

Canada to mount largest-ever security operation for G8/G20 summits

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29 May 2010

Next month's meeting of the G8 and G20 leaders in Ontario, Canada will see the largest and most expensive security operation in Canadian history.

From Wednesday, June 23 to Sunday, June 27 presidents and prime ministers from the world's largest economies will meet to discuss the ongoing crisis of global capitalism—first at the G8 summit in the resort community of Huntsville and then at the G20 in downtown Toronto, Canada's largest city and the center of its financial industry. This will be the first time that the two summits are held back-to-back in the same country.

The leaders and their entourages—some over a thousand strong—will be protected by thousands of federal, provincial and metropolitan police, troops from the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and a myriad of national security-intelligence agencies.

Last Wednesday, the Conservative government of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced that the revised cost-estimate for locking down Huntsville and downtown Toronto would top \$930 million. This represents a whopping \$751 million jump from initial government estimates in March. The new tally exceeds the \$898 million spent on security for last February's Vancouver Olympics.

Security forces are using the twin summits to extend the police powers of the Canadian state. Several weeks ago, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) conducted a low-flying military aircraft exercise over the region. Truck drivers have reportedly been approached to act as “look-outs” for the police. Hospitals will be placed on an emergency footing and a giant holding pen has been constructed for demonstrators arrested during the summit week.

In Toronto, where the bulk of the deployment will take place, over 5,000 police officers have been earmarked for crowd control duties. An unspecified number of CAF

soldiers will join them. At least 77 new street surveillance cameras are to be installed, four new “demonstration busting” sonar cannons purchased, and almost three miles of security fencing constructed. An announcement appearing in the Toronto Police Accountability Bulletin stated, “in the name of security, the police are being given a very free hand within the city”.

Citizens working or living within the “red” security zone that so far stretches for several city blocks will be subject to intrusive background checks, whilst a broader “traffic control” zone that encompasses most of the downtown core will be heavily policed. As has become standard procedure for such rendezvous of the elite, government and police authorities are planning to remove homeless people from the area. Even 600 residential summer school students from the University of Toronto, situated over a mile from the conference site, will be forced to relocate for “security reasons.”

Last week five organizers for the upcoming series of political protests that inevitably accompany G8 and G20 summit events were approached by security officials identifying themselves as agents of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS). The agents were interested in ascertaining the “political affiliations” and “political work” of the activists. Protest organizers have already documented 27 such examples of police harassment.

In an attempt to corral demonstrators far from the conference center, authorities have designated a “free speech zone” near the Ontario legislature that lies more than a mile away from the summit site. Initially there was some suggestion that the government would declare all protests outside the state-designated “free-speech zone” illegal, but in the face of a public outcry it has had to back down on this point.

Canada's big five banks, an array of investment houses and several other major Canadian corporations are all

headquartered in the area immediately adjacent to the designated conference “red zone” in Toronto’s downtown core. Already the Toronto-Dominion Bank and the Royal Bank of Canada have decided to temporarily close several branches in the immediate vicinity of the conference and to instruct thousands of bank workers in their Bay Street office towers to activate back-up contingency sites and work-at-home networks over the period that the G20 leaders are in the city.

Should the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Canada’s federal police force, successfully press a proposal to close Union Station—the main subway, train and commuter rail hub for the city—tens of thousands more workers would be forced to seek alternate work and/or travel arrangements.

A late-night fire-bombing of a Royal Bank branch in Ottawa in mid-May—reportedly perpetrated by individuals protesting against the use of Aboriginal land during the Vancouver Olympics and the bank’s funding of tar sands projects in Alberta—has provided the political climate for security forces to demand an even larger role in not only the lock-down of Toronto but in further attacking democratic rights across the country. The fire-bombers, purportedly members of a previously unknown organization, FFFC-Ottawa, threatened further actions at the upcoming summits.

Conservative Industry Minister Tony Clement was quick to make political capital out of the incident. “Early in the process, people were questioning why we needed so much security. Now, no one is questioning it,” declared Clement.

Just as in the fire-bombing of a bank in Athens, Greece earlier this month that killed three bank workers, such “direct action” tactics do nothing to advance the cause of working people fighting against the everyday violence of the global capitalist system. Immediately after the attack, as Canadian newspapers went into a frenzy against anti-G20 organizations, a request was granted to add 500 additional police to the 5,000-strong contingent soon to be in place.

Of course, it cannot be ruled out that the attack was carried out by agents provocateurs from within the state’s security apparatus. It would not be the first time such tactics were used to create the conditions for further curtailment of democratic rights. In 2007, at a North American leaders’ conference in Montebello, Quebec, police dressed as demonstrators were filmed carrying rocks and agitating amongst the crowd to join them in violent acts. And in 2001 at the Genoa, Italy G8

conference, police agents were discovered to have instigated violence during protests.

When asked by reporters whether police will rule out the patently illegal use of provocateurs during the two summits, a spokesperson for the Integrated Security Unit, which oversees the coordination of security forces, wrote that the agency “will not discuss organizational details.”

The parliamentary opposition parties have criticized the huge sum being spent on the G8/G20 security operation, noting that Britain spent “just” \$30 million on security for the April 2009 G20 meeting.

Following their protests, Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page said he would look into the issue, but added that his inquiry will be dependent on government cooperation. The Conservatives have repeatedly invoked national security to justify suppressing information. This included defying a House of Commons motion to turn over documents relating to the treatment of Afghan detainees—an action that the Speaker of the House of Commons was forced to warn constituted an illegitimate challenge to parliamentary government. (See “Canada’s Speaker rebukes government for withholding Afghan detainee documents”)

In this case, the government has refused to give any accounting of how the almost \$1 billion is to be spent.

Public Safety Minister Vic Toews would only say that some of the money is being used to buy “durable assets,” that is, equipment that will continue to be used by police and security forces after the summits are over.

Some opposition politicians and sections of the press have suggested that the mega-security operation that is being mounted in conjunction with the G8 and G20 summits is due to excessive government caution and anti-terrorist zeal.

The reality is much more sinister. Canada’s Conservative government and police-security establishment are using next month’s summits to refine their techniques and operational capabilities for use in the event of social unrest and to acclimatize the population to police-state type measures.



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