

## **The Toronto Call: No More Police State Tactics**

The police response to the protests against the G8/G20 in Toronto was the largest mass arrest in Canadian history, surpassing the 1993 Clayoquot Sound logging blockade. It constituted the most far-reaching single assault on political rights in the Canadian state since the *War Measures Act* of 1970.

This response fits the pattern of militarized policing at global summits, which consistently produce mass arrests. It also builds on long histories of police brutality in this city and across Canada, particularly aimed at people of colour, indigenous peoples, and poor communities. The use of these police state methods is increasing as the social divides produced by neoliberal policies deepen.

In Toronto, this ground was further prepared by extraordinary legislation passed in secret by the Ontario government that designated the G20 security zone as a “public work.” Police deliberately misled the public to believe that anyone appearing within five metres of the four mile long wall surrounding the G20 zone could be searched without warning and arrested for failing to state their purpose for being near the fence.

As part of the \$1 billion security buildup, there was a massive police presence on the streets of Toronto, beginning days before the summit. Police stocked up on – and paraded before the media – weapons ranging from sound cannons that can cause permanent hearing loss, to water cannons, tear gas, riot gear, and other devices.

The police presence significantly increased at the Indigenous Solidarity rally on Thursday, June 24, where over 1000 people gathered to protest the G20 and its entrenchment of global racist colonization. On Friday, June 25, security tactics were further escalated in response to the large community rally. A large section of downtown Toronto streets was taken over by police in riot gear, in parked vans and buses, in buildings and helicopters, on horses and on bikes. Within this highly militarized atmosphere the police incited tensions with the violent attack and arrest of a young, deaf, black man. It is a travesty of justice that he was denied access to an ASL interpreter. That is the equivalent of being taken into custody and having your mouth ducktaped shut.

On Saturday, June 26, the mass arrest of protesters began. The pretext for this crackdown was the limited property damage in protests that day, which was similar to recent hockey riots in various cities but treated very differently, as pointed out by journalist Linda McQuaig. We believe it is important to openly discuss and debate the effectiveness of various tactics used in activist mobilizations. However, the key issue remains the security build-up and police response that was completely out of proportion to Saturday’s events.

Over the course of the weekend, more than 1000 people were detained. Core activists were arrested in their homes or grabbed on the streets by police snatch squads. These targeted arrests reveal a disturbing degree of racial profiling of both residents and visitors to Toronto, consistent with ongoing police practices.

On Sunday, June 27, people who gathered peacefully outside the massive temporary jail set up on Eastern Avenue were beaten by police and shot with rubber bullets and tear gas “muzzle blasts”. Scores of protestors and bystanders were penned in for long periods by police at Queen St. and Spadina Ave. Many in the crowd were eventually arrested, as were several activists blockaded in and around the activist Convergence Space.

In the week leading up to the summit, Conservative Cabinet Minister Stockwell Day signaled a particular focus on “anarchists” for this security crackdown. This simplistic targeting of a long-standing political tradition was further used by police to justify assaults on all demonstrators as well as the round-up of activists by claiming they were hunting for the “Black Bloc”. This criminalization of activists aimed to silence attempts to address the real issues presented by the G20.

It is clear that long-term police plans, including the heavy infiltration of activist organizations, were at work in the mass arrests on Saturday and Sunday. The closure of many public institutions, including the University of Toronto, attempted to create a ghost town in the core of the city to facilitate the arrest of activists.

Statements by the Mayor of Toronto and Chief of Police have focused on labeling non-Torontonians as the source of disturbances. The image of “dangerous outsiders” draws on racial and ethnic stereotypes and suggests that it is not legitimate for people from outside Toronto to exercise their rights to political expression, free association and freedom of movement. The G20 is a global assault that requires global solidarity in response.

The hundreds who were detained faced dismal and abusive conditions. People were held in overcrowded cages and denied access to food, water, and legal counsel. Friends and families did not have access to information about who was detained or when they might be processed or released. The reports of those released from detention reveal a pervasive pattern of sexual, gender, trans, homophobic and racist harassment by police.

This assault on civil and political rights must never be allowed to happen again.

We the undersigned call for:

1. The immediate release of all those detained
2. A full campaign to defend the civil rights of those facing charges arising from this extraordinary policing regime, especially those facing excessive charges

and/or punitive bail conditions that criminalize, limit mobility, and curtail rights in the long term.

3. An independent public inquiry into police actions during the summit, including disclosure on the role of police infiltrators leading up to and during events, and the chain of command for the extraordinary crackdown on legal rights and protests.

4. An end to the targeting of anarchists by the Conservative government and the police.

5. The resignation of Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair

### **Signatories**

Abigail Bakan	Toronto	Professor of Politics Studies, Queen's University
James Cairns	Toronto	Assistant Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University (Brantford)
Kate Cairns	Montreal	PhD student, OISE/UT
Deborah Cowen	Toronto	Assistant Professor, University of Toronto
Sue Ferguson	Toronto	Wilfrid Laurier University-Brantford
Naomi Klein	Toronto	Author
David McNally	Toronto	Professor of Political Science, York University
Mary-Jo Nadeau	Toronto	Lecturer, University of Toronto, Mississauga
Eroca Nicols	Toronto	Toronto Dance Community Love-In
Jenny Peto	Toronto	Activist
Judy Rebick	Toronto	CAW Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy
Alan Sears	Toronto	Sociology, Ryerson University
Rinaldo Walcott	Toronto	Professor, OISE University of Toronto
Cynthia Wright	Toronto	York University, Member of CUPE 3903