Police helped plan vandalism at Toronto G20 summit

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In documents released last week as part of a plea deal between 17 social activists and Crown attorneys, it was revealed that 12 undercover police agents either spied on or infiltrated protest groups who were planning to participate in demonstrations against world leaders at the June 2010 G20 summit meeting in Toronto, Canada.

At least two of these undercover officers played central roles in organizing protest activities of various anarchist collectives. This included helping to identify targets to be vandalized in downtown Toronto. This "target list" was one of the key pieces of evidence used by the prosecution to pressure the defendants to enter into plea bargain discussions.

Alex Hundert—one of six activists who pleaded guilty to reduced charges of counseling to commit mischief (charges were dropped against the other 11 defendants for lack of evidence)—revealed last week that undercover Ontario Provincial Police officer Brenda Carey "played a major role in preparing the (vandalism) target list that I had to plead guilty for. Other than myself, there was nobody more involved." Hundert went on to state that information on the plans of the break-away anarchist group were further buttressed by a public "call-out" issued on the eve of the protests. The police "didn't need to infiltrate anything. All they had to do was read the call-out."

Hundert and two other associates have yet to be sentenced. They face a maximum of sixteen months incarceration. Three others received sentences Monday ranging from four to nine months imprisonment with some time reductions for time spent in pre-trial custody and on restrictive bail.

The revelations of the undercover operations shed important new light on the violent police response at the G20 protests. Despite having at least two police operatives inside anarchist groups who were privy to the timing and location of a juvenile "smashy-smashy" vandalism "action," and despite having this information subsequently confirmed publicly, police allowed about 80 "Black Bloc" anarchists to break away from the main Saturday march and damage store fronts and several "abandoned" police cruisers without any interference.

As tens of thousands of citizens, in a "kid-friendly" protest, marched peacefully through the streets of Toronto under heavy police guard, the film clips of a handful of black-clad anarchists trashing storefronts in the city's commercial district became the subject of round-the-clock breathless reporting from the country's major broadcast outlets. Politicians, news anchors and public officials were equally unrestrained in expressing their outrage and demanding a stern police response.

But if the police were noticeably absent from the one-hour long vandalism spree in the heart of the city, they were certainly active over the following two days. Of the nearly 1,200 arrests made over the course of the week, the vast majority were made after the spree of petty vandalism and against peaceful demonstrators at various other protest venues. During the course of 48 hours, demonstrators and bystanders alike were kicked, bludgeoned, kettled, tear gassed, fired upon with rubber bullets, trampled by police horses, subjected to strip-searches and incarcerated in primitive, wire cages.

More than 800 of those arrested were subsequently released without charge. Of 330 charges laid, more than half have been stayed or dropped altogether. To date only a few dozen individuals have been found guilty of any misconduct whatsoever during the G20 protests.

There is no doubt that the police were well-prepared for any sort of disruption and not only because they had agents in on the anarchists' planning sessions. In the week leading up to the G20 summit, downtown Toronto had all the hallmarks of a city under a state of siege. Six kilometers of fencing, topped with concertina wire and anchored in concrete encircled the actual meeting area. Police checkpoints fanned out another kilometer from the convention location. Snipers were stationed on the city's high rise rooftops. American Navy Seals surreptitiously patrolled the harbor.

Citizens in the vicinity were instructed to carry picture identification and expect curb-side interrogation by any of the thousands of police officers brought in from across the country. Canine units waited in the side-streets. Phalanxes of federal, provincial and municipal police stood at every corner buttressed by more mobile bicycle and horse patrols. A

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thousand private security guards were deployed throughout the city's adjacent financial and entertainment districts. Seventy-seven new closed circuit surveillance cameras monitored all movement on the streets. Police helicopters constantly hovered overhead. Security Service operatives regularly swept through the hotels and Canadian Armed Forces soldiers stood "on the ready" at "undisclosed locations."

Yet despite all these preparations—and advance warning of virtually every specific of the planned "direct action"—hardly a police officer could be seen in the area identified by its own undercover operative and targeted by the anarchists.

The exposure of the police's role in abetting the vandalism has passed with little comment in the media which has been more interested in recounting the "adventures" of the undercover operatives. Public figures at all levels of government have refused to comment on the revelations, deferring to a series of ongoing, toothless inquiries that were called to cover up a giant state provocation aimed at testing out the apparatus for mass repression and acclimatizing the population to police state measures.

This is not the first time that the police have used agent-provocateurs 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 a few recent incidents, there was the widely publicized Germinal affair at the April 2001, Quebec City Summit of the Americas. 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 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 agents 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.

A similar anti-democratic modus operandi was unmasked at Montebello, Quebec in 2007, in part through an amateur video posted on the internet. The video documents how Quebec Provincial Police (SQ) cops disguised as anarchist protesters sought to provoke fights between riot police and demonstrators at a summit meeting of the US and Mexican presidents and Canada's prime minister.

The video 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.

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 the march organizer 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.

In keeping with security forces' standard procedure, top SQ officials initially categorically denied that the three men in question were policemen. But after the video was posted to YouTube, the SQ was forced to admit that the men were indeed SQ cops.

These proofs of police provocation should be emblazoned on every worker's memory: when the state deploys 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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