

Canada: Police Brutality Against Journalists in Montreal - Beaten with Batons, Tagged with paint, Shot with Rubber Bullets, and Pepper Sprayed

Two Journalist Associations write an open letter to the Mayor of Montreal, Denis Coderre

By [Global Research News](#)

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Image: Police officers wearing colored camouflage pants to protest against Bill 3, a controversial pension reform law, which would increase the officers' contributions to their pension fund.

Ironically, student-led protests against austerity measures, including Bill 3, have been violently repressed.

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This letter of concern was sent to His Worship Denis Coderre, Mayor of Montréal

CC: Chief Marc Parent, Director of the City of Montréal's Police Service

Commander Ian Lafrenière, Head of SPVM Communications and Media Relations

The Honourable Philippe Couillard, Premier of Québec

The Honourable Lise Thériault, Minister of Public Security

CJFE and the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) are deeply concerned by the brutal actions taken by the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) to impede the work of journalists in the city over the last three years. The assault, detention, and arrest of reporters by the Montréal police is in violation of freedom of the press, as cited in Section 2(b) of the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#), as well as Section 3 of the [Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms](#). To address these issues, CJFE and CAJ would like to arrange a meeting with you and SPVM Chief Marc Parent to discuss police policy on journalists covering protests in order to come up with a solution to end the existing practices.

Since 2012, there have been multiple [well documented](#) cases of journalists from both independent and mainstream media outlets being targeted for arrest, assault, or detention by police during their coverage of protests in Montréal. In 2012, OM99 Media released

a [video](#) illustrating the experiences of journalists and photographers in their encounters with the SPVM; the journalists described being beaten with batons, tagged with paint, being shot with rubber bullets, and being pepper sprayed by police officers.

In 2013, a VICE Magazine photographer [described](#) her own incident of being kettled and arrested during her coverage of, ironically, an anti-police brutality demonstration; another [video](#) from June 2014, filmed by Concordia University Television, shows police preventing journalists from accessing an ongoing protest. As recently as March-April 2015, the [Fédération Professionnelle des Journalistes du Québec](#) documented numerous attacks on journalists by both protesters and police officers during student-led [protests against austerity measures](#) in Montréal; another video from OM99 Media documents police preventing journalists from filming the arrest of demonstrators. In most situations, the journalists either had valid press identification available or told the police that they were journalists.

This evidence highlights what appears to be an ongoing pattern of SPVM officers targeting journalists during their coverage of protests. Harassing and restricting journalists at these events is a clear violation of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, rights that you have previously [expressed your support for](#). It is essential that journalists are able to safely and freely cover these events, as it is their duty to report on issues of public interest and hold law enforcement accountable for their actions.

While the police have [engaged in some measures](#) to address abuses perpetrated by some police officers, the punishments do not appear sufficient; the offending officer in this case was merely suspended without pay for a day. In order to meet the appropriate standard of punishment and to deter any future assaults by a police officer, the SPVM should reform its disciplinary policy to be more in line with Canada's Criminal Code.

CJFE and CAJ request clarification on the motivation behind these incidents of excessive use of force against journalists by police. Further, we urge the municipal government of Montréal and the SPVM to collaborate on concrete policies to address these worrisome patterns and to hold officers who impede the work of journalists in the city.

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