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Fantino wasn't 'there for the little guy' in Caledonia

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From Saturday's Globe and Mail (Includes correction)

Vaughan candidate who demonized 'an outsider' during native occupation trumpets endorsement from Don Cherry, who lives in Mississauga

It is the very sweetest of ironies that hockey tough guy Don Cherry should be shilling for Julian Fantino, the former OPP commissioner now running as the Conservative candidate in the federal riding of Vaughan.

"There are not enough words to describe how much respect I have for Julian Fantino," Mr. Cherry says in an automated call [<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/cherrys-call-for-fantino/article1812556>] that went out this week to some voters in the sprawling riding north of Toronto. "He is honest, experienced and he's always there for the little guy."

Mr. Cherry, of course, lives in Mississauga, works in downtown Toronto, and has a cottage near Kingston. He has, in other words, no vested interest, let alone a vote, in the by-election next Monday.

Now when Gary McHale, then of Richmond Hill, first poked his nose into the occupation that was going on in the town of Caledonia south of Hamilton, and began in late December, 2006, organizing rallies for those who objected to the way the Ontario government and the OPP were handling the occupation, Mr. Fantino had just taken over as the OPP boss.

He immediately demonized Mr. McHale, not a Caledonia resident, as "an outsider" with "an agenda."

In a flood of internal e-mails to the officers who worked for him (these later were made public as a result of Mr. McHale's various disclosure requests in court) and in his public statements, the then-commissioner went to remarkable lengths to characterize Mr. McHale and his supporters, to borrow from one of the e-mails Mr. Fantino sent, as "interlopers who put their own personal agendas" ahead of the purportedly grand peace efforts at the negotiating table.

It was an astonishing use of the resources of the state against a private citizen who had done nothing but exercise the very freedoms guaranteed by the Charter.

And it culminated in two extraordinary events.

The first was Mr. McHale's arrest on a charge of "counselling mischief not committed," which virtually no one had ever heard of but which was used nonetheless to impose sweeping travel restrictions upon him for more than two years (and keep him out of Caledonia, in other words). This charge was ultimately stayed by the Crown.

The second event was then-commissioner Fantino's letter to a court in defence of a native man who was accused of assaulting Mr. McHale (and that man later pleaded guilty).

