places of worship, schools, child-care centres and hospitals. Anyone who violates the proposed bylaw would face a \$100,000 fine.

"What we are witnessing represents a wake-up call," Del Duca told reporters at a press conference, citing purported antisemitic graffiti as well as threats against an Islamic community centre. "A wake-up call that requires a call to action to protect vulnerable social infrastructure here in our community and to protect the individual residents who use that infrastructure."

The proposal follows protests last month outside a synagogue which was hosting a real estate event selling settlement property in the occupied West Bank

restricted to Jews. A 27-year-old man was arrested on “hate motivated” charges on March 2 after he fired a nail gun at pro-Palestinian demonstrators. Three people were arrested on March 7, including a 32-year-old man who kicked a woman with the group ELDV4Palestine (Eglinton-Lawrence + Don Valley 4 Palestine) who was working as a protest marshal.

Del Duca joined hands with Lantsman and other Conservative politicians to issue a joint letter ahead of the March 7 event, declaring it “unacceptable that a place of worship” be subject to protests. Needless to say, they did not say it was unacceptable for the synagogue to host an event selling occupied land in violation of international law.

Noa Mendelsohn Aviv, executive director and general counsel of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, told CBC News that Del Duca’s proposed protest ban would go too far in restricting “lawful, constitutionally protected expression, peaceful assembly and protest rights.”

Aviv explained, “The kind of restriction that we’re seeing in this [policy] is going too far in clamping down on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly rights. It doesn’t mean that police shouldn’t be protecting religious institutions that have been targeted from criminal activities—they can and they should.”

A pro-Palestinian march in February was broadly denounced as antisemitic, including by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, after it passed by Mount Sinai Hospital, an institution founded by Jewish immigrants. Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, infamous for her efforts to cover up her grandfather’s background as a Ukrainian Nazi collaborator, professed “shock” at the purported “act of antisemitism.” They were joined by NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, who declared the hospital was “targeted because of its ties to the Jewish community in Toronto.” Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow claimed the protest was “unacceptable,” and an expression of hate and antisemitism.

The NDP helped unleash the campaign against opponents of the genocide by witch-hunting Ontario MPP Sarah Jama in October. Jama was kicked out of the NDP’s legislative caucus, which emboldened the Tory-controlled legislature to censure her, after she declared her support for the Palestinians and denounced Israel’s apartheid regime. Israel has been described as an “apartheid state” by the United Nations and

numerous international aid organizations.

Meanwhile, charges continued to be pursued against a group known as the Peace 11, who were arrested in police raids on their homes in November over their alleged involvement in affixing red paint and posters to an Indigo bookstore in protest at the CEO’s financial support for the IDF. The group, which includes York University professor Lesly Wood, who is Jewish and a supporter of Jews Say No to Genocide, have been smeared in the media as antisemitic, as Indigo CEO Heather Reisman is also Jewish. The Socialist Equality Party (Canada) has demanded the dropping of all charges against the 11.

The non-binding resolution passed in parliament by the Liberals and NDP, presented initially as a demand for a ceasefire in Gaza and recognition of a Palestinian state, ended up as an endorsement of the genocide being carried out by the far-right Zionist Israeli regime with the backing of imperialism. The NDP agreed to multiple last minute rewrites to gut the resolution of its original language, which had been intended to confine mounting popular anger to the genocide within official bourgeois politics.

The episode thoroughly exposed the NDP, which secures a parliamentary majority for the pro-war, pro-austerity Trudeau liberal government, as accomplices in the genocide. The Liberal government has made clear that a purported ban on military aid to Israel in the resolution will not stop the transfer of arms and other equipment.

The continued support of the Liberal-NDP-union alliance for the genocide in Israel and the cross-party effort to suppress opposition by deploying false claims of antisemitism makes clear that the perspective of pressuring these parties to change course is a dead end. All those opposed to genocide in Gaza must turn to the international working class, the only social force capable of putting an end to war and genocide. The fight against imperialist war must be aimed at its root cause, the capitalist system, by taking up the fight for socialism.



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