

G20: Demonizing Democracy. Canada's Police State.

"A Taste of South in the Global North"

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They never "opened fire" but by Canadian standards the public got a shock – a well-thought out theatrical performance – Southern style! "This only happens in places like Mexico," one protester told me. Helicopters circling the city 24 hours a day, snipers on roof tops, the liberal use of pepper gas, rubber bullets, police on horseback, university campuses and private home raids and arrests (900 and counting), beatings (men and women, young and old of all colors including "white"), intimidation, transportation shut-downs... The list goes on. You know it well! While the Integrated Security Unit might have been slightly milder on the beatings, the rest was standard practice, so much so, I could warn my less experienced comrades what was about to come and it usually came, minutes later!

20,000 March in Protest

A protester who came all the way from Iran for the event, said jokingly, "Even God is a capitalist," when the rain poured down on us for most of the day. By 11:00h on Saturday almost 20,000 protesters from a cornucopia of groups, along with the Ontario Postal workers, Hamilton Steel workers, Sudbury miners (on strike for over a year now), Oshawa and Ottawa autoworkers, CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees), university employees, students and professors, militant Ethiopian and Somalian groups, together with an array of leftist groups, gathered at Queen's Park in the heart of Toronto (approximately 10 to 15 blocks from where the Summit was well under way at the Toronto Convention Center in the financial district). All had two objectives. First, to make our voices heard. Second, to get to the fence (near the site of the Summit). As predicted, neither happened! A well-planned, coordinated effort on behalf of the *Integrated Security Unit* (ISU) (trumped up name for police) to protect the ruling class together with the bourgeois media made sure both objectives were terminated.

All prepared with banners and megaphones, we marched south down a main artery (University Avenue) where we were met with riot police who diverted us west on Queen Street to Bathurst Street. We were the "beautiful people" of Canada, the oppressed and marginalized, those who truly called for democracy not only in Canada but for our brothers and sisters around the world. When I say democracy, I refer to an [Ellen Meiksins Wood understanding of democracy](#). We chanted slogans in unison. "One, we are the people. Two, a little bit louder. Three, we are responsible for each other." "This is what democracy looks like. That is what hypocrisy looks like." (directed to the riot police and snipers on top of the U.S. embassy and other key buildings). "United the people will never be defeated." "Stop corporate take-over now." "Justice Now. Housing Now. Jobs Now." "Stop corporatized education." "G8/G20, they're few, we're many." "G20 off Native land."

Our voices were loud and strong with every good intention. Suddenly out of nowhere the

Black Bloc (a militant anarchist group) infiltrated the line and divided the CUPE group, I was walking with, in two, along with the entire 20,000 protesters. Dressed in pure black from head to toe, faces completely covered in black masks, about 200 plus in number, they were “militant terror” in the heart of the protest. Known by Canadians as a group to cause destruction, they became the major antagonism to our legitimate protest. Canadians in Quebec have exposed some members of this group to be *agent provocateurs*. Our unity was divided! Now one group of us headed south toward the fence (which we never reached), while another group turned back to march up to Queen’s Park. From then on, the event played out into scenes that remind me of the back streets of Kurtulus on former May Day marches in Istanbul. A formula used all around the world, it transformed the event into what spectators/taxpayers were waiting/paying for. Three police cars were burned. Bricks were thrown at police. The *Black Bloc* went on a rampage smashing unexpected shop keeper windows on Yonge Street (Canadian equivalent of Istiklal in Beyoglu). They made sure to hit large corporate chains but left small business untouched. Perfectly staged, the ruling class forces that be, destroyed all legitimacy to the genuine protest march. The goal of some of the agitated protesters, excluding the Black Bloc, was to *reach* the fence (like we have to *reach* Taksim Square). Continuing all afternoon, evening and into the night, 2,000 more of us marched down Yonge Street at 21:00h chanting slogans like “Whose streets, our streets” and “End the police state.” We even broke out into the national anthem, until we met with police who stopped us dead in our tracks. Pockets of protests went till about three in the morning only to spill over to Sunday.

Once again democratic voices for the oppressed poor, the working classes and the voices against capitalism and imperialist wars were silenced. I wept for my people. They are good people but will have to become smarter, wiser. They will have to learn it is just the beginning. An expected 20 years of austerity measures, an entire generation, will give them a “wake-up call.” The ruling elite planned the G20 event specifically for such purpose, to justify a tightening on the middle and working classes under a new oppressive regime as the economic crisis deepens here. Bourgeois media, the *Globe & Mail* was kind enough to write *far too late* on its Saturday pages of an undercover plan to crack down on demonstrators by imposing new legal restrictions, embedded within a 1939 law known as the *Public Works Protection Act*, similar to a war measures act, which “allows police to search without a warrant, demand identification and deny entry.” Resembling George Orwell’s *1984*, my people experienced the act firsthand. On Sunday morning the University of Toronto campus was raided twice and 75 arrests were made. Hundreds of new cameras in the downtown core and elsewhere in public space are now permanent. New possibilities for the police to do whatever they want, *from now on*, will become standard practice. I witnessed an historic moment. Canada has entered a new paradigm. Twenty thousand police from all across the country were paid \$1000 a day to control 20,000 protesters, while public employees who worked in the “Security Zone” (the new term given to the downtown core) were sent home for the Summit without pay!

Free Our Comrades

On Sunday morning at 10:00h there was a protest march against a make-shift jail set up in a former Film Studio in Eastern Toronto. [Over 300 of us protested](#) with slogans like, “Down with the police state,” “Free our comrades,” “Sol, sol, sol solidarity!” “Protest is not a crime! No more cops on overtime!” in the hopes they would release those genuine activists from progressive democratic movements arrested unjustly on Saturday, including [Jesse Rosenfeld](#), a journalist for the *Guardian* newspaper beaten by police. A deal was made with

an officer O'Connor. We were to follow police instructions, be non-violent and when asked to disperse we would. We kept our end of the bargain. They, did not! Over the course of about 60 minutes a slow build up of unmarked police vans were brought to the area and encircled us. Without any warning one forced its way to our front line, flinging open the side door in haste whereby robo-cop police sprang from within the van, out upon the crowd, as a wolf would a rabbit, and began beating protesters.

Shocked, we sat down peacefully in response to their violence to adhere to our end of the bargain. Not two minutes later they fired tear gas into the crowd and began arresting more protesters in the chaos and violence the Integrated Security Unit created. Their objective had been met. Round up more of the legitimate voices and "process" them. "Process" is a term used by the bourgeois media to establish the discourse for further "criminal activity" in the future. Rather than "arrest," the term "process" has a kind of clinical ring, like one might process meat or process a refugee or a socialist. You get my point. To my knowledge no one from the Black Bloc was arrested. And so the charade continued all day Sunday across the downtown core with small pockets of protesters, divided by the Integrated Security Unit and the Black Bloc. As Canada doesn't have so-called terrorists, it would appear they have been manufactured from marginalized groups whose agenda is far from the need for working class solidarity. Divide and conquer works a little differently here, but on the same premise. Media worked it's magic. The average citizen has been put to sleep, free to become nationalist and borderline fascist in the future. Shame! (as protesters shouted out at political rallies) Shame! Indeed!

Deals and Disaster

Before the G20 conference even began, deals were already being signed, 11 between China and Canada. Canada will be their major supplier of uranium. Saskatchewan based Cameco Corporation won the deal to supply China's need for nuclear capacity for electricity generation - 23 million pounds of Uranium concentrate by 2020. In return, quotes the *Globe & Mail*, "the Chinese leader pledged to double his country's trade with Canada to \$60-billion by 2015." The Canada Tar Sands in Alberta (largest oil extraction in the world) is set to grow five times in size over the next few years. Leo Gerard the international President of the United Steelworkers told a packed audience at a rally in Massey Hall on the Friday night before the protests, since 1980 over 1500 foreign companies have taken over Canadian firms involved in resource capital accumulation. Naomi Klein rallied the audience into a standing ovation when she told those who had paid \$20 for a ticket to the event, to "step out of their comfort zone, reject individualism and to march with her to a make-shift tent city in nearby Allan Gardens for the homeless." (2,000 of us followed her Friday evening.) At the same event [Vandana Shiva](#) spoke of a "militarization of the economy" and informed the audience of the American [Operation Green Hunt](#) designed to pursue resource extraction in India along with the Maoists. John Hillary told of plans for an EU-Canada agreement set to pave the way to privatize Canada's public sector. Canada's esteemed healthcare system, highly boasted in Michael Moore's film *Sicko*, will continue to erode. Over 500,000 people are out of work in Canada and 500,000 more have given up looking - nearly one million in a country of 34 million. [Prime Minister Steven] Harper however, managed to push through his pet project for Maternal Aid to third world countries!

A Week Full of Protest

The past week saw an array of legitimate protests across the city from anti-imperialist wars

to climate change. One I found particularly moving – a platform for Indigenous Rights saw about 2,000 march on Thursday. Darlene Ritchie from Council Fire (forum for Native Rights), a prolific speaker, told her audience at a press conference at Queen’s Park of the Indian Act – “racism legislated in Canada.” An archaic piece of legislature (written in 1763 is a proclamation which promised Native people their own land from the crown if they fought for the British). She spoke of 584 Native women who are missing or murdered since 2001. The living standards of the Indigenous people in Canada is rated 74th as the world’s worst conditions while Indonesia is rated 63rd. “My people are living in 4th world conditions, yet Harper can send money off to the third world for maternal aid!” Over half of Indigenous people migrate to cities as they have no work. There they are exposed to racism sending them into a downward spiral of drug addiction and alcoholism. Only since 1965, are Indigenous people allowed to attend regular public schools. However, they are forced to pay for them, hence the most impoverished of Canada have been funding public education. They die from undefinable cancers from the Uranium mining and oil tar sands in the north, set only to escalate due to Harper’s new deals with China. Hundreds of Native people who protest are thrown behind bars. One man has not been able to send his children to school for two years because of his political involvement. Ritchie ended with, “We want Harper to give us a little bit of the surplus. We are tired of them bombing other nations. It effects our spirit too. We are tired of the pigs who only want to get to the trough first.” After the speech, I approached her as my sister and offered her to visit me in Istanbul and speak to us there. In response, she told me she can’t travel. “I don’t have a passport. I am an Indian under the Indian Act. If I took a passport I’d have to be a Canadian. I have chosen not to!”

Later in the week I joined a strike for the [Novotel Hotel employees](#), protesting for a decent work contract and the right to unionize who were subject to intimidation. Firing of key leaders in organizing union members, promoting workers to better positions and pay if they didn’t join the union were some of the tactics used to divide and intimidate them. This sounded familiar and I thought of our own situation at Istanbul Bilgi University. About 150 workers from different ethnicities and areas of employment were making their voices heard in front of the French hotel chain and disturbing the flow of capital. Slogans rang out, “Contract Now,” “What’s that smell... Novotel” and “The workers united can never be divided.” A huge inflated rat, filled with hot air, drew negative attention to the hotel. They nick-named it “Ratatouille” as the dish in French cuisine. Having once worked in big hotel chains when I was a student in Toronto, I jumped right in. Marxist groups marched with them handing out flyers and newsletters. Later they made speeches and I added our university employees had a similar platform to theirs. “Employees at Istanbul Bilgi University support you all the way from Turkey,” I added. They broke out in huge cheers! It was only later that I learned on Saturday night when genuine protesters came in solidarity, 150 were arrested in front of the Novotel along with the *Guardian* journalist.

It has been an educational and enlightening ten days. I have got to know my people again. I have learned the struggle is really no different here. As I leave them, I know their struggle has only begun. I trust as we ALL move toward unpredictable times ahead, we keep cool and remember there are others, genuinely fighting for a just, socialist world, where borders are only in our minds and our chance for solidarity must never be forgotten in the struggle, whether we are from the North or the South!

For those of you interested in following the “real events” please check the following websites – [Toronto Media Coop](#) and [rabble.ca](#) •

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