

Brisbane, Australia in lockdown for G20 summit

Mike Head**13 November 2014**

Brisbane, the venue of this weekend's G20 summit, increasingly looks like a city under police occupation. Much of the inner city and the adjoining Southbank precinct, where the event is being staged, resembles a ghost town, with police outnumbering people on the streets.

Everywhere throughout the centre of Australia's third biggest city, large groups of police are present, some with dogs. Others are patrolling on horses, motorbikes or bicycles, or in squad cars. Police buses, dark vans and motorcades are a constant sight.

All the police are armed, and most are wearing dark blue para-military uniforms. Snipers are on the roofs of hotels, Black Hawk helicopters hover overhead and military aircraft, including F/A18 Super Hornets, have criss-crossed the sky.

This was already taking place yesterday, well before the arrival of most of the leaders of the world's 19 largest economies, plus the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and other global financial institutions.

The measures being taken to protect the government leaders—at a cost officially approaching half a billion dollars—stood in stark contrast to the impact on ordinary working people, who faced three kilometres of barricades, street closures and shutdowns of educational and cultural facilities.

Pedestrians were warned that police were ready to use special powers, which can include conducting strip searches, ordering people to leave declared zones and making mass arrests. To shield 4,000 G20 delegates and officials, the operation involves at least 6,000 uniformed police on active duty and 2,000 military personnel, mostly on standby.

Hundreds of surveillance cameras have been activated, transmitting images from streets, buildings,

airport terminals and police drones and helicopters. They are monitored via a new "state-of-the-art" security operations centre, giving what police chiefs boasted was "unprecedented footage" for an Australian city.

This is a deliberate show of force, backed by multitudes of security guards, plain-clothed police and intelligence agents, foreign security detachments and a military presence in the air and at checkpoints. Brisbane, the capital of the state of Queensland, is providing a rehearsal ground for police-state conditions.

Queensland Deputy Commissioner Ross Barnett said residents would "notice a sea of police" and "snipers on buildings" but should feel reassured, because this is "one part of the security planning required to make sure leaders have a safe and enjoyable stay."

Judging from the near-deserted streets, however, and the interviews given by young people to the *World Socialist Web Site*, many residents felt intimidated, alienated and disgusted by the security blanket surrounding the G20 gathering, and by the summit itself.

Under the guise of preventing terrorist attacks on the event—although police say none have been identified—and averting violent protests—none has been specified—the security operation is designed to both prevent demonstrations near the summit and condition public opinion to such a repressive atmosphere.

While police claim to have permitted 26 planned protests, they imposed severe restrictions and issued dire warning against any departures from approved venues or routes. Participants are banned from wearing masks, holding megaphones or carrying large banners. A water cannon is ready to use against deviating demonstrators, along with several "sound

cannons”—giant vehicle-mounted speakers that blast ear-piercing shrieks.

Queensland Premier Campbell Newman aggressively defended the lockdown, declaring that it would pay dividends by displaying Brisbane as a safe “world city” for investors and tourists. He emphasised the bipartisan support for the summit within the political establishment, noting that the event was originally assigned to Brisbane by the former federal Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

The clampdown on the city was highlighted yesterday when the police commissioner extended the summit’s “declared zone” to cover the main University of Queensland campus, and the adjacent Brisbane River and surrounding areas. The campus will be the venue for an address by US President Barack Obama, described by the White House as a major speech on American leadership of the Asia Pacific.

Significantly, this address, which is expected to declare Washington’s determination to dominate the region, economically and strategically, throughout the 21st century, will be delivered to a carefully invited audience of 1,500 people, behind an immense security cordon.

University students, who are in the middle of exams, will have difficulty accessing their own campus and will certainly be unable to get anywhere near the event. Everyone entering the zone will be subject to searching and screening.

Security is so tight that Obama will arrive via one of the huge US military helicopters that held noisy training runs over Brisbane yesterday. At one point, two of the choppers landed near a freeway, causing a dust storm that halted traffic.

When a WSWS correspondent photographed the security barricade near the summit venue yesterday, police officers immediately intervened. Claiming that taking such pictures “caused a lot of tension,” they insisted on questioning the reporter and recording his ID. Asked if all people taking photographs were being accosted, a police officer declined to say, but stressed that police had these powers under the G20 legislation passed by the state parliament.

According to the *Australian*, its reporter saw “a pedestrian furiously berated by an officer on a motorbike for legally crossing the road when a motorcade was stopped at traffic lights. ‘You might get

shot, mate,’ the officer yelled.”

In other incidents, a solitary woman lining up paper boats in a row along the edge of Brisbane convention centre was ordered by police to move on or face an “exclusion notice.” A man was arrested after taking photos near the summit venue and refusing to provide his details.

Homeless people were also harassed and pushed out of the area. Roby Curtis, a co-ordinator of Blind Eye Ministries, a homelessness charity, told the media it was “pretty obvious that they don’t want the riff raff around,” noting that “where the summit is happening are some of the poorest areas in Brisbane.”

At the other end of the social scale, the G20 summit budget—officially put at \$478 million—includes the purchase of a fleet of 16 bomb-proof limousines for \$1.8 million to protect heads of state and other dignitaries.

In its own way, this disparity illustrates the agenda pursued by the G20 since the 2008 global financial meltdown, which has been to enrich the financial markets and corporate giants at the expense of the working class. According to an Oxfam media briefing, during the past year alone, when Australia held the G20 presidency, the total wealth in the G20 countries grew by \$17 trillion, but a staggering 36 percent went to the richest one percent of their populations.



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