

Opinion: The clownish attire of Montreal police is turning into a public-safety risk. It's time for the province to end it



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Police have been dressing in camouflage of all colours at the request of their union. But the time for the protest has passed. [REDDIT.COM](http://reddit.com)

Never-ending, purposeless protest gestures are beginning to erode public confidence in Montreal's police force. This casual-looking approach to policing could have unintended consequences as a handful of protesters are once again blurring the lines between protest and nuisance.

As tension mounts between taxi and Uber drivers, the potential for serious violence is obvious. In plain view of reporters, officers "[stood by but didn't intervene \(http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/anti-uber-protests-taxi-sheriff-takes-quebec-government-to-task-over-uber\)](http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/anti-uber-protests-taxi-sheriff-takes-quebec-government-to-task-over-uber)" as cabbies pelted eggs at their competitors' vehicles. A group of Montreal taxi drivers has also promised to continue deploying roving squads to summon and sequester Uber drivers. Some

cabbies, wearing cowboy hats and brandishing fake pistols and badges, have also taken it upon themselves to [steal phones \(http://www.cjad.com/cjad-news/2015/10/01/cowboy-taxi-drivers-steal-uberx-drivers-cell-phone\)](http://www.cjad.com/cjad-news/2015/10/01/cowboy-taxi-drivers-steal-uberx-drivers-cell-phone) being used by unlicensed drivers – in plain view of cameras (<http://www.journaldemontreal.com/2015/09/30/des-chauffeurs-de-taxi-cowboy-volent-le-cellulaire-dun-uberx>).

“We have seized the device you use as your weapon to transport people illegally,” said a legit-sounding Hassan Kattoua last month, part of a squad of cabbie-vigilantes who have deluded themselves into believing they have powers of search and seizure. This ominous warning was also issued to Uber drivers: “You can run, but you can’t hide.”

“The drivers, they are really upset that the law is not being respected,” added Kattoua at this week’s protest, without any trace of irony.

As the taxi industry puts forward legitimate grievances against Uber, actual law enforcement officials seem comfortable with these chaotic scenes, perhaps out of a misplaced sense of anti-government solidarity — or of sheer indifference. It’s not clear which.

Quebecers have recently seen sheriffs; costumes elsewhere: Palais de Justice constables wore sheriff T-shirts [earlier this month \(http://www.journaldemontreal.com/2016/02/01/constables-speciaux--apres-les-pantalons-de-clowns-les-t-shirts-de-sherifs\)](http://www.journaldemontreal.com/2016/02/01/constables-speciaux--apres-les-pantalons-de-clowns-les-t-shirts-de-sherifs) as they demanded a \$5,000 raise from the government; police officers in Chateauguay began [wearing the costumes \(http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/old-west-sheriff-costumes-donned-by-protesting-police-force-in-ch%C3%A2teauguay-que-1.2835682\)](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/old-west-sheriff-costumes-donned-by-protesting-police-force-in-ch%C3%A2teauguay-que-1.2835682) in November 2014.

It is Montreal’s police force, though, that leads in flirting with insubordination. At the behest of their union, the Fraternité des Policiers et Policières de Montréal, some officers have been plastering police cars and offices (on private property) with union stickers, and wearing jeans, camouflage pants, leopard-print leggings and other clownish trousers every day since July 2014. (Some officers do, admirably, defy their union and wear the full uniform or at least dark pants that resemble regulation attire.) It’s been used sporadically as a union tactic since 2003, but never for such a sustained period.

These are not “pressure tactics.” Bill 3, the proposal renegotiating pensions to split contributions 50/50 between government and its employees, became law in December 2014. There is no more pressure to be applied, at least not until the 2018 election, when union leaders can encourage their members to vote for the Parti Québécois, as union leaders are wont to do.

This disregard for the uniform and public property, and by extension the citizenry, is completely gratuitous and serves no purpose other than blind antagonism.

When an armed officer is [photographed \(http://www.cjad.com/cjad-news/2015/01/09/watch-cop-in-tight-pink-pants-and-green-socks-getting-coffee\)](http://www.cjad.com/cjad-news/2015/01/09/watch-cop-in-tight-pink-pants-and-green-socks-getting-coffee) wearing pink pants and fluorescent green socks, standing in front of a display case full of doughnuts, the credibility of the entire force and the city of Montreal suffers greatly. Worse than a festering public-relations problem are the risks to safety, that of both citizens and the officers themselves.

Confronted with cops in [clown pants \(http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/06/12/montreal-police-pants_n_7572038.html\)](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/06/12/montreal-police-pants_n_7572038.html), one assault victim said she was [too scared \(http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/harmless-protest-or-threat-to-public-safety-quebec-city-wants-to-force-police-officers-to-ditch-outrageous-pants\)](http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/harmless-protest-or-threat-to-public-safety-quebec-city-wants-to-force-police-officers-to-ditch-outrageous-pants) to open the door; a driver in Châteauguay [called 9-1-1 \(http://www.journaldemontreal.com/2014/11/21/un-citoyen-appelle-le-911-parce-quun-sherif-larrete\)](http://www.journaldemontreal.com/2014/11/21/un-citoyen-appelle-le-911-parce-quun-sherif-larrete) to be sure he wasn’t being accosted by an impersonator. Coupled with news this week that police commanders receive bonuses (<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/bonuses-for-tickets-police-union-calls-on-city-to-halt-scheme>) for meeting traffic-ticket quotas, tension between police and citizens could increase if professionalism isn’t promptly restored.

Since police leadership and the mayor's office seem unable to restore order, it is incumbent on the provincial government to legislate an end to the undignified and potentially dangerous tactics if the Brotherhood doesn't come to its senses first. As police appear less authoritative, it should come as no surprise that jilted citizens are taking it upon themselves to play a law-enforcement role.

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