

Massive police mobilization prepared for G20 summit in Pittsburgh

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The Pittsburgh Police Department and the US Secret Service are preparing to turn Pittsburgh into a militarized zone in preparation for the upcoming G20 summit to be held in the city on September 24 and 25.

Authorities are planning to occupy one of the city's most famous landmarks, Point State Park, prior to and during the summit, which is expected to draw large numbers of protesters. More than 4,000 police officers from over 100 police departments throughout the region and nationally will descend upon Pittsburgh to provide protection for the 320 delegates from 19 countries and the European Union who will take part in the summit.

The G20 meeting has been designated a National Special Security Event by the US Department of Homeland Security, which places security coordination under the control of the Secret Service. Established in 1997 as an "executive order" under Bill Clinton, only about two-dozen other events have been given this level of security where government officials fear the staging of mass protests. In 2008, the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado and the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota were given that classification.

Plans are under way to construct a fence surrounding the David Lawrence Convention Center, the site where the summit is being held, preventing people from getting within a three-block radius of the location. People who live and work within the security perimeter will need special clearance to enter or they must stay out during the conference.

In addition, surveillance will be massively increased and sharpshooters positioned on rooftops of downtown buildings. Flight restrictions will be imposed during the time of the convention and the Coast Guard will

increase patrols along the three rivers that border the downtown area. Many other unseen security "enhancements" will be implemented. The Pennsylvania State Police will provide at least one special emergency response team and several helicopters. The state National Guard is planning for possible missions for the event.

Officials are asking businesses that have offices and stores in the downtown area to close during the conference. Subway service into the downtown area will be cancelled and buses will only drop passengers off on the edges of downtown and not travel near the convention site. The Pittsburgh Public School Board also voted to shut down all 66 of the city's public schools early on Wednesday, September 23 and keep them closed for the next two days.

The total cost for security for the two-day event is expected to exceed \$19 million.

The fact that major portions of the city will be off limits or shut down and the two million residents of the greater Pittsburgh region barred from many public areas demonstrates the gulf that separates the political leaders of world capitalism from ordinary people. Meetings of leaders of the major powers are now routinely accompanied by huge military-police operations, with Pittsburgh following similar exercises in recent years in Sydney, Seattle, Genoa, and Rostock. Most recently, the world witnessed the brutal killing of Ian Tomlinson at London's G20 summit this past April. (See: "Britain: Third autopsy into G20 victim Ian Tomlinson's death")

Several pacifist and anti-globalization groups, which planned protests at the conference, have been denied permits. The anti-war groups Code Pink and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, along with several other women's rights groups,

applied to set up a “Women’s Tent City,” well outside the security fence during the week of the conference, but were denied a permit.

Another group led by Pennsylvania Democratic State Senator Jim Ferlo was denied a permit to hold a rally in Point State Park, more than half a mile from the convention site. Ferlo was applying on behalf of a group of unions, which have been promoting the right-wing Buy America agenda.

City officials denied Ferlo the permit on the grounds that the police and Secret Service plan to use the park and the Fort Pitt Museum, which is located in the park, as a command center for their operations. These operations are to include helicopter landings and a tent city to house the 3,100 police officers brought in from out of town. The Fort Pitt Museum, which has been closed to the public due to budget cuts, will be reopened to house the police.

Another group, calling itself the G 6 Billion was denied a permit to march to the convention center on the Sunday before the conference.

So far only one group, led by the pacifist Thomas Merton Center, has been given tentative approval to hold a march from the University of Pittsburgh to the City-County office building, nearly a mile from the convention site. The Secret Service has put their application on hold until the White House makes a final decision.

During last year’s election campaign many of the groups planning protests in Pittsburgh now falsely claimed Obama would reverse the policies of the Bush administration, end the wars and uphold democratic rights. Now they are the victims of the White House’s efforts to criminalize political dissent.

Pittsburgh City Council is due to be on recess until August 28, but could meet this week to begin reviewing a special slate of legislation regarding the G20 summit. Democratic Mayor Luke Ravenstahl requested members return early to approve bills involving funding and police measures for the summit. These measures are to include bans on masks and any equipment protestors can use to stymie police trying to disperse, contain or arrest them.

In line with previous experience there is little doubt that the police have already begun to infiltrate various protest organizations with informants and provocateurs, in order to lay the foundations to accuse protesters of

violence so they can carry out pre-emptive raids on protest headquarters and make large scale arrests.

It was just a year ago at the Republican National Convention (RNC) in Minneapolis where eight young protesters were arrested prior to the start of the convention and charged with plotting to kidnap delegates to the RNC, assault police officers and attack airports. Almost all of the charges listed are based upon the testimony of police infiltrators—one an officer, the other a paid informant. The eight youth, members of the anarchist group Republican National Convention Welcoming Committee (RNCWC), were charged with “Conspiracy to Riot in Furtherance of Terrorism” under provisions of the Minnesota state version of the Patriot Act.

An affidavit filed by police with the District Court for Ramsey County that allowed the warrant to raid and arrest declares the RNCWC a “criminal enterprise” and claimed that numerous examples of weaponry would be found if the judge allowed the warrants. However, police turned up no such physical evidence in conducting their raids.

They RNC8, as they have come to be known, have had two postponements of their scheduled hearings. The most recent was set for Wednesday, August 19, but was postponed by the judge two days earlier. It was to be their first court date since the motion hearing that concluded on March 3, 2009. The eight charged could face up to seven-and-a-half years in prison under a provision that allows the enhancement of charges related to terrorism by 50 percent.

(See also “*Amid mass arrests and suppression of media: RNC in Twin Cities: Eight protesters charged with terrorism under Patriot Act*”)



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