

SERIOUSLY FREE SPEECH

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BILL C-51: SHUT IT DOWN BEFORE IT SHUTS US UP!

Aspectre is haunting Canada, the spectre of so-called “anti-terrorism legislation”, raising fear in order to enable control. The Harper Conservative government, supported by the Liberals, is about to pass Bill C-51, the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act, that substantially expands the already-considerable powers of CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service), the RCMP, border services and other agencies.

Among other things, it lowers the bar for “preventive detention” if an agency thinks someone “may” (changed from “will”) commit a crime. It lowers standards for putting someone on a no-fly list, and broadens the definition of “terrorism”

Under Bill C-51, you would break the law “by speaking, writing, recording, gesturing or other visible representation, knowingly advocate or promote the commission of terrorism offenses in general”.

Terrorism includes “undermining the security of Canada”, “interference with critical infrastructure” or “the economic or financial stability of Canada”.

So an interview, newspaper or online article, film documentary, news coverage, or placard could be vulnerable to the charge of “terrorism”. This could easily apply to aboriginal actions against pipelines or other intrusions on their land, trade union strikes, environmental demonstrations or civil disobedience.

“THE PRO-CORPORATE AGENDA OF THE NEW LEGISLATION COULDN’T BE MORE CLEAR.”

A newly publicized RCMP report specifically names Greenpeace, Tides Canada and the Sierra Club as part of “a growing, highly organized and well-financed anti-Canada petroleum movement” that perfectly fits the new definition of “terrorism”. The pro-corporate agenda of the new legislation couldn’t be more clear.



But there is also a foreign policy dimension to Bill C-51. It is the latest in a suite of legislative efforts designed to forward the Harper policy of unquestioning support to Israel and its brutal colonization of Palestine.

- In 2010, the CPMCA (Canadian Parliamentary Committee to Combat Anti-semitism), composed of Zionist parliamentarians, attempted to criminalize criticism of Israel as anti-semitic “hate speech”; this drew national protest and flopped.
- In 2012, the CPMCA, funded by Ottawa, held an international conference of Zionist parliamentarians and used a discredited European definition to define “the new anti-semitism” as criticism of Israel.

- The February 2015 unanimous Parliamentary vote condemning anti-semitism included an endorsement of the “Ottawa protocol on Combating Antisemitism”, which holds that strong criticism of Israel is a “new form of antisemitism”.

- The 2015 Memorandum of Understanding calls for Canada to join with Israeli propaganda machine in opposing the international BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) movement which applies economic pressure to Israeli products and institutions.

What is the connection? Again, using fear and control to suppress any criticism of the Harper government’s chosen allies, however disreputable those allies may be on the world stage.

This spectre has appeared before in Canada. The 1906 Immigration Act

was passed to enable the deportation of “undesirable immigrants”.

In 1914, the War Measures Act forced “enemy aliens” (mainly Italians and Germans) into work camps. In 1918, the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World and 13 other socialist and anarchist groups were banned; it became illegal to publish in Finnish, Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian or German. 1919 saw an amendment to the Criminal Code that made it illegal to “teach, advocate, advise or defend” “any governmental, industrial or economic change within Canada by use of force”.

The War Measures Act reappeared in World War II to intern dissenters and pacifists, and again in 1970 to round up hundreds of Quebec independence activists or those perceived as such.

Bill C-51 embodies these and other ghosts of Canada’s repressive past. It provides the tools and legal infrastructure to implement legislative and regulatory attacks on freedom of speech and association.

What can be done?

- You can, of course, contact your MP but the bill is likely to pass soon, despite parliamentary and public opposition.
- If the Bill passes, there will be court challenges and civil disobedience actions to join and support.

What is needed is alliances and coalitions between indigenous, environmental, free speech, women’s, trade union, immigrant and third world support groups. Only massive public protest will eliminate or weaken Bill C-51. SFSC looks forward to working with any organizations involved in this important action.

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