

Canada's ruling elite deploys court injunction and police violence to crush two anti-genocide student encampments

James Clayton, Roger Jordan
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Canada's pro-war, genocide-supporting ruling class has succeeded this month in shutting down the two main remaining student encampments protesting Israel's "final solution" of the Palestinian question.

Using a court injunction and police violence, authorities in Ontario and Quebec broke up the student encampments at University of Toronto (UofT) and McGill University over the last week and a half, without any of the student's demands for divestment from Israeli companies and an acknowledgement of the genocide being met.

In a highly provocative move, McGill University management called in private security firm SIRCO to dismantle the student encampment Wednesday. The illegal decision violated a May 15 Quebec Superior Court ruling that denied an injunction for the university to remove the camp. It came just days after British medical journal *The Lancet* estimated that Israel's imperialist-backed genocide has claimed the lives of some 186,000 Palestinians, or about 8 percent of Gaza's pre-war population.

The rampage by the university's hired thugs was actively supported by hundreds of police officers from the Quebec Provincial Police and City of Montreal in full riot gear.

The move occurred with the encouragement of the "Quebec first" Coalition Avenir Quebec government. Premier Francois Legault has repeatedly denounced student protesters from the outset of the encampment, which he and university management baselessly slandered as "violent" and "antisemitic." Asked about the ongoing police operation Wednesday, Quebec Higher Education Minister Pascale Déry said, "We're following the situation very closely, but this is good news."

One week earlier, on July 3, the "People's Circle for Palestine" solidarity encampment, which had refused to budge from the UofT's Front Common for two months, folded its tents and went home in a few hours. The "voluntary" disbandment of the camp came a day after a reactionary Ontario Superior Court ruling that declared the peaceful protest illegal on the thoroughly anti-democratic basis of the university's private property rights.

McGill's violent dispersal of the student encampment and Ontario Superior Court Justice Markus Kohenen's injunction evicting the U of T students are the latest examples of the Canadian ruling elite's vicious crackdown on all opposition to the Gaza genocide. This campaign has combined legal assaults with extra-legal and state-sponsored violence, and political smears and distortions.

Protesters have been attacked by police and also by far-right and fascist mobs, while cops looked the other way. The police have raided people's homes in the middle of the night, using tactics worthy of the Gestapo, merely based on their political opposition to a genocide that has claimed tens of thousands of lives. The wheels of this ruthless state onslaught have been greased by all political parties, who have denounced any criticism of the far-right Israeli regime as "antisemitic."

The existence of a secret group in Ontario's Ministry of the Attorney General dedicated to spying on and smearing anti-genocide protesters with bogus "hate" charges, linked directly to the Israeli consulate, points to the existence of a conspiracy against basic democratic rights within the capitalist state and the ruling class.

The union bureaucracy sabotaged the anti-genocide student protests

This repressive campaign has been overseen by the trade union- and New Democratic Party-backed Trudeau Liberal government, which has covered up for and politically defended the Zionist genocide from Day One. Trudeau has funnelled millions of dollars in military weaponry to Israel, while fully endorsing US imperialism's effort to seize on the genocide as a key component of preparations for a region-wide war targeting Iran. This aggressive policy is one element in a rapidly emerging third world war incited by the imperialist powers to redivide the world in their interests.

The disbanding of the two encampments revealed the trade union bureaucracy's role as the velvet glove cloaking the iron fist of the ruling class. Neither the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) nor the various trade union federations in Quebec did anything to mobilize popular support for the student protesters during the more than two months that the encampments were in place. They refused to do so because they knew full well how overwhelming the support for a political mass movement against genocide and war in the working class is.

In the months leading up to the encampments, Canada witnessed numerous mass protests across the country against Israel's savage onslaught, involving hundreds of thousands of people. The unions feared that mobilizing this support behind the student encampments could have encouraged a movement that would have come into conflict with the bureaucracy's allies in the Trudeau Liberal government.

In a deeply cynical move, the OFL gave its 1 million members little more than three hours' notice July 3 to join a "rally" to defend the UofT encampment against the injunction, which was enforced by the police. The announcement came some 24 hours after the injunction ruling. The end result was predictable: a few OFL officials and activists turned up for the public relations stunt, which amounted to little more than serving as the guard of honour for the students as they "voluntarily" removed their tents and belongings under the watchful gaze of police officers and far-right Zionist thugs.

The OFL's actions expose as a lie the commitments it had loudly proclaimed to the students when the encampment was first threatened with

eviction in May. Those included the bombastic declaration of Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) President J.P. Hornick that the unions “will be your human shields” against the police. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained at the time, the OFL’s May 27 solidarity rally where Hornick made this empty pledge was a fraud, designed to politically prepare the students for a controlled surrender to the authorities.

In the intervening five weeks, Hornick and their fellow union bureaucrats who pull in six-figure salaries did absolutely nothing to build support in the working class for the students. They knew full well that UofT management was seeking an injunction to provide the pretext for a violent police assault, backed up by Zionist activists, on the camp. The university publicly announced it was filing in court for the injunction in early June.

Making a mockery of the university’s claim to be a forum for “democratic” debate and protest, the Toronto Police issued a menacing threat to the students in the lead-up to the injunction deadline, warning, “We hope that protestors will leave voluntarily to avoid the need for police action... the timing and manner of police action is at our discretion.”

Isolated by the union bureaucracy and facing the threat of police violence, the student activists encamped at UofT decided to “voluntarily” end their protest. Well before the 6 p.m. deadline, the only trace of the encampment, which the organizers previously had vowed to leave only once UofT accepted their demands, were the impressions left by their tents on the grass, some spray-painted slogans, and a papier maché sculpture which far-right activists made a great show of destroying only a few minutes after the last students fled.

The bankruptcy of student protest politics

The union bureaucracy’s sabotaging of the anti-genocide student protests was facilitated by the totally bankrupt and disoriented political perspective advocated by camp organizers. Focused exclusively on their own university campuses, they believed that if they protested loudly and persistently enough, the managers of these multi-million-dollar education businesses would sit down at a negotiating table with them, admit their wrongdoing, divest from Israeli companies, and condemn the genocide. The leadership never made any attempt to broaden the protest to the working class, and issued no criticisms of the union bureaucrats’ criminal isolation of the encampments from the workers they claim to represent.

The encampment organizers at UofT issued an explanatory statement following the disbandment of their encampment, claiming, “We refuse to give the Toronto Police Service any opportunity to brutalize us, as they have done repeatedly to pro-Palestinian protesters across the GTA.”

This is a deliberate evasion of the main issue. The question was not whether it was appropriate to engage in a senseless scuffle with the police, which only the most demoralized anarchists would advocate, but why, after over two months, the police had the “opportunity” to confront an isolated group of student protesters? On this decisive question, the student organizers had nothing to say.

Why were workers not mobilized to deny the police the opportunity to brutalize the student protesters? Which organizations promised to organize such a mobilization but did nothing? To ask these questions is to answer them. Yet the student protest organizers could not bring themselves to utter a single word of criticism of the pro-war union bureaucracy, which props up “genocide Justin” Trudeau’s Liberal government.

If the unions in the OFL had organized a strike only of their members at UofT, they could have placed thousands of workers on the ground to “be

your human shields” as promised by the blowhard Hornick in May. But that promise was a lie.

The organizers went on to declare, “We are leaving on our terms.” This statement is patently absurd. The encampment was forced to disband by the University of Toronto, backed up by a court injunction and the most reactionary social forces—multiple Zionist organizations, the Toronto Police, and all the might of the Canadian state apparatus and political establishment.

The activists’ statement notes with an incredible degree of naivety that the encampment should have prompted the University of Toronto to “reflect on its moral responsibilities” in one breath, while in the next declaring that the University was “the face of genocide.”

In fact, the encampment prompted the University to reflect only on its rights as a private landowner. It was on this basis, citing the Trespass Act, that the Ontario Superior Court granted the University’s application to evict the encampment, declaring that “so strong is the protection of property rights that it is possible to grant an injunction based solely on the fact there has been a trespass...”

The Court found that, “The University has been dispossessed of Front Campus in the sense that it no longer has access to or control over it.” The University’s private property rights therefore override all democratic rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This reactionary ruling notwithstanding, the judge felt compelled to note that he had found no evidence to support the ludicrous claims made by the university and supporting organizations accusing the student protesters of violence and antisemitism.

The response to the violent dismantling of the McGill camp by SIRCO, a globally active private security firm, backed up by the police, prompted an equally bankrupt response from the political forces involved in the camp’s organization and leadership. Yves Engler, whose valuable exposures of Canadian imperialism’s crimes around the world are more than offset by his thoroughly opportunist political relations with the NDP and promotion of “left” Canadian nationalism, declared in an article that McGill “cannot silence students.”

The fact of the matter is that the genuine outrage over Israel’s genocide that motivated many students to join encampments has largely been isolated, silenced, and shut down. This has been accomplished through a combination of ruthless state repression, the smothering of the class struggle by the trade unions, and the dead end of the protest politics advocated by encampment organizers.

The only way to stop the genocide in Gaza is to join the struggle to build a movement in the working class against imperialist war and the capitalist system, the root cause of genocide and war. For students, this means abandoning any conception that one can appeal to university administrators and their paymasters in capitalist governments to change their ways. Rather, what is required is a determined turn outwards to the working class, in the factories, offices, warehouses, transit depots, and other work locations, to construct a powerful movement that can halt the production and supply of weaponry to Israel and bring the imperialist powers’ war machine to a grinding halt. This fight can be conducted only on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.



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