

After Canadian police raid homes, 6 World Beyond War peace activists face charges over protest against arms fair

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London, Ontario police carried out coordinated pre-dawn raids on November 25 against four homes across southern Ontario, targeting members of the anti-war and Palestinian-solidarity group World Beyond War (WBW). The raids bring to six the number of peace activists charged in relation to a protest of more than 100 people against the Best Defence Conference in London at the end of October, an arms-industry gathering attended by Israeli-linked weapons manufacturers and Canadian military officials.

The sweeping operation saw officers burst into homes at 6 a.m., frighten children, seize personal electronic devices and haul activists hours away from their communities.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) unequivocally condemn these raids and charges. They represent a serious escalation of state repression aimed at criminalizing anti-war and anti-genocide dissent under conditions where the Canadian government is deeply implicated in US-led wars around the world and Israel's genocide in Gaza. All charges must be dropped immediately.

On the morning of October 21, WBW and other anti-war activists blockaded entrances to the RBC Place convention centre in London, attempting to prevent arms dealers and military officials from entering the weapons conference.

The event was sponsored by Israel-based defence contractor Elbit Systems, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Hensoldt, Saab and Gastops. All of these firms are directly involved in supplying drones, munitions, targeting systems and surveillance technology used in the genocidal assault on the population of Gaza. Notably, Ottawa-based contractor Gastops is the sole supplier of critical engine sensors for the F-35 jets that Israel uses to drop 2,000-pound bombs.

Protesters denounced the corporations for supplying a government engaged in mass killings and demanded that the Canadian government impose an arms embargo on Israel. For this, the organizers of the protest are being treated as

criminals.

Just over a month after the protest, on November 25, the London Police Service Street Crime Unit, normally deployed against drug trafficking and “organized crime,” executed search warrants at homes in London, Hamilton, Marmora and Owen Sound. The items seized reveal the political nature of the operation: computers, laptops, hard drives, phones, USB sticks, two-way radios, protest placards and even a “Free Palestine” wreath taken from one activist's door. Police also paraded before the media the discovery of purported “plans indicating how to cause property damage” and “documents describing police Public Order Unit tactics.”

In its own account, WBW describes officers waking families before dawn, crowding into small homes, harassing parents, disturbing disabled residents and seizing every electronic device in sight. These were intimidation raids carried out to send a message that opposition to war will be punished.

Those arrested and charged include WBW Canada organizer Rachel Small, longtime London activist and Western University professor David Heap, Hamilton activist Patricia Mills and Toronto-based organizer Diana Thorpe, whom police now claim is “wanted.” Earlier in October, charges were also laid against Nicholas Vincent Amor and Pamela Reano.

The charges include mischief over \$5,000, conspiracy, resisting arrest, disguise with intent and “obstructing a peace officer,” the standard prosecutorial arsenal used to intimidate protest movements.

Speaking to CBC News about the excessive charges, Heap noted, “I think the police response is overreaching, and that's because they're trying to intimidate people from standing against war industries ... more generally, and it won't work.” Responding to police claims about property damage, Heap explained, “I think we should be thinking about [how] these war industries are used to kill civilians in many parts of the

world. Property damage pales in comparison.”

The London police statements are shot through with politically-motivated exaggerations and insinuations. A handful of activists allegedly damaged electronic locks or threw paint, acts that are insignificant next to the industrial-scale violence of the corporations and military officials being protected by the police, companies profiting from the arming of the Zionist regime in Israel as it commits genocide, and Canadian military officers providing training, intelligence and logistical support.

The London raids form part of a broader pattern of repression unfolding across Canada.

The “Peace 11” frame-up in Toronto in 2023 targeted protesters who splashed washable red paint on the front of an Indigo bookstore to highlight CEO Heather Reisman’s support for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The police conducted violent no-knock raids, seized electronics and handcuffed family members, while the corporate media smeared the protesters as antisemites for opposing genocide.

The increasing brazenness of the authorities was underscored in a further incident last month, when 95-year-old legal scholar Richard Falk, a former special rapporteur for the UN on human rights in the Palestinian Territories, was detained for three hours at Pearson Airport in Toronto. Falk was attending a “people’s tribunal” in Ottawa aimed at exposing Canada’s complicity in Israel’s imperialist-backed genocide of the Palestinians.

In Quebec, longtime anti-war writer and NDP leadership candidate Yves Engler stood trial last week on charges of “harassing” a Montreal hate-crimes detective after he was told he would be arrested for criticism of a Zionist provocateur on social media. Engler’s alleged crime is encouraging his supporters to join in an email writing campaign to the police demanding that the spurious charges be dropped. The fact that this escalated into a criminal prosecution underscores the drive by police and prosecutors to criminalize any protest against imperialist war.

The federal Liberal government and its provincial counterparts, Liberal, Conservative, Coalition Avenir Quebec, and NDP alike, have fuelled this climate. Prime Minister Mark Carney has continued the Trudeau government’s backing of Israel’s slaughter in Gaza with weapons, diplomatic cover and intelligence support. It was only after immense pressure that Ottawa cast a largely symbolic UN vote for a “ceasefire,” while simultaneously affirming Israel’s “right” to complete its war aims.

The Liberal government can tolerate no opposition to war under conditions in which it is enforcing a massive increase in military spending unprecedented since World War II. With the backing of the New Democrats and trade unions, Carney’s government just passed a budget containing over

\$80 billion in additional military spending over the coming five years aimed at equipping Canadian imperialism to secure its share of the spoils in a rapidly escalating third world war.

The Ontario NDP, meanwhile, hounded legislator Sarah Jama and kicked her from its caucus for denouncing Israel’s apartheid regime. This gave fuel to a campaign by the right-wing Ontario government of Tory Premier Doug Ford to ban her from speaking in the legislature until she recanted. Jama was subsequently blocked from standing as a candidate for the ONDP in elections earlier this year.

Under these conditions, police forces have been emboldened to treat anti-war protests as a threat to national security. The raids on WBW members follow the logic of Canadian imperialism’s warmongering, in which war abroad requires repression at home.

The lessons of the past two years of anti-genocide and anti-war protests in Canada and internationally must be drawn. Despite enormous public opposition to Israel’s genocidal assault on the Gaza Palestinians, and despite countless appeals to Liberal cabinet ministers, NDP MPs, municipal officials and international bodies, the slaughter and dispossession continue unabated. Protest alone, especially when subordinated to moral appeals to the very governments and corporate CEOs arming the Zionist state, cannot halt imperialist war and genocide.

The working class requires its own independent organizations of struggle. Rank-and-file committees must be established in workplaces, campuses and neighborhoods to unite workers against war, austerity and repression. These committees must be guided by a socialist program that links opposition to militarism with the fight against the capitalist system that breeds war.

The criminalization of anti-war activism flows from the preparations of the ruling class for a global conflict against Russia and China. The fight to defend the WBW activists and oppose war and genocide is inseparable from the struggle to build an international revolutionary political movement of the working class against capitalism’s descent into barbarism.



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