

G20 Toronto Riots perpetrated by Agents Provocateurs of the Police

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Picture: Agents provocateurs at SPP protest in Montebello in 2007

Smoke and Mirrors

Two weeks after the G20 protests in Toronto it is becoming more and more apparent that what many of us suspected is indeed true: the June 26 'violence' (i.e. property damage and police-car fires) was most likely perpetrated by agents provocateurs of the police. I recall walking back down Yonge Street after the June 26 demonstration and seeing smashed commercial windows and later watching the spectacle of burning police cars on the mainstream news; it all seemed surreal and quite staged. It felt a bit like being in a parallel universe. The demonstration broadcast on TV was not the demo I had just come from. None of the folks I was with during the demonstration saw windows being smashed or cars being set on fire, and when we saw the spectacle plaid out in the media we instantly knew that the vandalism was either staged or provoked, or both. Now evidence is beginning to surface that proves that these acts were at least partly carried out by undercover agents. As was the case at the 'Security and Prosperity Partnership' meeting protests at Montebello Quebec on August 20, 2007, it is the agents' boots that gives them away. In a recent article, Terry Burrows draws on photos from the Globe and Mail to demonstrate that 'black bloc' provocateurs and the uniformed armoured police were wearing in Toronto (as at Montebello) the identical government issued combat boots" [1].

It's likely that the agents provocateurs went off with other 'black block' people away from the larger march to set the stage for what Burrows aptly calls a "massive government / media propaganda fraud." This orchestrated spectacle of violence and destruction has at least three main functions or effects: it diverts attention away from the G8/G20 and any discussion on how they serve to plunder and exploit the world's resources, peoples and economies (the very issues raised by protestors); it serves to demonize demonstrators and delegitimize much-needed dissent and protest against global capitalism and its aforementioned devastation and; it serves to justify the billion dollar security bill that Harper put on the Canadian people. After weeks of insisting that the grounds for a one billion dollar police presence was specifically to stop so called black block tactics and 'violent groups,' when the time came police were no where to be seen and/or were given clear orders from the command centre that said "Do not engage," meaning to stand down and do nothing [2].

Rather than 'protect' the downtown district from violence and property damage, police actually used their resources and hugely disproportionate presence to demonize, intimidate and corral protestors. In Toronto police used what Catherine Porter of the Toronto Star calls the Miami Model [3]. This model is used by police agencies at demonstrations across the

globe from Genoa to Pittsburgh. As Porter explicates, the formula includes a number of now-common police tactics: The first is information warfare. Leading up to the demonstrations protestors are criminalized and dehumanized, presented as 'terrorists' and 'threats' that the city needs to defend against. Then there is intimidation, wherein police conduct random searches of perceived activists, midnight raids on organizers' homes before demonstrations etc. Another tactic is the self-defense rationale by police that "they threw rocks" so we had to use tear gas, rubber bullets and make arrests. In Toronto, rock-throwing, window-smashing "thugs" (as Harper called them), burning cars, and the over 1000 people arrested—only 263 of whom were charged with anything other than breach of the peace [4]—are part of a carefully orchestrated diversion and serve as scapegoats that allow the Canadian national security state to justify the insane cost of security for the summit as well as its police-state tactics and the increased militarization of public engagement. The last ingredient of the model is the police congratulating themselves for a "job well done" regardless of how many people are needlessly arrested (most of them never charged) or abused in the process.

The corporate media are complicit in this model and, as one would expect the result of implementing it is that protestors are demonized in the mainstream and legitimate dissent is therefore delegitimized. The real issues and the grievances of the protestors unfortunately never make the news and instead the act of demonstrating becomes the point of focus. The spectacle of 'violent protests' and/or 'riots' dominates the headlines and is subterfuge for any discussion on or critique of the G8/G20 and global capitalism.

The Truth Will Come Out

It is hopeful that in the days, weeks and months to come government and police will be forced to admit (under similar circumstances as in Montebello, Quebec in 2007) that much of the vandalism and fire-setting was undertaken by those encouraged, directly or indirectly, by agents provocateurs. It is also hopeful that police will have to answer for their disgraceful tactics—bolstered by regulation—during the G20 demonstrations (in fact a June 9 announcement was made that the Ontario Ombudsman is launching an investigation into the controversial security regulation passed by the province prior to the June 26-27 G20 summit) [5]. These tactics, apart from mass indiscriminate arrests, include arresting and beating a deaf man; arresting without-cause and violently removing the prosthetic leg of an amputee; strip searching young women in the make shift detention centre and threatening an Independent Media Centre (IMC) journalist with "gang rape;" and also using an electrical Taser device on another IMC reporter with a heart pacer despite having been informed of his condition and told not to use the device on him [6].

It has also recently surfaced that the much-feared five-meter rule never even existed. As it turns out a temporary regulation affecting the Public Works Protection Act, which was approved in secret by Dalton McGuinty's cabinet on June 2 on the request of Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair, never existed in the manner that protestors and legal counsel were led to believe. The media was complicit in underreporting the approval of the regulation initially on June 2 until they finally dropped the bombshell only days before the demonstrations, not allowing protestors and their legal team to properly and thoroughly examine the regulation. As a result the regulation was misinterpreted by protestors and misapplied by the police to an area beyond the security fence, when in actuality it was in regards to an area inside the security zone all along [7]. Toronto Police chief Bill Blair has admitted that he allowed the five-metre rule to be "misinterpreted" by citizens in order to "keep the criminals out."

Ultimately, it was little more than a trap—one that led both the police on the ground and the protestors to exaggerate the powers police legally had to search individuals and demand identification.

Exposing duplicitous regulatory maneuvers and ‘black block’ agents in government issued attire is without question a necessity and a positive thing for our movements. So too are the demands for a public inquiry into the heinous and illegal tactics of the police against people on the streets. It is critical that we expose the state as corrupt and demonstrate that it will break the law and trample all over our charter and human rights in the process of protecting global capital. If these issues are given more than cursory attention in the mainstream media it will serve to show the state’s despotic hand, and delegitimize police claims and actions against protestors. Still the images of burning cars and broken windows will forever live in the public imagination and many are likely to think of protestors as thugs, even after the police admit they placed agents provocateurs in our midst.

If 9/11 has taught us anything it is that holes in the ‘official story’ unfortunately do little to raise mass suspicion or scrutiny. Simply put, focusing on exposing police and government fraud, lies and abuses is very important but also puts us in a reactionary position with respect to the state. While a focus on the abuses of civil liberties and human rights that occurred during the G20 demonstrations in Toronto is hugely important, it simultaneously serves as yet another departure from the issues we initially came out to protest (the systematic global devastation of people and the environment wrought by the policies of the G8 and G20, and global capitalism generally).

Time to Reassess our Tactics

What is ever more apparent and frustrating is that our movements seem to be increasingly unwilling pawns in a larger systematic strategy designed to distract people away from any critique of the international banking structure and global capitalism while undermining the tactics and hindering the transformative potential of resistance movements. At sanctioned and even unsanctioned marches protestor’s physical movements are increasingly limited and dictated by police and the state. During the G20 demonstrations police corraled and herded us, holding us where they wanted us, stopping the march long enough for riot cops to get into position ahead of us, blocking off key intersections, and attempting to insight some form of ‘violent’ response. As Porter explains, a popular police tactic is “kettling.” Here, “Officers on bike or horses herd protesters into an enclosed space, so they can’t leave without trying to break through the police line. Take the bait; you provoke a beating or arrest.” In the end, the June 26 march in Toronto did not get anywhere near the much hyped about security fence. And even if it had, focusing on “getting to the fence” is not the goal or purpose of the global justice movement (one should hope). It was hard not to feel herded during the demonstration, almost like walking into a trap. They ultimately used our march to create media distractions/spectacles and set us up as being “violent.” As has happened before, our message did not get out; it did not reach the public. In other words, the police state/media used our demonstrations to create and/or perpetuate a negative image of protest in the public eye.

Maybe we need to change our tactics, perhaps holding our demonstrations away from downtown/summit locations so that the state will have no one to frame and scapegoat for their staged vandalism, fires etc., and no ways of justifying these huge security budgets [8]. Simply put, perhaps it is time to change our organizational, mobilization and agitation model(s) since the police state seems to repeatedly set traps for activists and

demonstrators, and use us—with the help of the corporate media—as a diversion from any real discussion of the global social justice issues we are attempting to raise and promote. It may be necessary to consider whether existing forms of resistance and agitation serve to help our movements and causes or undermines them and put us in harms way. Alternative strategies that may be worth exploring could involve organizing in a more covert fashion so that the state does not know exactly when and where to expect us. We could even use the fact that they infiltrate our meetings and mobilization campaigns against them. Here we could purposely spread misinformation at meetings and online about proposed events and demonstrations, leading the state and police to deploy resources and security goons to protests that never materialize. In the case of the G20 demonstrations in Toronto, if we were not there to be arrested by the hundreds and framed for smashing windows and burning cars, the Canadian security state would not be able to justify its billion dollar security budget. What if instead of protesting downtown in the designated zones they expect us to be in, beside the summits, we held our acts of resistance and opposition outside of the city altogether [9]? Then what? Could they blame or frame us for their staged acts of violence if there is no one there to ‘police’ save for a handful of undercover agents posing as ‘black bloc’? If we refused to play our part in the “Miami Model” it may help to show their hand.

It seems clear by now that the state’s policy is one of staging or inciting violence one day (while conveniently not arresting anyone during the actual occurrence of the violence) and then rounding up hundreds of protectors the next day and throwing them in jail (though they are not linked to the violence). The media helps create the manufactured connection between the arrests and the violence by incessantly looping images of smashed windows and burning cars one day and then images of mass arrests and sound bite headlines about the numbers of arrests etc. without any explanation or contextualization so as to suggest (without words) that the arrests must be somehow linked to the violence of the day before. We could deploy a counter-tactic that is fluid—such that if violence and/or property damage were to occur due to so-called black bloc tactics; we do not stick around waiting to be arrested the next day. We could have a contingency plan that dictates that when/if (staged) violence erupts; we disband and regroup according to media savvy back-up plans, perhaps moving our actions completely outside of the downtown area. This is one way to send the public a message of disowning the violence so that we cannot be faulted or scapegoated for it. Ultimately, our publicized plans for demonstrations should be used as bait to mislead and expose the police and media [10]. In turn we gain politically by humiliating the police and leaving nothing for the media to photograph except legions of over-funded riot cops and their undercover agents.

I want to suggest to all of those who are opposed to global capitalism (and its goon the capitalist police state) and the myriad destructions it renders unto the majority of the world and the environment, that perhaps it is time for our resistance movements to get a little more savvy and creative; to use misinformation and infiltration as they have done on us, and perhaps to move our organization and mobilizations underground instead of listing every planned event or action on our websites for the state to read and the media to broadcast. No more being pawns in a rigged game. This is not a retreat; quite the contrary it is a movement toward an evolution in strategy and tactics that may put us a few steps ahead of the capitalist state and ensure both the survival of our movements and the advancement of our agendas and causes. It is time for us to consider whether protests/demonstrations (and social movement organization and mobilization generally) in their current form further our cause(s) and affect palpable change. Stop being their pawn and start playing with the system. Just something to think about...

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Notes

[1] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=19928>

[2] <http://m.torontosun.com/14564416.1?fullscreen>

[3] <http://www.thestar.com/article/828876-porter-when-police-stick-to-phony-script>

[4]

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/toronto/independent-review-of-toronto-police-g20-conduct-moves-ahead/article1629887/>

[5]

<http://www.ombudsman.on.ca/en/media/press-releases/2010/ontario-ombudsman-to-investigate-g20-security-regulation.aspx>

[6]

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/g8-g20/toronto/deaf-man-arrested-in-g20-protest-gets-bail/article1619559>

<http://niagaraatlarge.com/2010/07/05/thorold-ontario-amputee-has-his-artificial-leg-ripped-off-by-police-and-is-slammed-in-makeshift-cell-during-g20-summit---at-least-one-ontario-mpp-calls-the-whole-episode-“shocking/>

<http://vimeo.com/12925239>

<http://vimeo.com/12924829>

[7]

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/adam-radwanski/a-timeline-on-the-g20-five-metre-rule-that-didnt-exist/article1626001/>

[8] & [9]- I want to thank my comrades Malinda Francis and Katherine Francis for turning me onto this idea and helping to flush it out.

[10] To my knowledge this counter-tactic of misinforming, trapping, and/or misleading police and the media is not one that has been previously proposed. It grows out of a larger argument I am currently formulating as part of my doctoral research.

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