G20 summit held under police-state conditions

Mike Head
17 November 2014

The gulf between the leaders of world capitalism and the vast majority of the population was on graphic display during last weekend's G20 summit in Brisbane, Australia's third biggest city.

The two-day gathering of the heads of the 19 largest economies plus the European Union and the global financial institutions was held behind a massive police-military cordon. Much of the inner city was blockaded and saturated by a sea of heavily-armed police, backed by military helicopters and army snipers on rooftops.

The intimidating police-military operation helped trigger a mass three-day exodus from the city, leaving a surreal scene of virtually deserted streets on which the numbers of police easily outnumbered those of ordinary people.

Brisbane's downtown and the adjacent Southbank precinct were literally emptied of people in order to shield the G20 leaders and their business delegations from any expressions of popular hostility to their agenda of militarism, austerity and suppression of basic democratic rights.

Squads of police were stationed on every street corner and large contingents surrounded every protest, each of which had to be authorised in advance by the Queensland state police commissioner. The police presence was all-pervasive—helicopters and drones in the air, a flotilla of police boats on the river, and officers on foot, motorbikes, bicycles, horses and in patrols cars.

In scenes that are unprecedented in Australia, all trains entering the city on the weekend were stopped, and their carriage doors locked, while their passengers' bags were searched.

On Saturday morning, the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, a Murdoch tabloid, published prominent pictures of snipers in battle fatigues monitoring city streets through binoculars from the top of the Treasury Hotel.

Throughout the weekend, about 7,000 state, federal and New Zealand police were mobilised, along with an unknown number of private security guards, emergency personnel and foreign bodyguards. About 2,000 military personnel were on standby.

Under special G20 laws, passed unanimously by the Queensland state parliament, police exercised draconian powers, including to conduct strip searches, detain people or ban them from the G20 zone, which covered the entire central city area.

By Sunday morning, according to the police, 12 people had been arrested and 24 excluded from the G20 zone. Arrests were made for carrying prohibited items, which included large banners, and for trespass for re-entering the city after being excluded.

While police allowed participants in officially authorised protests to carry banners, others were treated differently. The *World Socialist Web Site* witnessed two young women being arrested for having a political banner and gas masks in their bag, and a young man being interrogated for wearing a mask on the back of his head.

Police camera and video-taping squads visibly recorded participants in the main protest march on Saturday morning. Intimidatory tactics were also applied to journalists. Those trying to record the arrest of the two women were ordered by police to stand back at least two metres, and during the march news crews were constantly told to move their locations.

The police mobilisation far exceeded that mounted in Sydney for the 2007 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, which involved about 5,000 police and soldiers. That operation sought to suppress opposition to the meetings involving US President George W. Bush, his fellow Iraq war

© World Socialist Web Site

criminal, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, and 19 other government leaders.

Seven years on, with the US and its allies, including Australia, embarked on a renewed military intervention in the Middle East, and working class conditions under assault in the wake of the 2008 global financial crash, the Brisbane G20 event was a rehearsing ground for police-state measures to suppress mounting discontent.

The chasm dividing the G20 leaders and the general population is an expression of the deepening social divide between rich and poor in Australia as in every country and the growing popular hostility to the G20 agenda of war and austerity. Nothing could be allowed to upset or intrude into the entirely stage-managed summit designed to project an image of dedicated leaders wrestling with the problems of the day afflicting humanity. As a result, under the pretext of security, no one who had not been vetted and screened could be allowed anywhere near the sanitised event or any of the leaders and top officials.

All of this was graphically underscored when the G20 lockdown was extended to the main University of Queensland campus, seven kilometres from Brisbane's CBD. There, before a hand-picked audience, US President Barack Obama delivered an aggressive speech, asserting American power in the Asia-Pacific.

While Obama demagogically claimed that the United States was the world's champion of democracy, his speech was held in the most anti-democratic atmosphere. In order to guarantee that no dissenting voice could be heard, everyone entering the campus was searched and subjected to screening via facial scanning technology. All campus buildings were closed and the university's staff and students were told to stay away.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site