

“Freedom in Jeopardy’: Thousands rally across Canada against New C-51 “Anti-terror” Law

By [RT](#)

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Thousands of demonstrators have united across Canada to take action against proposed anti-terrorism legislation known as Bill C-51, which would expand the powers of police and the nation’s spy agency, especially when it comes to detaining terror suspects.

Organizers of the ‘Day of Action’ said that “over 70 communities” across Canada were planning to participate on Saturday, according to StopC51.ca.

The biggest gatherings were reported in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa and Halifax.

“I’m really worried about democracy, this country is going in a really bad direction, [Prime Minister Stephen] Harper is taking it in a really bad direction,” protester Stuart Basden from Toronto, the Canadian city which saw hundreds of people come out, told The Star.

“Freedom to speak out against the government is probably [in] jeopardy...even if you’re just posting stuff online you could be targeted, so it’s a really terrifying bill,” Basden added.

The ruling Conservative government tabled the legislation back in January, arguing that the new law would improve the safety of Canadians.

Anti-terror bill labeled ‘too vague’

Demonstrators across the nation held signs and chanted against the bill, which they believe violates Canadian civil liberties and online privacy rights.

Protester Holley Kofluk told CBC News that the legislation “lacked specificity...it’s just so much ambiguity, it leaves people open [and] vulnerable.”

One of the protest organizers in Collingwood, Jim Pinkerton, shared with QMI Agency that he would like to see the Canadian government “start over with Bill C-51 with proper safeguards and real oversight.”

“We need CSIS to be accountable. It’s not OK for CSIS to act as the police, which is what’s indicated in Bill C-51. We need accountability and Canadians deserve that,” Pinkerton said.

The Day of Action is being backed by more than 30 civil liberties groups, including Amnesty International Canada, LeadNow, OpenMedia, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, the Council for Canadians, and others.

One of the biggest concerns the new legislation raises is the additional powers it grants to police and Canada's spy agency – the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) – by increasing information sharing and allowing detention on mere suspicion.

“This bill disproportionately targets indigenous communities, environmental activists, dissidents, and Muslims, many of whom are already subjected to questionable and overreaching powers by security officials, [and] will make it easier and ostensibly lawful for government to continue infringing upon the rights of peaceful people,” StopC51.ca said.

Govt ‘rejects argument’

A spokesman for Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney, Jeremy Laurin, spoke in support of the bill on Saturday, telling CBC News that the government “rejects the argument that every time we talk about security, our freedoms are threatened.”

“Canadians understand that their freedom and security go hand in hand [and] expect us to protect both, and there are safeguards in this legislation to do exactly that,” Laurin said.

Blaney’s parliamentary secretary, Roxanne James, also issued comments of support, saying she was happy to answer any questions or concerns about the proposed law.

“Most people across Canada believe that if one branch of government comes across information pertinent to the national security of this country and the safety and security of our citizens, then that branch of government should be able to relay that information to our national security agencies,” James said. “That is precisely what Bill C-51 would do, and I was pleased to be able to answer those concerns.”

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