

The criminalization of dissent in Chicago and Quebec

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As the Socialist Equality Party candidate for president of the United States, I denounce the government intimidation and violence employed against anti-NATO protesters in Chicago earlier this week and students in the Canadian province of Quebec. I call on workers in the US, Canada and around the world to demand the release and dropping of charges against protesters whose only crime was exercising their right to free speech.

In Chicago, riot-equipped police, directed by Homeland Security, the Secret Service and the FBI, locked down much of the city. The police indiscriminately beat up peaceful demonstrators and arrested at least 100 people opposing the war in Afghanistan and the US-dominated military alliance.

Most ominously, five anti-war activists were jailed in police raids and charged with preparing “terrorist” attacks against the president, the mayor and police. All five were victims of a frame-up, instigated by police provocateurs who infiltrated protest groups and encouraged violent actions. If convicted, the young men—now being held on bonds as high as \$1.5 million each—could spend the rest of their lives in jail.

Such activities are nothing new for the Chicago Police Department, which has a long and brutal history of political repression—from the 19th Century frame up of the Haymarket martyrs and the massacre of striking steelworkers in 1937, to the beating of anti-war protesters at the Democratic Party convention in 1968 and the assassination of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton a year later.

The frame-ups and overwhelming police power—in many cases the cops outnumbered the 5,000 protesters—are aimed at silencing political opposition to the Obama administration’s wars and the plans for even bloodier adventures against Syria and Iran.

At the conclusion of the NATO summit, President Obama hailed the “great job” done by the Chicago police. This was echoed by his former chief of staff, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who declared that Chicago had “the finest police department in the country.”

The authorities in Canada have been no less brutal. After nearly three months of mass student protests against tuition increases, the Liberal government in Quebec last week rammed through Bill 78, which criminalizes the student strike by outlawing picket lines anywhere in the vicinity of the province’s universities and CEGEPs (pre-university and technical colleges). It also threatens teachers with criminal prosecution and massive fines if they make any accommodations to striking students or fail to perform all of their normal functions.

Bill 78 places sweeping restrictions on the right to demonstrate. Any demonstration of more than 50 people is illegal unless organizers submit to police in writing more than eight hours in advance the route and duration of the protest and abide by any changes requested by the police.

On Tuesday, an estimated 100,000 students and workers marched in Montreal to oppose the attack on students and defy Bill 78. After the demonstration, police carried out a crackdown on students, adding more to the hundreds who have already been arrested.

As the events in the US and Canada show, the attacks on civil liberties, the expansion of domestic spying and other police state measures introduced in the name of the “war on terror” are now being employed to crush political dissent at home.

The measures against anti-war demonstrators in the US and Canadian students—and similar actions in countries throughout the world—are aimed at outlawing

dissent. The ruling class is preparing for a far broader movement, involving masses of working class people, against the deeply unpopular austerity measures being implemented by both the Obama administration and the government of Stephen Harper in Canada.

Genuine democracy is incompatible with capitalism and the economic and political dictatorship of the banks and major corporations. The capitalist system has failed. Its continued existence requires that millions of people accept a future of poverty and war.

Well aware that their reactionary social policies are provoking deep social opposition, the ruling class is repudiating the most basic democratic rights and adopting ever more authoritarian forms of rule.

That is why the struggle to defend democratic rights, along with the fight to attain basic social rights such as jobs, education and a future free from war, is a revolutionary question. Appeals to the conscience of the powers-that-be will change nothing. The only way forward is for the working class to take political power and reorganize economic and political life on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The fight for this requires the most determined struggle to free the working class from the political influence of the capitalist politicians and their liberal, trade union and pseudo-left supporters. This includes various groups, such as the International Socialist Organization, which aim to channel opposition back behind the Democratic Party and the capitalist system. The ISO joined with the unions and the anti-working class huckster Jesse Jackson during the anti-NATO protests to bolster the reelection campaign of President Obama.

The last three-and-a-half years have once again demonstrated that the Democratic Party is just as ruthless defender of the corporate and financial elite as the Republican Party. Whatever their tactical differences, Obama and Romney are both committed to expanding the wars on behalf of American imperialism and escalating the attack on democratic rights and the jobs and living standards of the working class.

In Canada, all the capitalist parties—the Conservatives, Liberals, NDP and Parti Quebecois—are determined to impose tuition hikes on college students and brutal austerity measures on workers to defend the banks and big business.

The way forward for the working class in the US,

Canada and throughout the world is the building a new mass political parties committed to fight to establish the political rule of the working class and socialism. That is the only means to guarantee genuine democracy and social equality.

For more information on the SEP presidential campaign, and to get involved, visit socialequality.com



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