

Canada's largest union victimizes senior official, Fred Hahn, for opposing Gaza genocide

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The National Executive Board of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) is supporting and seeking to enforce a right-wing, state-supported witch hunt vilifying Fred Hahn, the president of CUPE's Ontario division, as an "antisemite" for his opposition to Israel's imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza.

Last week, the national executive board (NEB) of CUPE sought to purge Hahn from the top leadership body of Canada's largest union. It demanded he resign from his post as General Vice-President for Ontario, citing Hahn's reposting of an anti-genocide social media video that it disingenuously termed "deeply problematic" and a "clear violation of our union's equality statement."

Hahn has refused to resign and has once again forthrightly rejected the "antisemite" smear with which the corporate media, Ontario Premier Doug Ford and other leading members of his notoriously right-wing, pro-big business government have sought to tar him for the past ten months.

"I utterly reject the charge of antisemitism," declared Hahn. "Anyone who knows and works with me knows it to be a lie. It remains my strongly held view that it is a terrible mistake, and antisemitic, to conflate abhorrent actions by the state of Israel with Jewish humanity or identity."

Independent Jewish Voices has come to Hahn's defence, correctly noting, "The rights of workers across Canada to speak out against genocide must be protected as a fundamental principle of free speech."

Nonetheless, emboldened by the NEB's craven capitulation to the campaign to smear Hahn and all opposition to Israel's genocidal war, the media and Ford government have intensified their efforts to hound him from the CUPE leadership. So too have right-wing, pro-Zionist elements within the union. The head of CUPE's Air Canada Division, Wesley Lesosky, has issued a statement ostensibly on behalf of 10,000 Air Canada flight attendants demanding Hahn resign from the NEB. On Tuesday, several dozen pro-Zionists, including at most a tiny smattering of dissident CUPE members, mounted a picket outside CUPE's Ontario regional office north of Toronto to demand Hahn's firing. There is also an ongoing SLAPP-style lawsuit against Hahn and CUPE that is being fronted by a small group of pro-Zionist union members, but which is being egged on and no doubt financed by powerful figures within Canada's capitalist elite.

Despite our well-documented differences with Hahn, who has served as a loyal member of the CUPE apparatus for decades, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) call on CUPE members and all workers to resolutely oppose the witch hunt of Hahn and the attempt to drum him out of the CUPE leadership.

It is a flagrant attack on the democratic rights of the more than 750,000 CUPE members. Hahn was reelected as Ontario CUPE President in May 2024, despite a months-long campaign championed by Premier Ford and his ministers and the *Toronto Sun* and *National Post* to smear him as an

antisemite and supporter of terrorism. These attacks were prompted by Hahn's many sympathetic statements in support of the Palestinians before and after the October 7, 2023 uprising against Israel's illegal occupation and systematic dispossession of the Palestinian people.

The witch hunt of Hahn is not principally or primarily directed at him. Rather it is part of a ruling class drive, actively supported by the Trudeau Liberal government and now being aided and abetted by the CUPE leadership, to delegitimize and suppress popular opposition to imperialist war and the use of genocide to advance the interests of Canadian imperialism and its allies.

This includes trying to stamp out any expression in official political life of the revulsion and opposition of the vast majority of working people to the now ten month-long massacre of Palestinians in Gaza through war, starvation and the deliberate destruction of public infrastructure.

Hahn is receiving the same treatment afforded to Ontario MPP Sarah Jama, who spoke out in support of the Palestinians in October 2023, and was expelled from the Ontario NDP Caucus and censured by the provincial legislature. She is now a pariah in official politics.

The contrived, right-wing furor over Hahn's social-media post

An examination of Hahn's supposedly "antisemitic" media post—the cardinal sin for which we are told he must be branded with the proverbial scarlet letter "A"—only underscores how wanton and desperate is the smear campaign.

The video that Hahn reposted on August 11, while the Paris Olympics were in full flight, depicts what is clearly meant to be an Israeli Olympic diver, with a blue Star of David (akin to that on the Israeli flag) tattooed on his shoulder, diving into a pool. As the diver descends, the video cuts to Gaza and the diver becomes a bomb that explodes destroying a building. Scenes of mayhem and panicked people bearing the wounded in their arms follow.

As Hahn subsequently explained, "My intention in posting it was to call attention to the reality that, while the Russian Federation was barred from participating at the Paris Olympics, the state of Israel was permitted to participate—which appeared clearly to me to be a double standard."

Indeed, Russian athletes were excluded from the Paris Games with the support and at the urging of French President Emmanuel Macron and the other imperialist powers, Canada among them, that instigated and are relentlessly escalating the war with Russia over Ukraine. At the same time, Macron made a point of extending a special invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to attend the Games.

While Netanyahu freshly returned to Israel from his July 24 address to a joint session of the US Congress chose to let the Israeli president go to France in his stead, Israel took full advantage of the Olympic stage to try to legitimize its genocidal war. Multiple members of the Israeli Olympic team are either former or current members of the IDF, or have made explicit political statements in support of the Gaza war.

If imperialists, Zionists, and the privileged bureaucrats who head CUPE find the diver-bomb video “deeply problematic”—a meaningless catch-all designed to avoid the political issues raised by the video and appeal instead to irrational emotions—it is not because of any taint, no matter how rarefied, of antisemitism. Rather it is because they find the agitation against the imperialist-backed genocide politically threatening.

The same CUPE NEB that sprung into action against Hahn on the spurious grounds he violated the “union’s equality” statement, it need be emphasized, has no qualms about supporting the New Democratic Party-Liberal governmental alliance. With CUPE’s full-throated support, the NDP has continued to prop up the minority Liberal government as it has backed Israel’s onslaught on the Palestinians, providing both political and military support; is playing a major role in the war on Russia; is diverting tens of billions of dollars from meeting social needs to procuring new fleets of warships, warplanes and submarines; and is eviscerating workers’ right to strike.

While Hahn has thus far refused to cede to the NEB’s demand he resign, he earlier tried to placate his right-wing critics. On August 18 he removed his repost of the Israeli Olympic diver-bomb video and “apologized.”

CUPE’s capitulation to a Doug Ford-led smear campaign

Predictably this only encouraged them. In the days immediately before and after the NEB’s decision, both Ford and Labour Minister David Piccini publicly vilified him.

Piccini confronted Hahn at a public reception on August 20. With a *Toronto Sun* reporter conveniently beside him to capture the exchange on cell-phone video, Piccini declared, “You have to stop hating on Jews,” then added “your members deserve better.” This from a minister in a government that is slashing the public services CUPE members provide and that in Nov. 2022 invoked the Canadian constitution’s “notwithstanding clause” to preemptively criminalize a strike by CUPE members employed as support staff at the provinces public schools.

The following day Ford, an admirer of the would-be dictator Donald Trump, denounced Hahn as “a disgusting human being” and a “bully” at a press conference. Ford then called on Hahn to resign.

Also on Aug. 21, CUPE’s NEB made public that it had requested Hahn’s resignation.

Amid a flurry of celebratory media commentary from the likes of the *Toronto Sun*’s Brian Lilley, the *National Post*’s John Ivison, the *Globe & Mail*’s John Ibbitson and the *Toronto Star*’s Rosie DiManno—all of them staunch defenders of Israeli apartheid and long-time Hahn-baiters—CUPE’s “national officers” issued a press statement in which they tried to claim that they were not aiding and abetting reaction.

“In light of Doug Ford’s recent comments about internal CUPE matters and CUPE Ontario president Fred Hahn,” it began, “CUPE wishes to be clear about several things: We do not take advice from a union-hating, public service-gutting Premier trying to distract from his own scandals and track record.”

The statement went on to declare: “To suggest that asking for Fred’s resignation as a GVP (General Vice-President) is to throw in with those who support the genocide in Gaza, or is in response to a conservative

Premier’s bullying, is frankly ludicrous.”

This is truly a case of the proverbial lady “protesting too much.” That the CUPE leadership has given succour to a vicious right-wing campaign aimed at suppressing opposition to Israel’s genocide will be recognized by all class-conscious workers no matter how it tries to deny it. Moreover, this is entirely in keeping with the CUPE leadership’s political support for the Trudeau government and opposition to mobilizing the working class against the Canadian imperialist-backed Gaza war.

The CUPE NEB’s action against Hahn underscores that a key element in the struggle against the Gaza genocide and the developing global war must be a struggle against the trade union bureaucracy and its political suppression of the working class.

Turning everything on its head, the pseudo left have tried to use the CUPE leadership’s victimization of Hahn to bolster their claim that workers must orient to the unions, even as they integrate themselves ever more deeply into the imperialist war machine and systemically suppress the class struggle. The victimization of Hahn, they argue, demonstrates that there is a section of the union bureaucracy that is susceptible to left pressure, even “militant”.

This is all lies. Workers must unequivocally defend Hahn from the pro-imperialist, pro-Zionist witch hunters, and those who capitulate to them, within CUPE and without. But such a struggle must be developed as part of the fight to mobilize the working class against the genocide, including in strike action, and against the imperialist governments, Canada’s included, without whose support the fascist Netanyahu government and the exclusivist Zionist project could not survive.

That means rejecting Hahn’s politics. His differences with the top CUPE leadership, in which he has served for decades, are solely tactical. He has voiced no opposition to the anti-worker union-NDP-Liberal alliance. In Nov. 2022, he joined with CUPE National President Mark Hancock and Laura Walton, then the head of the Ontario School Board Council of Unions and now the Ontario Federation of Labour, and the rest of the union bureaucracy to prevent the mass defiance of Ford’s anti-strike Bill 28 from becoming a province-wide general strike. And while Hahn professes support for the Palestinians, he lifted not a finger to mobilize CUPE’s 8,000 members at the University of Toronto to oppose the dismantling of the anti-genocide encampment there.



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