

Right-wing Ontario Premier Ford demands crackdown on anti-genocide student encampments

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Canada's ruling elite is preparing a brutal police crackdown on anti-genocide student encampments that have sprung up across the country. This is the only conclusion one can draw from Monday's expulsion of an elected member of the Ontario legislature from the provincial parliament and right-wing premier Doug Ford's open threats of violence against the protesters.

The very public expulsion of Sarah Jama, the MPP (member of the provincial parliament) for Hamilton Centre, for the "crime" of wearing a keffiyeh was aimed at sending a clear message to all opponents of Israel's genocide against the Palestinians: no opposition will be tolerated.

The intensifying political repression coincided with Israel's launching of its onslaught on the tent-city of Rafah, to which over 1.2 million Palestinians have been displaced by the Zionist regime's murderous ethnic cleansing of Gaza. The offensive underscores that the far-right Netanyahu regime is fully committed to a "final solution" of the Palestinian question by means of genocide.

Ford's thuggish threats come after a brutal wave of police violence against US encampments during which more than 2,300 students have been violently arrested. He was following in the footsteps of "Quebec First" premier and CAQ leader François Legault, who urged the police to disperse the encampment at McGill University in Montreal last week, despite a Quebec Superior Court ruling that to arbitrarily shut down the protest would imperil democratic rights. McGill in Quebec, the University of Toronto, Ottawa University and McMaster in Ontario, and the University of British Columbia and University of Victoria, in BC, currently have encampments on their campuses.

Addressing Simon Wiesenthal Centre officials, Ford said, "I wish those people in the parks, at the universities, could hear your story," referring to the Holocaust. Ford's insinuation that the young student protesters are ignorant of the Holocaust is politically filthy, not least because many of the students are Jewish and have family connections to that horrific crime of German imperialism.

Ford is politically covering up a genocide taking place today,

while cynically feigning remorse for the deaths of six million European Jews in World War II. What's more, Ford's government is perfectly happy to politically cultivate real antisemites, including Ukrainian far-right nationalists who praise Nazi war criminals as "heroes," and the fascistic elements that led the misnamed "Freedom" Convoy. Ford's opposition to anti-genocide encampments is in marked contrast to his tacit approval of the Convoy's menacing, nearly month-long occupation of downtown Ottawa in 2022, whose instigators demanded the establishment of an authoritarian junta to eliminate all remaining pandemic public health measures.

Ford proceeded to smear the protesters, implying in not so many words that they were engaging in illegal activities, including hate crimes. "I can't stand some of the nasty stuff I've been seeing out there," he said, without providing any examples of the "nasty stuff" to which he was referring. Ford declared, without a shred of evidence, that the university encampments were violent: "Yeah, we live in a democracy. Everyone's allowed to protest peacefully. And that's what I mean, peacefully. The hatred I have seen on these protests, I have never seen in my entire sixty years." Again, Ford failed to name a single "hateful" statement or violent incident.

The Premier then resorted to blatant islamophobia and anti-immigrant racism, insinuating that the protests were instigated by people from "foreign cultures." "You want to be here in Ontario, you live in peace and love... No matter what culture you are, you don't come to Ontario and stir things up," he asserted. This chauvinist diatribe received a round of applause.

Ford's vicious denunciation of the anti-genocide protesters came only an hour after Jama's ejection from the Ontario legislature for wearing the keffiyeh. Jama was defying an anti-democratic ban on wearing the headscarf within the building and grounds of the Ontario Legislature that the Speaker of the House, Ted Arnott, imposed through a secret directive in March. The order to remove Jama from the legislature was made on behalf of Speaker Arnott by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the head of security for the legislative building, whose powers have their origins in 14th-century England.

The political role of the New Democratic Party, which threw

Jama out of its parliamentary caucus last October because she described Israel as an “apartheid state,” was especially despicable. Out of a total of 28 NDP MPPs, just two—Kristyn Wong-Tam and Joel Harden—also donned keffiyehs and voluntarily walked out in solidarity with Jama. NDP leader Marit Stiles subsequently left the chamber as “an individual,” making explicitly clear that she was not leading a caucus walkout or protest.

The utterly cynical, token NDP “defiance” of the keffiyeh ban is inseparable from its support for the pro-genocide, pro-war Trudeau federal Liberal government. With the full support of the Canadian Labour Congress, Unifor and all the country’s major union organizations, the federal NDP is propping up the Trudeau government as it wages imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine and supports Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Speaking at a Yom HaShoah event in Ottawa as the assault on Rafah’s civilians began, Trudeau declared that Zionism was not a genocidal ideology of racial superiority, but merely “the belief, at its simplest, that Jewish people, like all peoples, have a right to determine their own future.” Zionists are determining that future – on the bones of Palestinian women and children.

The NDP’s actions have been central to the systematic suppression of all pro-Palestine, anti-genocide sentiments over the past seven months. Stiles’ decision to expel Jama from the party’s legislative caucus served as the starting gun for a veritable wave of repression, which included the censuring of Jama in the legislature by the Ford government. The censure meant that the elected MPP is barred from speaking on any issue in the chamber until she “apologizes” for her October statement declaring her solidarity with the Palestinians.

In March, the NDP played the leading role in a charade in the House of Commons that began with its presentation of a motion ostensibly aimed at supporting the Palestinians’ right to “self-determination.” The NDP then voluntarily entered into backroom negotiations with the Liberal government that resulted in over a dozen amendments to the motion’s text. The outcome of this re-write was that the motion was transformed into a piece of propaganda backing the genocide that could have been written by the Netanyahu government.

Palestinian solidarity activist Charlotte Kates, a leading organizer of Samidoun, the Palestinian prisoners’ support network, was arrested after an April 26 speech in Vancouver. Kates demanded that Palestinian resistance groups, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, be removed from the Canadian state’s list of designated “terrorist” organizations. She is alleged to have declared Hamas’ October 7th uprising against the State of Israel to be “heroic and brave.” For this, Kates has been charged with “public incitement of hatred” and “willful promotion of hatred,” and ordered not to attend any protests for six months as a condition of her bail. BC NDP Premier David Eby praised the arrest of Kates.

The charges against Kates are obscene, coming as they do

from the Canadian state, which maintains diplomatic relations with the State of Israel, whose political leaders engage in the “public incitement of hatred” on a daily basis. Defence Minister Yoav Galant has referred to the Palestinians as “human animals.” Israeli President Isaac Herzog has stated that there are “no innocents in Gaza.” Speaking on Israeli television on May 6th as the assault on Rafah began, Shimon Boker, the International Vice Chair of Netanyahu’s Likud Party, declared, “There are no uninvolved civilians there (in Rafah). You have to go in and kill and kill and kill.”

Further, the Canadian state has been itself engaged in a decades-long campaign of imperialist warfare that amounts to global terrorism. Canadian imperialism is dripping with the blood of Somalis, Yugoslavs, Afghans, Haitians, Libyans, Russians and Ukrainians. The Trudeau government has covered up any investigation into serious charges that Canadian troops tortured and murdered Afghan civilians during its brutal occupation of Kandahar province. It is rapidly arming itself for World War III.

Workers, students and youth cannot fight back against the attack on their basic rights to free speech and assembly by appealing to the same political forces who are working night and day to take those rights away. The anti-war youth need to take the political message of opposition to genocide and war into the working class, the only force that has the social power to defeat the imperialist governments that are arming and supporting the Israeli state as part of their developing global war. Workers must come to the defence of the anti-genocide students who are being attacked by the same political forces and state machine that are enforcing an ever-widening never-ending assault on their rights and living standards. Together, armed with a revolutionary socialist program and perspective, workers, students and youth must wage an independent struggle for working-class political power.



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