

Backed by the Trudeau and Ford governments, Toronto Police wage campaign of repression against anti-genocide protestors

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Israel's imperialist-backed genocide on the Palestinians of Gaza has now continued relentlessly for almost nine months. The official death toll of close to 38,000 is widely considered to be a massive undercount, with many thousands more likely buried under the rubble created by US-supplied 2,000-pound bombs or simply not registered in the fatality records of Gaza's collapsing social infrastructure.

This horrific war crime, without precedent since the barbarism of the Second World War, has driven millions of people around the world onto the streets to protest. Canada has witnessed protests by hundreds of thousands across the country, including a series of large demonstrations in Ontario. In response, the Toronto Police launched a massive police operation to intimidate protestors and suppress any opposition to the Canadian ruling elite's complicity in the US-backed slaughter.

This campaign of repression, detailed in an investigation by *The Breach*, has been carried out at the behest of and in direct coordination with the trade union and NDP-backed Trudeau Liberal government, the ardent Zionists of the hard-right Tory provincial government of Doug Ford, and the Toronto City Council, led by its ostensibly "progressive" mayor, Olivia Chow. As Trudeau slandered anti-Gaza genocide protestors—many of them themselves Jewish—as "anti-Semitic," and Ford fulminated against what he called "hate rallies," the Toronto police began a wave of arrests, pre-dawn raids, and trumped-up charges under the codename "Project Resolute."

Toronto Police Chief Myron Demkiw, in direct consultation with the Prime Minister and prominent supporters of Israel in the Toronto elite, has personally led this operation. According to a police source cited by *the Breach*, the unit leading Project Resolute set up a "fully-integrated intelligence sharing model," through which they receive information from the RCMP's Integrated National Security Enforcement Team and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), Canada's premier spy agency.

The smearing of opposition to Israeli war crimes as "antisemitism" in order to justify state repression against the growing anti-war movement among workers and youth is an international phenomenon. In Germany, France, the UK, and above all the United States, the radicalizing movement against the genocide in Gaza has been met with slander, police violence, and threats from the extreme right.

Like their international counterparts, the Canadian ruling class can tolerate no opposition to its support of the genocidal Netanyahu regime and its steadfast alliance with US imperialism. The police reign of terror against anti-genocide protesters in Canada's largest city, blatantly violating their freedom of expression and assembly and setting new precedents for criminalizing dissent, is in service of this imperialist consensus.

Toronto Police Hate Crimes Unit launches "Project Resolute"

In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attack seized upon by Israel to begin its assault on Gaza, Toronto Police Chief Demkiw tweeted that he was "closely monitoring the events in Israel with deep concern. The Toronto Police is not aware of any threats to Jewish communities in Toronto; however, we have increased our presence and visibility to ensure the safety of our Jewish communities and all residents."

Shortly thereafter, Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow—the widow of former NDP leader Jack Layton and prominent ally of "left" union bureaucrats like Ontario Federation of Labour President Laura Walton and OPSEU President J.P. Hornick—put forward a motion to City Council directing the Toronto Police "to create community safety zones, aligned with their predetermined areas of critical infrastructure and potential targets... inclusive of areas surrounding places of worship and cultural and religious daycares and schools." Top staff from Mayor Chow's office, along with the deputy mayor and the strident pro-Israel City Councillor James Pasternak subsequently met with the Toronto Police Hate Crimes Unit.

Though Chow's motion to City Council cynically claimed to condemn both "Antisemitism and Islamophobia," the Toronto Police immediately closed ranks with the pro-Israel political establishment. Chief Demkiw and the senior officials of the Hate Crimes Unit participated in a town hall meeting organized by the ardently pro-Zionist United Jewish Appeal. Already preparing to smear pro-Palestinian demonstrations as "antisemitic," Chief Demkiw told the town hall that "We will not tolerate hate, intimidation, or violence... we know there's going to be a number of demonstrations going on. These are all events that we are very much staying on top of."

A similar promised town hall to address the threat of hate crimes against Toronto's Muslim community never happened.

The Hate Crimes Unit was given command of this new policing operation, Project Resolute. It received a massive influx of funds and expanded from 6 officers to 32. Explicitly targeting the demonstrations against the Israeli onslaught in Gaza, the unit's mandate was expanded to include the "investigation of any occurrence generated as a result of protests and/or demonstrations related to the Middle East conflict." Built into the foundations of this operation was the false accusation that participation in a protest against the genocide in Gaza was evidence of a "hate-based motivation" for any alleged crime.

The subsequent wave of police repression, including pre-dawn raids on the houses of protesters, surveillance of and attempts to infiltrate activist groups and anti-democratic bans on demonstrations, received critical political and legal support from the hard-right Conservative government of Doug Ford.

A secretive committee of Crown prosecutors in the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General, the Hate Crimes Working Group, has worked closely with Toronto Police in its campaign to suppress opposition to the genocide in Gaza. As *The Breach* exposé documents, members of the working group ostensibly set up to advise police on hate-related cases, have intervened in numerous cases to push the police leading Operation Resolute to bring more severe charges against, and impose more restrictive conditions on those they have arrested.

Reflecting the influence of pro-Israeli political forces within the Ford government, the committee is riddled with outspoken Zionists. The co-chair of the Hate Crimes Working Group, Crown Prosecutor Karen Shai, studied at the Hebrew University and told reporters that her “love for and commitment to the state of Israel was further deepened by my time there.” Another member of the committee, Rochelle Direnfeld, has repeatedly described pro-Palestinian activists as “terrorists” and gave a presentation titled “Leveraging Criminal Law for Critical Action” to a pro-Israeli group called Lawyers Combating Antisemitism.

The trumped-up charges they have worked with Toronto Police to lay, however, have in many cases fallen apart when subject to the slightest legal scrutiny.

The “Hate-Related” Frame-up of the Peace 11

In November 2023, after activists covered the flagship Indigo Bookstore in Toronto with posters and red paint to protest the bellicose pro-Israel actions of CEO Heather Reisman, Toronto Police arrested 11 people and charged them with mischief. While a police press release declared the protest was “treated as a suspected hate-motivated offense,” no official hate crimes charges were brought. This did not prevent the right-wing press from whipping itself into a frenzy, libelously accusing the protesters of antisemitism on the sole grounds that Reisman and her husband, billionaire venture capitalist, Gerry Schwartz, are Jewish.

In 2005, Reisman and Schwartz established a “charity,” the HESEG Foundation, to provide financial support and free tuition for so-called “lone soldiers” in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). These are people who, although not Israeli citizens or having family in Israel, have served in the IDF and who want to remain in the country after their service. In just 2021-22, the foundation provided approximately \$12 million in financial support to such “lone soldiers.”

Due to Reisman’s support for the IDF through HESEG, Indigo has been a target of protest for more than 15 years by supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. The posters which were placed on the Indigo bookstore included Reisman’s headshot and text which accused her of funding genocide.

According to a police source cited by *The Breach*, CEO Reisman made a direct call to Chief Demkiw the same day that protesters placed posters on the Indigo bookstore.

The Hate Crimes Unit then began a two-week-long investigation, with ten officers working full-time to gather evidence on the activists who had posterized the bookstore. In the pre-dawn “no-knock” raids that followed on November 22, more than 50 police officers and a canine unit were mobilized. They knocked doors off their hinges, handcuffed family members of their targets, ransacked their homes and arrested people in bed.

While interrogating one of the accused the next day, a police officer claimed that they had been monitoring the activist group No One is Illegal, to which several of those arrested belonged, gloating that “we were watching you.” Four of the eleven arrested, including three faculty members at York University, were suspended from their jobs, while more

lost work and many were subject to harassment and threats of violence from the frothing extreme right.

The Indigo CEO again spoke to police in late November, according to a source cited by *The Breach*, after which police announced a new charge of “criminal harassment”—the maximum penalty for which is 10 years in prison—against each of the accused.

Despite the furor stoked up by the corporate press around this alleged “hate-motivated” crime, the charges against the eleven protesters have since fallen apart. The case has faced numerous procedural delays, as prosecutors have not yet provided key documents justifying the search warrants used by police to carry out the night raids. In May, the Crown dropped all charges against four of the accused, citing “no reasonable prospect of conviction.” A lawyer for one of the defendants said that prosecutors had presented “not a scintilla of evidence to support the allegations of hate motivation.”

Trudeau gives his blessing to ban protests on the Avenue Road overpass

The campaign of police violence and legal intimidation continued into the new year with the explicit blessing of Canada’s political elite, including the Prime Minister himself. In January 2024, Toronto Police banned demonstrations on the Avenue Road bridge over Highway 401, which had been a site of recurring protests. This police restriction on the right to free assembly, in the words of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, sets a “dangerous precedent.”

Though police justified the ban by claiming the demonstrators were distracting drivers and posed a risk to public safety, the overpass protests had been repeatedly denounced by pro-Israel groups as “antisemitic” due to the site’s proximity to an historically Jewish neighbourhood.

The day before the Toronto Police declared its ban on the Avenue Road protests, Police Chief Demkiw met with Prime Minister Trudeau to discuss “the increase in antisemitic incidents in the city.” When asked by reporters about the results of this meeting, Trudeau said only that “the federal government doesn’t have any line of command over the decisions taken by the Ontario and Toronto police.”

The day after police declared the ban on protests, three demonstrators were arrested on the Avenue Road overpass, charged with mischief and obstructing police. One of those arrested that day, Cyrus Reynolds, a young construction worker, told reporters that he was approached by a detective from the intelligence unit and urged to become an informant. In exchange for the dates and locations of upcoming demonstrations, the detective promised to help with his charges. Undoubtedly, these attempts by the Toronto Police to infiltrate and disrupt activist groups are widespread. Reynolds told the officer there was “no way” he would become an informant.

Project Resolute intimidates York University professor, targets protest organizers

As the whole Canadian political establishment united to denounce Gaza genocide protesters as “antisemitic,” police acts of intimidation against those opposed to the Israeli genocide in Gaza grew ever more brazen.

At York University in February, where students in the Sociology Department had walked out to protest the suspension of faculty members in the Peace 11, two uniformed police officers entered a classroom before

a lecture by Palestinian scholar Muhannad Ayyash. When asked their purpose, the police officers replied that they had been called by the university to address a “possible protest” and “major event.”

This, however, was a lie. According to an investigation by *The Breach*, York administrators later told a select group of professors that the police had been alerted by a “special intelligence unit.” Clearly, the police intelligence unit guiding Project Resolute is monitoring academic activity in Toronto’s universities, alongside the mass demonstrations and activist groups, for any opposition to Canada imperialism’s alliance with Israel.

In the case of several activists arrested in April 2024 for participating in a non-violent sit-in at the Toronto office of the investment firm Awz Ventures, police have sought to literally silence prominent pro-Palestinian activists.

Former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper is a leading partner and the chair of the advisory board for Awz Ventures, which specializes in funding Israeli security and intelligence start-ups. Among other investments, the firm funded and controls the Israeli company that developed the facial recognition technology being used by the Israeli military to conduct mass surveillance of Palestinians in Gaza.

Harper, who was among the loudest defenders of Israel while in office, has promoted Awz Ventures in Israeli media outlets and has said that the company is a chance to “continue what I did in government.”

Activists, among them members of the “Jews Say No to Genocide” coalition, conducted a peaceful sit-in of the Awz office in February 2024 to expose Canadian complicity in Israeli war crimes. No arrests were made at the time. Months later, plain clothes police officers identified one of the protesters at a street demonstration, then followed her, grabbed her arm, knocked her phone from her hands, and declared her under arrest.

“I remember saying, ‘You can’t do that, that’s assault,’” she wrote in a statement. “The person grabbing my arm and a few other people surrounded my sister and I and pulled badges out of their clothes, informing us that they were cops and that I was under arrest.”

Two other participants in the sit-in were forced to turn themselves in to police that same day. Before their release, Toronto police forced all three to sign papers accepting conditions that flagrantly violate their democratic rights, including one that prevents them from using a device that amplifies their voice when attending a protest, vigil, or demonstration.

In the coordinated campaign of police repression carried out in Toronto, with the full support of the political elite from the Ford Conservatives to the Trudeau Liberals, and their backers in the union bureaucracy and the NDP, workers and youth confront the true face of Canadian imperialism. Heaping slanderous accusations of antisemitism on demonstrators rightly horrified by the mass civilian deaths and suffering in Gaza, the ruling class justifies police violence and restrictions to basic democratic rights, such as free expression and assembly, that it purports to uphold.

Appeals to these same politicians to end their support of Israeli war crimes fall on deaf ears. The genocide in Gaza is a critical part of the unfolding global conflict whereby Washington and its allies, including Canada’s imperialist ruling class, are striving to revive the moribund, crisis-ridden capitalist system by asserting global dominance and re-partitioning the world. They are waging a proxy war on Russia in Ukraine, using Israel to establish unbridled domination over the Middle East, and strategically and militarily encircling China in the Indo-Pacific. The only social force that can challenge the death-spiral of imperialism, which has normalized genocidal slaughter in Palestine and threatens the existence of humanity with nuclear war, is a revolutionary movement of the international working class.





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