August 30, 2024

Dear Members of the Police Services Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the formulation of the Board’s policy on public order policing.

I am a Jew and a Zionist. Like the vast majority of Canadian Jews, I support the existence and flourishing of the State of Israel and its people. I am also an Emeritus Professor of Management at the University of Toronto.

Since October 7, I have attended a number of Jewish community rallies, including the Walk with Israel and a rally of Jewish faculty and students at Convocation Hall while the encampment was standing. As a result of my ongoing affiliation with the university, I passed by the encampment at King’s College Circle on numerous occasions.

I believe the purpose of demonstrations and rallies is to influence public opinion and governmental decisions. Therefore, the appropriate place to have demonstrations and rallies is in public spaces, such as Queen’s Park or Nathan Phillips Square, or major streets. Since the beginning of the Gaza war on October 7, the supporters of Israel and those of Hamas have been attempting to influence public opinion, albeit with one major difference in approach. Virtually all Jewish community demonstrations have been held in public places, but some of the demonstrations in support of Hamas have been held near synagogues, Jewish community centres, neighbourhoods with a significant Jewish population, and affiliated institutions such as Mount Sinai Hospital. I believe that this constitutes harassment and intimidation. I believe it is possible to draw a clear line between permissible public demonstrations and unlawful intimidation. The TPS should not permit demonstrations that, by their location and itinerary, constitute harassment of people perceived to be associated with the “other side” of this dispute.

Visiting the encampment, it was obvious that if I was honest about my values, I would be denied entry to the part of King’s College Circle that the demonstrators had seized control of. I am attaching two photos from the encampment fence. The “Zionists fuck off” poster needs no explanation. The photo with the words “Free Palestine” and the pre-1967 State of Israel in red along with the watermelon symbol of Palestinian resistance signifies the intention to destroy the State of Israel, which explains why it was spray-painted. I was disappointed that the Toronto Police Service took no action to remove the encampment without an injunction, but I could understand this decision in light of the University’s administration’s position.

Now that the injunction was granted it is clear that the courts regard encampments as trespassing. I believe that the TPS should treat all encampments or similar demonstrations that seize private property for an indefinite duration as trespassing, work with universities to prevent them from being established and, if they are established, dismantle them immediately. Tomorrow evening there will be a demonstration billed as a “solidarity shabbat” at King’s College Circle, “also known as The People’s Circle for Palestine.” I consider this attempt at renaming as a trial balloon towards re-establishing a presence.

Finally, I recognize that policing the demonstrations and rallies that have occurred since October 7 is challenging, and I support the provision of additional resources and training to support the TPS’s additional responsibilities in this area.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Sandford Borins