



Call it what it is: Vile Anti-Semitism in Toronto

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THE TTC EMPLOYEE ACCUSED OF MAKING HATEFUL COMMENTS ON VIDEO ON JULY 26, 2014
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It took eight decades to rival Toronto's worst incident of anti-Semitism, but mark July 26, 2014 on your calendar.

What happened Saturday at Queen's Park in Ontario will sit in the same repugnant category as the other day in Toronto history that lives in infamy.

The other day was 81 years ago this summer, August 16, 1933 at Christie Pits, where a riot broke out between Jewish and supportive Italian youth and sign-waving pro-Hitler protesters in the crowd of 10,000 people at a baseball game.

That melee lasted six hours. The stench considerably longer.

World War II, the Holocaust and, the re-establishment of Israel followed. Canada became a multicultural mosaic where all races and religions are free and expected to live together in peace.

But now this.

"Israel does not believe on humanity. They just believe in the killing," said one protester of the conflict in Gaza at a Quds Day rally at Queen's Park caught on video by the Sun News Network. "They want to make money with the blood of the human being. They are sucking the blood out of the human being just to make the money."

Another said, "Israelis should go back from where they came . . . They came from Poland. They came from Russia. They came from Germany. They came all over the world. So they should go back."

Another man, wearing a TTC patch on his shirt, said in an interview with Sun News Network reporter Marissa Semkiw there should be a "free Gaza" and "Palestine" and "we will go from here... and we will kill all Israel."

Simon Wiesenthal Centre spokesman Avi Benlolo said the whole thing was unacceptable.

"This rally was not a peace demonstration, but a well funded effort by Iran, which supports both Hamas and Hezbollah, to promote an ideology of hate and the destruction of Jews, and to export to countries around the world a foreign ideology that is completely against the fundamental Canadian values of freedom and democracy," he said.

"When a protester at the rally cries, 'Go back to Germany where they can kill you again,' (as one did) it becomes crystal clear what this is really all about, and it is not sympathy for the beleaguered Palestinians suffering under Hamas, but the desire to destroy the Jewish state and kill Jews. It's that simple."

Toronto Police is investigating. "We are reviewing the incident of Saturday," said Toronto Police spokesman Mark Pugash.

And so is the TTC.

"We are reviewing the video to ascertain the identity of the individual and next steps. He is in what would appear to be a TTC janitor uniform," TTC spokesman Brad Ross told Toronto Sun reporter Shawn Jeffords.

Ross confirmed it was a TTC employee and policy and conditions of employment states "employees agree to conduct themselves, while on duty, in a manner which does not jeopardize the integrity or the image of the TTC. To conduct themselves, while off duty and in issued uniform or clothing, equipment or TTC vehicle, in a manner that does not jeopardize the integrity and image of the TTC."

Like in 1933, Saturday's demonstration also had protesters displaying Swastika signs. The 2014 version also had a child wearing a Hamas headband and one protester waving a Hezbollah flag. Hamas and Hezbollah are both listed as illegal terrorist entities in Canadian law.

Tempers flared and the potential of an all-riot was clearly there. Benlolo said he knows exactly what this was and what it could mean for the future.

"I completely agree with the assessment that a strident and dangerous level of anti-Semitism has permeated civic discourse in Canada," he said. "It's vital for Canadians to understand that this past weekend's Quds Day rally at Queen's Park- which proudly included posters of the Ayatollah Khomeini and Hamas flags, is an Iranian initiative, developed and promoted by the brutal theocratic Iranian regime. The mantra of Quds Day is 'We must all rise, destroy Israel and replace it with the heroic Palestinian nation.'"

But former Canadian Jewish Congress leader Bernie Farber cautions on using comparisons to 1933.

"Then we had a general anti-Semitic milieu that stretched the gamut from the guy in the street to government and private business," said Farber. "Today it's politically based, no less heinous in its expression, but society today is not 'anti-Semitic.' Canadian Jews are doing well, feel little hatred until the winds of Middle East war erupt. Then people's emotions get frayed and stupid things happen."

Farber added while "disgusting" Toronto as a city we, "need to find a way to bring the threat level down here and have cooler heads prevail - possible, but with positions so entrenched, it's difficult."

Toronto Police did a good job of not letting it get out of control. But this repugnant incident is a warning to Torontonians the hate and anger simmering beneath the surface that cannot be ignored. It should not be glossed over or sugarcoated.

Threatening death to a people is unacceptable in any era and is as vile, disgusting and disturbing an anti-Semitic incident as we have seen inside of Toronto's famously tolerant borders in a long time.