

Anti-Maskers Are Co-Opting Palestinian Protests, Claiming Their Plight Is Similar

 [vice.com/en/article/y3dvax/anti-maskers-are-co-opting-palestinian-protests-claiming-their-plight-is-similar](https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3dvax/anti-maskers-are-co-opting-palestinian-protests-claiming-their-plight-is-similar)



At a pro-Palestinian rally on May 18 in Mississauga, Ontario, a man marched proudly with the crowd, waving a pole with two flags on it. The top flag featured a red line dramatically slashing through a black circle, dwarfing the Palestinian flag below it. The top flag was the logo for The Line, one of the biggest anti-lockdown groups in Canada.

In the past week, as the one-sided death toll in conflict between Israel and Palestine continues to grow, The Line has suddenly inserted itself into the Palestinian movement. Almost all of its posts are about the violence in Gaza. Many are about an upcoming rally next week and highlight the group's most prominent member, Lamont Daigle, the man with the flag, and his actions at the protests.

The Line has been criticized for conflating the Palestinian struggle with its fight against lockdowns and minimizing what's happening in the Middle East. As of Thursday morning, at least 227 Palestinians, including 64 children, have been killed in Israeli airstrikes on Gaza. Twelve Israelis have been killed in the conflict. The escalation came over the forced eviction of Palestinians from East Jerusalem that also resulted on raids on Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's most revered sites.

Daigle, the group's figurehead, posted a lengthy diatribe online outlining his support for Palestine and his belief that a carbon copy of oppression "will come to Canada at some point." In it, he outlined a conspiracy with antisemitic flourishes (Jewish people secretly run the global economy and politics, etc.) about the pandemic being used to put the rest of the world in the same conditions those in Gaza live under.

"The Globalist Elites are the ones responsible for the Palestinian occupation 'testing ground' for how they propose to 'Occupy' and 'lockdown' the rest of the World," he wrote.

"We've been in lockdown for 1 year and we're already fed up," Daigle wrote. "What are you going to do in 2 years? Still the same thing? Yelling at cops and the media to tell the truth? No, we're going to be a bit more 'active' and then be labeled by the government media as terrorists."

Another lengthy post on The Line's main page followed a similar vein.

World News

What It's Like Being a Migrant Worker Caught Between Israel-Gaza Violence

Anthony Esguerra

05.19.21

Yara Shoufani, a spokesperson with the Palestine Youth Movement, told VICE World News pro-Palestinian activists make concerted efforts to root their activism in the real world far away from antisemitic conspiracies.

"We do not condone or support any kind of movement that is centred around any sort of conspiracy theory," said Shoufani. "We're very well aware of conspiracy theories, the way in which they're rooted in a long history of antisemitism in particular."

Shoufani said you may be able to draw comparisons to how Canada treats its Indigenous communities and the oppression in Gaza but the comparison between the "minor inconveniences within their lives" as a result of COVID-19 lockdown and what the Palestinian are dealing with is "quite strange."

"We know that COVID-19 has disproportionately impact marginalized communities," she added. "So to see this kind of sentiment of folks who are anti-COVID-19 safety protocols showing up to our events, trying to recruit members of marginalized communities who are disproportionately impacted, is a little bit heartbreaking and makes me a little bit nervous."

A pro-Palestinian activist and organizer, who did not want to be named out of fear of repercussions, said it appears The Line is using the plight of the Palestinians to further its agenda. They cited recent videos the group published showing Daigle marching in a pro-Palestinian rally with large flags advertising The Line.

“There might be specific members of their organization who do believe in the Palestinian cause,” they said. “But if that is the case, then they just need to mask up and go to the rally without the branding.

“They are trying to put their struggle on the same level as Palestine, and it's not even close,” they added. “It's insulting to Palestinians.”

The activist told VICE they have spoken to several organizers who share their concerns.

Rose Jazmin, a co-founder of The Line, told VICE World News in an email she has been involved in the Palestinian movement for “over 30 years.” Jasmin disputed the description of the group as “anti-lockdown”—despite the group’s large footprint in the anti-mask community—and said The Line “distanced ourselves a long time ago from lockdown groups due to discrimination towards our Muslim and Middle Eastern organizers and founders.”

“Since many of our followers are actively engaged in lockdown protests, our aim was to show them that Palestine has been occupied for over 73 years,” she said. “We were hoping to get our followers to relate in a way and really understand what our Palestinian brothers and sisters are going through.”

The Line isn't new to reaching out to marginalized groups. They recently held an anti-lockdown prayer event for Eid—something Muslim groups quickly distanced themselves from. However, they aren’t the only group in the anti-lockdown milieu to have compared the Palestinian plight—or the plight of other oppressed communities—to what is happening in Western countries because of the pandemic.

Michael Bueckert, vice president of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, a pro-Palestinian statehood advocacy group, told VICE World News, “Conflating the horrific conditions of occupation and apartheid... to very justified health measures in Canada to deal with a pandemic is just absurd on its face.”

However, Bueckert said the involvement of anti-lockdown folks is “almost encouraging.”

“This is a sign that public opinion is changing. The mobilization we've seen for Palestine over the last week or two has been tremendous and in some ways unprecedented,” said Bueckert. “The fact this group wanted to insert itself or to even exploit that growing movement... is a sign of the Palestinian movement’s growing respectability and popularity.”

Hammam Farah, a board member of Mississauga’s Palestine House, told VICE World News, “All I can say is that we obviously have nothing to do with these groups and don’t care.”

According to the activist who did not want to be named, members of The Line have joined pro-Palestinian Facebook groups where they shared links to their content and have even had The Line posts shared by the pro-Palestinian groups who were unfamiliar with The Line and

too busy to vet the content. They believed some in the movement may have spotted an “opportunity to grift” because “they know people might not check them out and don’t have time and are just grateful to have support.”

“When you see the sort of white flag with this flag, you don’t know what that means, and they’re singing along with the chants,” said Shoufani. “It’s like they’re taking advantage.”

Support of Palestine is in no way a popular sentiment among the greater anti-lockdown community. The Line has been significantly more outspoken in favour of Palestine and other marginalized groups than other groups in the anti-lockdown Canadian community.

Other anti-lockdown groups and figures are either not weighing in or are staunchly against Palestine. Many key organizers and figures in the community are holdovers from right-wing groups that organized for years around anti-Muslim sentiment. Citizen journalist Morgan Yew, who has been following the anti-lockdown movement closely, was at a recent rally in Toronto and saw members of the broader movement antagonize pro-Palestinian groups.

“I would say they are predominantly not on the side of Palestine,” Yew said.

It’s no surprise, then, that some of The Line’s followers are confused—or downright angered—by the pro-Palestinian rhetoric.

“You are saying that Israel is a perpetrator of crimes against Palestinians,” wrote one distressed follower on Twitter. “You started as an anti-lockdown movement so why did you now venture into politics?”

Follow Mack Lamoureux on [Twitter](#).

ORIGINAL REPORTING ON EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS IN YOUR INBOX.

By signing up, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) & to receive electronic communications from Vice Media Group, which may include marketing promotions, advertisements and sponsored content.