

Lawsuits launched over state repression at Toronto G20 summit

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Canadian civil rights lawyers Clayton Ruby and Brian Shiller announced on Wednesday their intention to represent G20 protestor Natalie Gray in a \$1 million lawsuit against the Toronto Police. Gray is suing for assault and battery, unlawful arrest and detention, malicious prosecution, and violations of a number of her constitutional rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

On June 28, Gray was amongst a group that was peacefully demonstrating outside a temporary detention centre that security forces had set up to incarcerate hundreds of social activists, workers and youth who were protesting against the pro-corporate policies of the world leaders gathered at the G20 summit in Toronto.

Whilst there, Gray was hit by two rubber bullets fired by a police tactical unit, tackled, and bundled into a police vehicle. She was then driven around the streets of the city for half an hour before receiving any medical attention for her injuries. Gray was subsequently incarcerated for 30 hours on a charge of obstructing a police officer. Those charges were subsequently dropped for lack of evidence when she appeared at an August 23 court hearing.

At the time of her arrest, the police initially denied firing rubber bullets into the crowd of demonstrators. But their lies were exposed when bystanders recovered some of the projectiles and Gray appeared on television to display wounds inflicted by the bullets.

“What happened to me during the G20 weekend—being shot, arrested, sexually threatened, strip searched, taunted, and left cold, hungry, and in pain—in no way unique,” said Gray. “The police demonstrated utter contempt for democracy and the law. In a truly democratic country, the politicians and police responsible for such unprovoked violence would be put on trial. The weekend of the G20 Summit made

blatantly obvious the Harper government’s fascist approach to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. We need to ask Harper how he justifies the one billion dollar police budget for the weekend. We need to ask ourselves whether we should put up with a government that funds and dictates such brutality.”

Gray’s court action is only the most recent of several lawsuits announced over the past month. Last week, social activists Miranda McQuade and Mike Barber filed a claim in Ontario Superior Court for \$115 million in damages against the Toronto Police Services Board, the Attorney-General of Canada, and the Regional Municipality of Peel Police Services. The plaintiffs’ class action suit seeks to represent about 1,150 citizens who were caught up in the week-long police assault on basic democratic rights during the G20 meetings.

Sherry Good, an office administrator and resident of a neighbourhood that saw police, in a driving thunderstorm, “kettle” about 300 bystanders, commuters and peaceful protestors for four hours, is the lead plaintiff in a class action suit that asks for \$45 million in damages. “I’m just an ordinary person”, said Good, who was out for a walk in her neighbourhood when the police action began. “I am not an activist, but I got caught up in the police kettling operation at Queen Street and Spadina Avenue. I just feel that what happened to me and hundreds of others was very wrong. It shocked me that I was surrounded and held by police because I was just walking on the street where I live.”

The wholesale suppression of democratic rights by the police on the streets of Toronto—abetted and supported by all levels of government—shocked broad layers of the population. Protestors were kicked, bludgeoned, tear gassed, trampled by police horses and shot at with rubber and plastic bullets. Even prior to the

beginning of the demonstrations, homes were raided in the middle of the night and without warrants being shown in a series of “preventative arrests.” Journalists covering these unprecedented events were arrested and assaulted. Those apprehended were hauled into primitive detention cages, strip searched, and denied legal counsel.

Indeed, so egregious were the police actions at Queen and Spadina—caught on live television for all to see—that Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair was forced, after a public pillorying, to belatedly contradict “no apology” statements from his Staff Superintendent and admit that the kettling operation “probably” was allowed to go on for too long.

Despite the public outcry against the police-state methods unleashed at the G20, both federal Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Ontario Premier McGuinty have issued statements supporting the security measures and have refused to convene a public inquiry. For their own part, Toronto City’s Councilors, led by social democratic Mayor David Miller, voted 36–0 to “commend outstanding police work”.

In the wake of the June events, no less than three governmental “reviews” of police conduct have been set up by provincial and municipal authorities to purportedly investigate the circumstances surrounding the mass arrest of 1,150 protestors and bystanders at the global summit. But none of these have a mandate to seriously probe and hold the police and state security agencies’ Integrated Security Unit or the federal government accountable for the blanket repression, let alone to objectively investigate evidence of police brutality.

The flurry of lawsuit filings was further spurred after prosecutors failed to pin convictions on many of those arrested. On August 23rd, 303 defendants appeared before an Ontario magistrate’s court in Toronto to face charges stemming from the summit.

The June police blitz was the largest mass arrest in the history of Canada—more than during the Great Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 or the suspension of civil liberties in Quebec under the War Measures Act during the 1970 FLQ crisis.

Of the 1,150 people arrested, more than 800 were released from custody without charge as the summit concluded. At the magistrate’s court in August, Crown prosecutors entirely back-footed by the grievous lack of

evidence accompanying many of the remaining charges agreed to withdraw 31 warrants outright and struck deals with another 22 individuals, staying all charges in exchange for agreements by the accused to donate \$25 or \$50 to charity. An additional 9 charges were dismissed because people were “listed in error.” Five people signed a peace bond in exchange for full exoneration. Another 227 cases were adjourned until the autumn with the Crown failing in the majority of those cases to produce any evidence to defense lawyers. Only six individuals appearing before the magistrates—three courtrooms were used to handle the crush of defendants—pleaded guilty—mostly on charges of petty larceny.

On September 27, prosecutors will begin proceedings against 17 so-called “ringleaders” on conspiracy charges stemming from a police undercover operation directed against reputed organizers of the anti-G20 protests.



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