

Rights under attack: activists

Anti-terror bill threatens freedom of expression, marchers say

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Canada is slowly turning into a police state as the government rushes anti-terrorism legislation through Parliament, a coalition of civil-rights and anti-globalization activists charged yesterday.

About 60 people marched through downtown streets to protest against what they see as the dismantling of individual rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Ahmed Abdirahman, spokesman for Opération SALAMI, an anti-globalization group that organized the protest, said Bill C-36 uses the fight against terrorism as a pretext to compromise justice and freedom of expression.

The bill is expected to clear Senate in the coming week.

"The definition of terrorism in Bill C-36 is so vague that it could involve forms of protest and dissent that have nothing to do with terrorism," Abdirahman said.

Under the new definition, Abdirahman said, people can be suspected of terrorism or facilitating terrorism by participating in strikes, civil disobedience campaigns and unsanctioned demonstrations.

The protesters gathered at Cabot Square, opposite the Montreal Children's Hospital, then marched in silence with their mouths covered by pieces of black cloth with C-36 written on it.

They held another short rally in front of RCMP headquarters at Greene Ave. and Dorchester Blvd.



JOHN KENNEY, GAZETTE

Antonin St. Jean takes part in yesterday's rally outside RCMP headquarters in Westmount.

Protest organizers said the new legislation gives the police powers to interrogate, detain and spy on people suspected of terrorist activities without appropriate checks and balances.

It also allows for preventive arrests and detention as well as investigative hearings where a person is compelled to co-operate with the police, suspending his right to remain silent.

But the protest drew little attention from crowds busy with Christmas shopping.

David, a university professor who teaches politics and didn't want to give his last name, said part of the apathy could be explained by a feeling of insecurity that the government is skillfully exploiting.

"Civil rights, democracy and freedom are for the courageous," David said. "They aren't for sheep who expected to be protected by their government from anything and everything."

David said the population is being lulled into a false sense of security, thinking that the new measures will allow the government to fight terrorism better.

"Look at Israel," David said. "They are doing everything under the sun but can't stop terrorist attacks."

More resources not more laws are what's needed, David said.

"Give more money to the CSIS and the army so they can do their job, I have nothing against that. But don't dismantle the system of civil liberties it took 100 years for us to create."

Eileen Young, of the Coalition Against War Hysteria and Racism, said she believes Bill C-36 is part of a broader corporate-inspired government policy to stifle anti-globalization dissent.

"This has nothing to do with terrorism," Young said. "They are trying to make criminals out of us, because now our activities are defined as terrorist activities."

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