

Police State Tactics at Toronto G8-20

Larry Gambone

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The majority of the population opposed spending a billion dollars on so-called security. Torontonians were angry in having their down town turned into an armed camp. Saturday June 26. saw a demonstration with an estimated 30,000 participants. Trade unionists, Indigenous activists, poverty, women's and environmental groups were there. After a nonviolent march, a black block of 50 to 100 in number broke away and began smashing the windows of corporate businesses. The police abandoned four cruisers in their path and these cars were soon in flames. A journalist followed the Black Bloc for almost an hour and a half and the police did not intervene against them.

When the police did act, it was against the peaceful demonstrators *in the assigned protest area*. Close to a thousand people were arrested in the course of two days of demonstrations. This was the largest mass arrest in Canadian history. People were beaten, trampled by horses, and six journalists were assaulted, one of whom was with the Manchester Guardian. The arrested were held in a make-shift jail and were held for 35 hours without food, denied water and the right to make a phone call. Quebecois, gay and minority people were targeted for special abuse. Some young women had to endure a cavity search and were threatened with rape. Saturday night the police invaded houses and people were carted away.

In the meantime, the mass media only showed the images of the burning cop cars and black blockers smashing windows. They mentioned nothing about the hundreds of victimized protesters. So-called pundits ranted hypocritically about violent criminals and the need to suppress them. It looked as though the black block action totally discredited the movement in opposition to the G8-20 summit, or at least that was the media's spin on the event.

Twenty four hours later the picture began to look somewhat different. The brutal and irrational over-reaction on the part of the state could no longer be ignored. Videos showed the police assaulting journalists and demonstrators. As people were released, the conditions in the jail were made public through the social and alternative media. "Ordinary" people begin to turn their anger against the authorities. The comments section on the CBC reports of the later G8-20 actions ran ten-to one against the police and the Harper government. Many people suspected a set-up.

An organized response was not long in coming. Demonstrations occurred in half a dozen cities. Musicians, politicians and a host of academics, as well as Amnesty International and the Civil Liberties Association denounced the government's action. What's more, the labour movement

got on board. The Canadian Labour Congress and individual trade unions as well, demanded an inquiry into the government and the police actions.

By attacking, brutalizing and arresting peaceful protesters the government has succeeded in uniting labour, the radical left, academia and the social movements, when their goal had been to sow division among these groups. They have also radicalized thousands of people, for all talk of “liberal democracy” and “Canada is different” will seem utter hypocrisy to the victims, their families and friends. Had they simply rounded up the black blockers, few would care. The government seemingly “snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.”

Why the state over-reacted is now being debated. Many people figure they deliberately let the black bloc run free as a rationalization for the billion squandered on “security.” An equal number believe the violence was a warning of what to expect if people react against the coming government cut-backs, the so-called austerity program to destroy workers living standards. Others think that the government does not have such a fine tuned level of control and the police simply went berserk, venting their hatred against those who do not share their anti-democratic sentiments.

One should not let fear run away with us. The police attacked the community activist sector of the march. They did not attack the trade union section, and the reason for this is that they fear unionized workers. If they get the organized work force really angry they will do more than break a few windows, and the cops know this.

Whatever the reasons behind the attacks, Saturday, June 26th marks a new stage in the development of a mass anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian movement in Canada.

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