

Canadian anti-genocide protests under attack: Police violently clear Calgary encampment, McGill seeks injunction

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Police officers violently assaulted hundreds of peaceful students at the University of Calgary in the Canadian province of Alberta on the evening of May 9, as they forcibly dispersed an anti-genocide encampment set up just hours earlier. The state-sanctioned police riot, which followed a campaign of intimidation by the political and media establishments that smeared the protesters as antisemites, lasted for more than three hours.

Five protesters were arrested, and several bruised and bloodied.

Friday's brutal crackdown was clearly intended to intimidate students and workers across Canada considering joining an anti-genocide protest. It follows ongoing police round-ups in the United States, where more than 3,000 students and youth have been detained for opposing Israel's genocide in Gaza and preparations for a wider imperialist war.

The encampment at the University of Calgary was not even permitted to last a single night. No sooner had several dozen students set up tents in front of McEwan Hall, the university's student centre, than the university administration outrageously served the students with a "trespass" notice. When the students refused to budge, University of Calgary administration called in the riot cops. There was no attempt to discuss the students' demands, which like those made by other encampments across the country and internationally included a call for the university to divest from Israeli companies and those that arm the Israeli security forces.

Several demonstrators were targeted and beaten. "It was entirely peaceful the entire time. A couple of us got singled out, isolated and just punched and beaten on the ground for a while," Euan Thomson told the CBC. Thomson is pursuing a complaint against the cops.

The violent crackdown on free speech was greeted with

applause by the Canadian ruling class, which has been baying for weeks for the ruthless repression of anti-genocide protesters. The far-right United Conservative Party Premier of Alberta, Danielle Smith, declared, "It's already out of control in Ontario and Quebec and elsewhere, and the universities can't allow it to get out of control."

In Ontario, Premier Doug Ford's government called last week for the violent dispersal of encampments across the province, including at the University of Toronto and University of Ottawa. In a racist, anti-democratic move, Speaker of the Ontario legislature Ted Arnott, like Ford a Progressive Conservative, has used his sweeping "security" powers to arbitrarily impose a ban on the wearing of the keffiyeh in the vicinity of the legislature. Just days before the police rampage in Alberta, independent member of the provincial parliament Sarah Jama was ejected from the legislature for her defiance of the ban.

The silence of Naheed Nenshi—Calgary's former "progressive" mayor and the favourite to replace Rachel Notley next month as Alberta NDP leader—typifies how Canada's social democrats have fully backed the sustained witch-hunt of pro-Palestinian protesters over the past seven months. Nenshi has uttered not a single word criticizing the Calgary Police assault. In a recently exposed 2019 letter, Nenshi urged Alberta's labour-minister to empower the Calgary City Council to impose a wage freeze on municipal workers, including by reopening existing collective agreements.

Notley, who served as Alberta premier from 2015-19, could only re-tweet a two-faced statement from NDP Justice Critic Irfan Sabir and NDP Advanced Education Critic Rhiannon Hoyle. The two NDP front-benchers claimed to be "deeply troubled" by the police violence,

while legitimizing the slander that the encampment was a hotbed of antisemitism and that Jewish students felt “unsafe.”

The Alberta Federation of Labour has been entirely silent. A tweet pinned to its Twitter /X feed declares that “most Albertans think unions play a vital role in society.” Apparently, this “role” does not include defending Albertans’ fundamental democratic rights and speaking out against Canada’s complicity in the slaughter, starving and dispossession of the Palestinians.

The Canadian ruling class is uniting around a program of imperialist war abroad, and violent repression at home. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose government has firmly backed Israel’s genocide in Gaza and announced another major increase in military spending to wage war around the world, has been instrumental in orchestrating the state-sanctioned crackdown on protesters. A week before the violent police operation in Calgary, he declared that Canadians “have to trust” the police and university administrations to ensure the safety of demonstrators.

In a particularly odious op-ed column, *National Post* senior editor Michael Higgins declared that the demonstrators had been “taught a valuable lesson,” in the manner of a child who needs a spanking. “Actions have consequences and laws should be enforced,” he thundered, seemingly oblivious to the fact that the students are protesting Israel’s gross violations of international law in Gaza, and the impunity of the Calgary Police following their rampage.

The hypocrisy of the ruling class is not lost on University of Calgary students, however. One student noted bitterly, “The University of Calgary puts up signs saying, ‘Disrupt Something’ and when you do, they call the riot cops.”

Michelle, a literature teacher at McGill and a supporter of the encampment told a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter Friday: “The first few days of the encampment, the administration started with threats, emails saying that the encampment was forbidden, that it contravened university regulations. After the injunction was rejected, we heard nothing more from the administration officially. I understood that the university had started talking to the students, but had not yet responded to their demands. They haven’t said whether they’ll accede to the divestment demands.”

Referring to the widespread sympathy for the encampment within the local population, she added, “The people of Montreal, the people of the communities here support the encampment and come to support the

students. We have films in the evenings with discussions, teach-ins... Yesterday there was a teach-in on Sudan, the links with Sudan and Palestine, how the Zionist state is involved in both places. There’s poetry, art, painting, banners. It’s a way of opening up the university space to the general public.”

Quebec Premier Francois Legault and other representatives of his right-wing chauvinist Coalition Avenir Quebec government have demanded that the police move in to crush the camp. Michelle commented, “Legault can’t make laws himself. The Premier can’t say something is illegal just because he thinks it is.”

Camelia remarked, “I am here to show support. My best friend is Palestinian, her whole family as well, so I really take it to heart.

“The administration had the police, a few days ago here, try to stop donations from coming in. Some people tried to bring donations of masks to protect the students and they took the box from the guy and they started interrogating him. So they don’t want any donations to come in. There is security everywhere. If you come with a box of food, they won’t let you enter.”

Camelia explained how the students have been following the protests internationally: “What happened at [New York’s] Columbia University was truly disgusting. I had tears in my eyes. They keep referring to freedom of speech and the First Amendment in the USA, but when it’s about a genocide, something truly important, they treat them like they’re not even human. They had tear gas, they beat some people up who were just standing there. It’s really disgusting.”

She also rejected the ruling class campaign to smear and slander protesters as antisemites, saying, “It’s not about Jews, Muslims and Christians, it’s about innocent people dying. All the time at night, there’s a prayer for the Jews, and they all go in a circle with the people here, and they have fun, they play music. Nobody’s against the Jews here. We’re against the Zionists and those who promote the killing of innocent people.”



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