

Canada: Police agent-provocateurs unmasked at Montebello summit protests

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An amateur video posted on the internet shows cops disguised as anarchist protesters trying to provoke fights between riot police and demonstrators at last month's Montebello, Quebec, summit meeting of the US and Mexican presidents and Canada's prime minister.

On August 20-21, the luxurious Château Montebello was transformed into a fortress for the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America summit meeting. Three thousand policemen patrolled at or near the Château—the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) guarding an inner perimeter and the Quebec Provincial Police (SQ) patrolling the streets of Montebello. Helicopters flew over the small Quebec municipality, while coast-guard boats monitored the Ottawa River.

The size of this vast security operation reflected the chasm that separates the North American ruling elite from the mass of ordinary people. The three heads of government in attendance, despite sharp conflicts arising from the contradictory national interests of the elites they represent, are all carrying out policies that consistently favor the super-rich-directly represented at the summit by some of the most powerful businessmen of the three countries—to the detriment of the social needs of the majority.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper leads a Conservative minority government whose free-market policies and unbridled militarism in Afghanistan are increasingly unpopular. Mexican President Felipe Calderón, who took power after an election marred by accusations of fraud, is carrying out a fear campaign to push the Mexican public towards accepting more authoritarian methods of rule. As for the US President, George W. Bush, he personifies the brutality of a US ruling elite ready to commit the worst war crimes—as in Iraq—to seize control of the energy resources of the planet and pursue its plans for global hegemony.

Police officials tried to justify the extraordinary

measures deployed at Montebello by claiming they were needed to control “extremist” demonstrators and prevent them from “overwhelming” conference security forces. In fact, video images reveal a long-established police practice, that is, the use of agent provocateurs to provide a pretext for a brutal intervention by riot police against anti-government demonstrators and still further restrictions on the right to protest and other basic democratic rights.

The video, dated August 20, shows three burly, aggressive-looking masked men trying to join a group of smaller, youthful demonstrators wearing black and carrying red flags. One of the thugs is carrying a sign that says: “An end to war and globalization.” Another has a rock in his hand.

Dave Coles, president of the Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union of Canada, one of the demonstration's organizers, confronts the three thugs. He asks the one with a rock to drop it and asks all of them to show their faces. One of the masked-men then shoves Coles and gives him the middle finger. At this moment, a group of peaceful demonstrators begins chanting, “Police, police.” One hears a young demonstrator say: “They want to trick us, they want us to be aggressive with them. [...] They are agent provocateurs.”

In the meantime, the three masked men quietly approach the riot squad, which is forming a cordon a few paces away. One of them whispers something into the ear of a policeman. After a brief staged scuffle, the police cordon opens, letting the men through and they are gently placed in handcuffs. As the three walk away, one clearly sees that the fake demonstrators are wearing the same boots as their police escorts.

As usual for security forces, top SQ officials initially categorically denied that the three men in question were policemen. But after the video was posted to YouTube.com (to see the video, click on Stop SPP Protest - Union Leader stops provocateurs), the SQ was forced to

admit that the men are indeed SQ cops.

Without the YouTube video, the incident would in all likelihood never have been mentioned by the corporate media. As it is, the media dropped the story of the exposure of the SQ agent provocateurs after a single day.

On August 20 Radio Canada, the website of French-language section of the state-owned radio and television broadcasting service, titled its account “Montebello Summit: Demonstrations in relative calm,” and mentioned a few isolated confrontations after the departure of most of the demonstrators.

In fact, there were relatively few protestors—only a few hundred, according to the media—yet they were subjected to a gratuitous and completely disproportionate show of state violence. Police repeatedly fired tear gas and rubber bullets, even at a group that was only trying to drop off a petition with 10,000 names at the Château’s gates. Four people were arrested, accused of “interfering with police work.”

Turning reality on its head, Marcel Savard, an official of the SQ’s criminal investigation division, said the three undercover policemen in the video “were tasked with finding and identifying non-peaceful demonstrators and preventing incidents.” As for the rock clearly visible in one of the SQ undercover cop’s hands, Savard claimed that it had come “from a demonstrator who tried to incite him to throw it.”

Why then did the disguised policeman refuse to drop the rock when asked by demonstrators to do so? Why shove Coles and give him the finger?

Canada’s federal government defended the SQ agent provocateurs even though their behavior, captured on video, is of an illegal and criminal character. Resorting to the provocative tone and lies that have become standard fare for the Harper government, Public Security Minister Stockwell Day said, “Because they [the undercover cops] were not engaging in violence, it was noted that they were probably not protestors. I think that’s a bit of an indictment against the violent protestors.”

This is not the first time that the police have used such methods to justify the adoption of repressive measures aimed at limiting, if not abolishing for all practical purposes, the democratic right to demonstrate in opposition to government policy.

To cite only one recent incident, there was the widely publicized Germinal affair. For the April 2001, Quebec City Summit of the Americas, which discussed the creation of a free trade bloc of the Americas, the Canadian government mounted the largest ever security operation in

Canadian history, spending over \$100 million to equip and train thousands of police and build a massive security perimeter.

A few days before the summit, police arrested seven young men traveling to Quebec City, who had in their possession sticks, smoke bombs, dummy grenades, and gas masks. The press trumpeted the incident and loudly applauded the security measures around the summit.

Rapidly, however, the affair was shown to have been a state provocation. The reputed leader of the Germinal group was an ex-member of the Canadian Armed Forces. Of the group’s 15 members at least two others were RCMP double agents of and two more part of the Canadian military. It was one of the soldiers who had introduced the RCMP moles to the Germinal group. The RCMP moles urged the group to use Molotov cocktails in Quebec City, an idea the group rejected citing the possibility of damage or injury. The moles also furnished a large part of the equipment used to incriminate the Germinal members.

The same anti-democratic modus operandi was unmasked last week at Montebello. These images should be emblazoned on workers’ memory: when the state tries to deploy its repressive apparatus under the pretext of fighting “extremism,” it sends its own thugs and agents to make trouble and incite violence.

Its objectives are clear: to intimidate demonstrators; to discourage the populace in general from exercising its democratic right to express its opposition to the reactionary agenda of the ruling elite; and to discredit opponents of the government, especially the youth, by smearing them as vandals and criminals.



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