

# Ontario's Tory government tries and fails to ban Toronto Al-Quds Day demonstration

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Al-Quds Day, the annual demonstration for Palestinian rights, which has been peacefully observed in Toronto for decades, went ahead on Saturday, March 14. It did so, despite an 11th-hour attempt by Ontario's Doug Ford-led, hard-right Tory government to obtain an emergency court injunction banning the demonstration, on the fraudulent claim that it posed a "serious risk of violence."

Several thousand people attended a rally in front of the US Consulate and then marched peacefully through Toronto's downtown, in the face of an overwhelming police presence and a counter-demonstration organized by Zionists and Iranian monarchist elements, who shouted epithets and threats.

The demonstrators included entire families. Many carried placards denouncing the criminal war of aggression the US and Israel have launched against Iran, which has now expanded into an Israeli invasion of Lebanon that has displaced more than a million people.

Despite the hysterical fear-mongering from Zionist and far-right elements, including former Conservative MPP Lisa McLeod and Toronto City Councilors Brad Bradford and Bob Pasternak, who smeared the demonstration as "a platform for antisemitic hate" and "supporting terrorist organizations," the only arrests on the day were from among the Zionist and monarchist counter-protesters. Two Iranian monarchists were arrested, one for assaulting a demonstrator, and the other for assault and public incitement of hatred.

Significant threats of violence were made by Zionist activists against the demonstration before it even occurred. Commenting on a Facebook group, "Toronto Jewish Community on Alert" set up by the leader of the Zionist vigilante group Magan Herut, Marshall Uretsky declared "I'd like to show up too—with a machine gun!!!!"

The results are an embarrassing setback for the Ford government and for the far-right elements who have been attacking Al-Quds Day demonstrations for years as part of a concerted campaign to suppress anti-war and anti-imperialist opposition and roll back the basic democratic rights of the working class.

Successfully banning Al-Quds Day would set a precedent which Canadian imperialism could exploit as it militarizes

society and forces the working class to pay the costs of its role as a protagonist in the imperialist drive to redivide the world.

Upon his election in 2018, Ford attacked Al-Quds Day, smearing the Palestinians' struggle against their dispossession and expulsion from their homeland as a call "for the killing of an entire civilian population in Israel." This is a foul lie. In October 2023, Israel's far-right government with the military and political support of the imperialist powers, Canada included, began its now two-and-a-half-year-long genocidal assault on the Palestinians in Gaza. Under the leadership of American imperialism and its would-be führer, President Donald Trump, this war has now developed into an imperialist war of extermination against the people of Iran and Lebanon.

Since the genocide began, the Canadian ruling class has worked systematically to intimidate and criminalize anti-genocide protests. The Liberal government at the federal level and provincial governments like Ford's slandered demonstrators as "antisemites," defended brutal police raids against activists, and affirmed Israel's "right to defend itself." In the provincial legislature, Ford's Tories used their majority to gag NDP MPP Sarah Jama, who was banned from speaking after calling Israel an "apartheid state" and declaring her support for the Palestinian people.

In a transparent attempt to concoct a pretext to justify the criminalization of Saturday's pro-Palestine/anti-Iran war demonstration, the Ford government seized on the recent, still unsolved shooting incidents at three Toronto synagogues and the US Consulate on University Avenue. In each case bullets were fired at the buildings in the dead of night. No one was injured in these still-unexplained events, which occurred over the preceding two weeks.

For obvious reasons, the US Consulate has been a traditional rallying point for Toronto anti-war and anti-genocide demonstrations for decades.

Egged on by the *National Post*, the *Toronto Sun* and pro-Zionist groups, Ford latched on to these incidents and announced on Friday, March 13 that he would be asking Ontario Attorney General Doug Downey to apply for an emergency court injunction to ban the Al-Quds Day demonstration.

Downey filed the injunction at 12:30 p.m. the following day,

only two and a half hours before the event was scheduled to commence. The confusion and uncertainty thus created likely deterred many people who would have otherwise attended, and was no doubt part of the government's anti-democratic and frankly authoritarian calculations.

The government's hastily thrown together legal brief is itself revealing. It is a 109-page smear, conflating, without any factual basis, the four recent shooting incidents in Toronto, the timing and circumstances of which are suspiciously convenient, as well as other incidents, with the intentions of the Al-Quds Day demonstration organizers.

"Over the past two plus years and escalating over the last two weeks, the Greater Toronto Area has seen multiple incidents of serious violence, including gunfire, including incidents directed (sic) Jewish school and Jewish-owned businesses, at synagogues and Iranian-Canadians who are opposed to the current Iranian regime..." went the government's refrain.

The Attorney General then sought to smear the demonstration by association with these and other unrelated incidents.

"Thousands of protesters and counter-protesters are expected at the Rally; There is a serious risk of violence arising from or occurring at the Rally; There is a serious risk that Rally will constitute mischief, a public or common nuisance, and intimidation ... There is a serious risk that conduct at the rally will constitute public incitement of hatred, wilful promotion of hatred or wilful promotion of antisemitism ..." etcetera.

Ontario Superior Court Judge Robert Centa rejected the government's crude amalgam, stating:

The Attorney General points to horrific acts of anti-Semitic violence around the world as the context for its request for an injunction. However, there is no evidence before me to link those horrible acts to this rally. The Attorney General's approach comes dangerously close to asking me to hold some people accountable for the conduct of others.

In his ruling dismissing the government's injunction application, Judge Centa also noted that the Toronto Police had not indicated any opposition to the protest going ahead, this despite their well-known hostility to left-wing protests and close ties to Premier Ford, who routinely boasts about his "love" for the forces of "law and order."

"If the rally, posed a clear and present danger of violence," wrote Centa, "I would have expected to see affidavit evidence from the Toronto Police Service stating that they believed the rally would endanger lives and safety. ... There was no evidence at all from any member of the Toronto Police Service, the Ontario Provincial Police, or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Indeed, the only evidence before the court is that the rally organizers have been working with the Toronto Police

Service in advance to ensure that it proceeds safely."

While the ruling spared the Al-Quds protest on this occasion, workers cannot rely on the capitalist courts to uphold their democratic rights to protest against imperialist war and barbarism. Under conditions of systemic global capitalist crisis, the defence of basic democratic rights depends upon the intensification of the class struggle under the leadership of the working class.

Led by the federal Liberal government, first under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and now Mark Carney, the ruling class has moved to abolish the right to strike, as shown by the recent experiences of postal workers, dockers, rail workers and Air Canada flight attendants. Meanwhile, the use of the so-called "notwithstanding clause," whereby governments can trample on basic democratic rights supposedly guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, has become normalized.

The ruling class is sending a very clear signal that it intends to dispense with the rule of law to prosecute its wars abroad and silence all dissent at home. In the days following Saturday's demonstration, Ford made a series of unprecedented denunciations of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. On Monday, promoting a proposal to legalize the use of pepper spray by vigilantes under the cover of "self-defence," Ford mused, "We also need to make sure that we're putting the rights of victims ahead of criminals. You know, you always hear about 'Charter this, Charter that'—Charter rights for criminals. How about the Charter rights for the victims?"

Meanwhile, the editorial board of the *Globe & Mail*, Canada's so-called newspaper of record, has declared that international law must be abandoned to prosecute imperialism's war of aggression against Iran.



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