One year after the police ran amuck at Toronto's G20 summit

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One year after the mass arrests, illegal detentions and brutal police beatings that took place on the streets of Toronto during last June's G20 conclave of world leaders, not a single politician or supervisory police official has been held to account. Instead, the entire political establishment has worked might and main to cover-up or ignore what Ontario Ombudsman Andre Marin called one of "the most massive" violations of "civil liberties in Canadian history."

In the immediate aftermath of the G20, the local municipal government—at the time led by a mayor and city council associated with the social-democrats of the New Democratic Party (NDP)—voted unanimously to commend "outstanding police work". Since then, even as substantial new evidence of massive police and political wrongdoing has emerged, both the federal Conservative government of Stephen Harper and the Liberal provincial government of Dalton McGuinty have steadfastly rejected calls for a public inquiry into how the largest security operation in Canadian history turned into a police riot.

As for the police forces themselves, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Canada's national police force and CSIS, the country's intelligence agency, have refused any comment on their central organizing role in the security preparations. Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair, who held command over the 17,000 police officers deployed outside the summit's security perimeter, has, for his part, vigorously defended the police operation, admitting at most that some mistakes were hand. Amongst the hundreds of police caught individually on video-tape grossly abusing their powers, no more than a handful have faced serious disciplinary action.

As of this writing, only two constables have been charged under the Criminal Code—but not yet convicted—with assault and this only after complaints against the offending officers were long stonewalled by police investigative bodies. In the most recent case, investigations had to be re-opened three separate times under pressure from civil liberties groups and the liberal press before the authorities would bring charges despite indisputable evidence of a vicious police beating of a passive protestor in the state-designated "free speech" zone.

The violence and repression carried out by the authorities in Toronto was worthy of a police state. An army of security officers, both in uniform and undercover, took over the downtown portion of Toronto, a major world city, creating conditions of "martial law," in the words of a columnist for the right-wing *Toronto Sun*. The wholesale suppression of democratic rights by the police—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 protest 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 placed in primitive detention cages, strip searched, and denied legal counsel.

The police operation in Toronto was used to violently repress an overwhelmingly peaceful protest by thousands of people opposed to the policies of the governments represented at the summit. In all, 1,105 people were arrested and detained. The massive state operation was a brazen assault on basic free speech and assembly rights. It was the largest mass arrest in the history of Canada—with more arrested than during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 or the suspension of civil liberties in Quebec under the War Measures Act during the 1970 FLQ terrorist crisis.

In the wake of the events, no less than three governmental "reviews" of police conduct were set up by provincial and municipal authorities with the purported aim of investigating the circumstances surrounding the arrests of protestors and bystanders at the G20 summit. But none of these were provided with a mandate to seriously probe and hold the police and state security agencies' Integrated Security Unit or the federal and provincial governments accountable for the blanket repression, let alone to objectively investigate evidence of police brutality.

Nor were any of these "reviews" tasked with looking into why police initially failed to intervene to stop a few relatively minor incidents of damage to property reputedly carried out by "Black Bloc" anarchists; then, on the claim that the city was under siege from rioters, unleashed massive and indiscriminate repression.

As of this writing, the government has secured only 24 convictions against persons accused of rioting—mostly on charges of petty larceny.

Of the 1,105 people arrested, more than 800 were released from custody without charge as the summit concluded. At the magistrate's court last August, Crown prosecutors entirely back-footed by the total lack of evidence accompanying many of the charges agreed to withdraw 31 warrants outright and struck deals with another 22 individuals, staying all charges. An additional nine

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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. In the ensuing months, many more cases were dropped. The Crown is now pursuing less than one hundred cases. Said civil liberties lawyer Clayton Ruby, as the first anniversary of the Toronto G20 summit approached, "It's a classic example of police over-charging. It's a well-known game in Ontario, where defendants are told: 'We'll withdraw the charges that have no foundation if you plead guilty to charges that are in fact defendable'."

While the police have racked up some petty larceny convictions, federal Conservative cabinet minister Tony Clement—who is currently tasked with identifying "wasteful spending" in his government's quest to slash budgetary expenditures—has thus far avoided being charged, along with several big business associates and fellow cabinet ministers, with misappropriating $50 million in federal funds to "spruce up" his own constituency during the G8 meeting that was held north of Toronto just prior to the G20 gathering. The money had been taken from a "border congestion" program without the knowledge of parliament. Clement has yet to properly explain the justification for expenditures on pet projects not only hundreds of miles from the border but scores of miles from any G8 venue.

Nor have Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty or Toronto police chief Bill Blair been held accountable for the egregious misrepresentation of a law secretly brought into force in the run-up to the G20 summit, despite a scathing report last December from Ontario Ombudsman Andre Marin. Marin denounced both Blair and McGuinty for their roles in secretly passing "an unnecessary and probably illegal" regulation that was used by the police to "intimidate and arrest people who had done no harm" during the summit meeting.

Resurrecting a 1939 war-time Public Works Protection Act, McGuinty's government—at the behest of Blair—stipulated that police had the right to arrest anyone inside the security fence who refused to provide identification or to submit to a search. In what Marin termed a "premeditated, conscious decision," neither the government nor the police publicized the order's invocation. Blair first publicly spoke about it at a press conference that was held as the summit leaders were arriving in Toronto on June 25. Moreover, he did so only after a *Toronto Star* journalist had come across a mention of the order on a government web site and the paper had exposed the order's resurrection.

At a press conference as the G20 summit was about to begin, Blair effectively lied about the order. He led the public to believe that the police's new powers of search and arrest extended five meters beyond the security perimeter, when in fact they were confined only to the area inside it. Despite vocal complaints from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, McGuinty and his community safety minister, Rick Bartolucci, scrupulously kept out of the public eye until the summit was over, refusing to contradict the chief or clarify the order.

Ultimately, the premier did admit there had never been a five-meter rule. "There was," said McGuinty, "some confusion obviously surrounding five meters … It was constantly published in print and republished on TV and radio and there was no foundation in fact for that." Actually, as Marin observed in his report, the rule was applied by police not as "a five-meter rule" but as a "five-kilometer rule…The effect of this regulation was to infringe on the freedom of expression in ways that do not seem justifiable in a free and democratic society".

The initial events of the police rampage in Toronto and the subsequent legal and political white-wash must be taken as a serious warning. The level of official violence is being ratcheted up. Constables walk away with impunity from documented cases of abuse even as the mainstream press organizes campaigns to rehabilitate the police—the death of an officer last winter was made the occasion for a virtual state funeral. At the same time newspaper columnists, talk radio hosts and political operatives call for a once-and-for-all "hardball" showdown against "lazy" public sector workers. Already, the new, right-wing municipal regime of Mayor Rob Ford has made arrangements to mobilize an army of strike-breakers should city garbage collectors resist a move to privatize west-side collections next year. In this regard, police repression at the G20 will have served as a dress rehearsal for future events.

Under conditions where the bourgeoisie is facing mounting resistance to its program of public service, wage and job cuts, the state in every country is developing and rehearsing plans for mass repression. The attack the Harper Conservative government mounted last month on postal workers and Air Canada customer service representatives, stripping them of their democratic right to strike, is only the latest manifestation of the establishment's move to more dictatorial methods of rule.

What dominates politics and social relations in Canada—and in every country—is the global economic crisis, which has reached an advanced stage. All the emphasis must now be placed on the development of a consciously socialist and internationalist movement of the working class, the only progressive response to the police state provocations and violence of the ruling elites.

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