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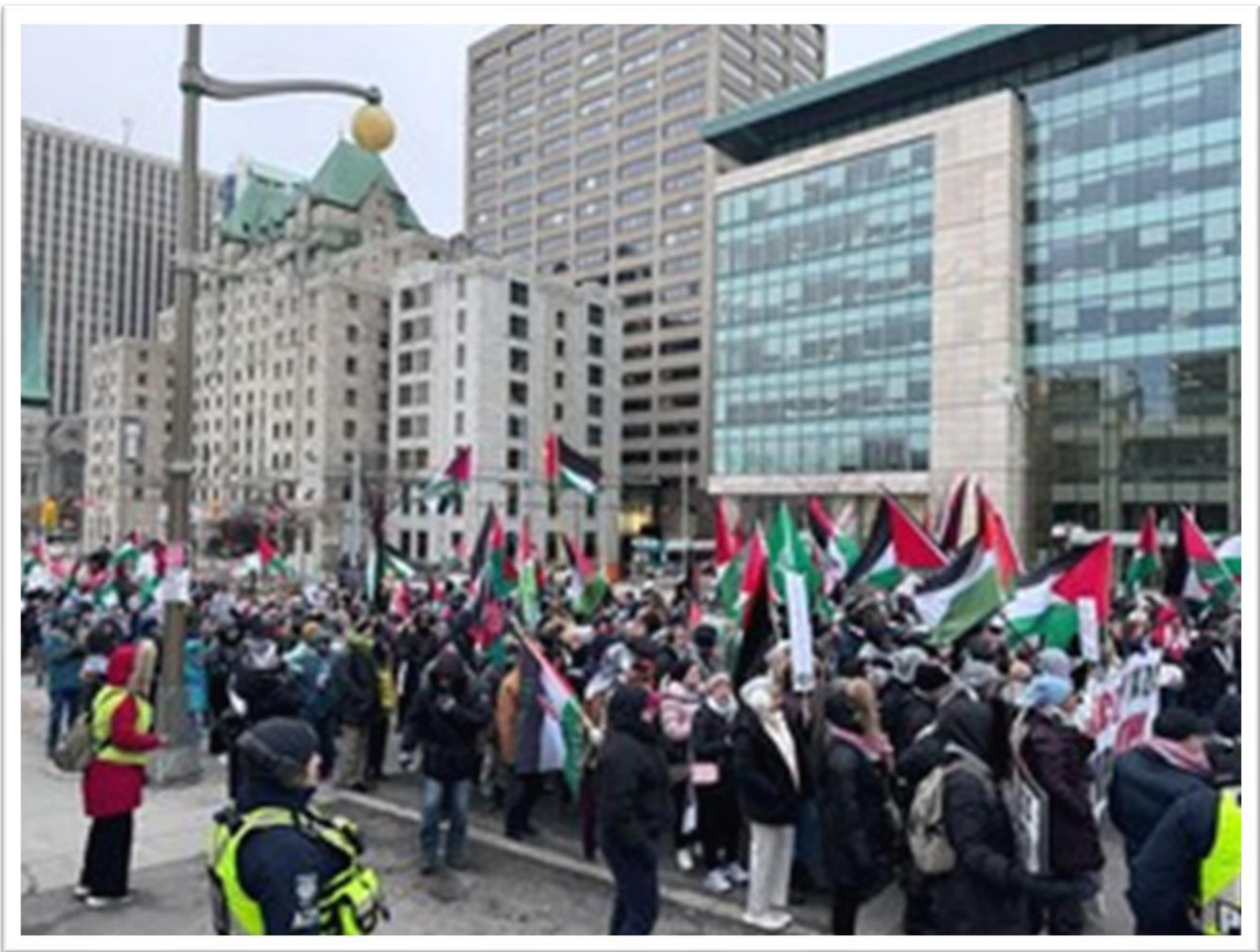
Noise bylaw tickets issued again during 12th weekend of pro-Palestinian rallies in Ottawa

Rally organizers call the tickets a "clear attempt to suppress pro-Palestinian organizing and support."

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Protesters gathered in downtown Ottawa for the 12th straight week of pro-Palestine rallies. PHOTO BY ASHLEY FRASER /POSTMEDIA

Article content

More bylaw infraction tickets were handed out to pro-Palestinian protesters gathered in downtown Ottawa for the 12th consecutive weekend.

The City of Ottawa said nine noise-violation tickets were handed out to protesters as hundreds marched down Elgin Street, through the Rideau Centre and into the ByWard Market repeating their call for a ceasefire in the conflict in Gaza and saying they wouldn't stop until Palestine was free.

Among those receiving tickets on Saturday was Ottawa Centre NDP MPP Joel Harden, who received a \$490 ticket after speaking through a megaphone at the Canadian Tribute to Human Rights monument on Elgin Street.

Speaking to the crowd, Harden said that Palestinian protesters “have the right to scream,” and that “silencing Palestinian solidarity when genocide is happening is wrong.”

When the 2022 convoy protest gridlocked downtown Ottawa for three weeks, “we talked to the truckers like people,” Harden said. “We let them organize.”

Convoy protesters also received bylaw tickets and criminal charges were laid in some cases after downtown streets were blockaded for weeks.

Sarah Abdul-Karim, a member of the Palestinian Youth Movement, said those who received tickets would be supported if they decided to contest the fines in court. Abdul-Karim was among three people who were ticketed at the protest on Dec. 23, when bylaw infraction tickets were also handed out to participants using megaphones.

Rally organizers have called the tickets a “clear attempt to suppress pro-Palestinian organizing and support.”

Ottawa's noise bylaw says “no person shall operate or use or cause to be operated or used any sound reproduction device on any highway or other public place.”

In a statement released by the city on Saturday evening, Roger Chapman, the director of Bylaw and Regulatory Services, said the department's regarding demonstrations was to, where feasible and reasonable, address nuisance-related issues that disturb the community while ensuring public safety and community well-being.

“BLRS follows a progressive enforcement model and takes every opportunity to educate individuals on Ottawa's by-laws before the event, and work towards a resolution during the event,” Chapman said.

“It's important to note that enforcement during demonstrations is a result of escalated actions by the participants, which may pose nuisance and public safety issues. Since the beginning of the protests, BLRS has been working with organizers to educate them on the city's bylaws. As the

activities of protestors escalated and became more frequent, including the defacement of property, the use of sound reproduction devices, smoke bombs, fireworks, and threats towards our officers, BLRS took action to address these concerns.

“Initially, warnings were issued to individuals regarding the operation of these sound production devices on highways or public places. However, when the activity persisted, fines of \$490 were issued.”

Upon the issuance of a Provincial Offence Notice, defendants have 15 days to select one of three options under the Provincial Offences Act, which includes the option of requesting a trial,” Chapman’s statement added.

Alex Silas, regional executive vice-president for the national capital region for the Public Service Alliance of Canada, one of Canada’s largest unions, also received a ticket after speaking to the crowd on Saturday. Silas called himself a “known megaphone guy” after he earned a reputation as the union’s hype-man, rallying workers on the picket lines during the weeks-long strike in spring 2023.

Silas said he was standing in solidarity with pro-Palestinian protesters, and the tickets were an attack on their right to protest.

“They want to silence and stop our movement,” Silas said. “We cannot let this go on.”

Silas said the City of Ottawa was trying to “oppress” the movement. During the PSAC strike, he said, the city issued tickets for having hot-dog carts on sidewalks.

“We face common oppressors, common forces trying to keep us down,” he said.

Gathered at the Canadian Tribute to Human Rights monument, protesters banged drums, waved signs and flags and chanted: “free free Palestine” and “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Ottawa police had warned beforehand on social media that there would be “increased police presence due to potential demonstrations” downtown on Saturday afternoon.

The war triggered by a deadly Hamas attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7 has displaced large swaths of Gaza’s 2.3 million residents.

Israeli warplanes struck two urban refugee camps in central Gaza on Saturday, and United States President Joe Biden approved new weapons sales to Israel despite international calls for a cease-fire.

The United Nations Security Council has called for the unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, which has been blocked by long delays at two border crossings, ongoing fighting, Israeli airstrikes, repeated cuts in internet and phone services and more.

With files from Catherine Morrison and The Associated Press