

Senior Toronto Police officer calls 2010 G-20 demonstrators “terrorists”

Carl Bronski
20 March 2015

Toronto Police superintendent David (Mark) Fenton equated the protests that occurred during the 2010 G-20 summit with terrorism, when testifying in his own defense at a disciplinary hearing last week.

Fenton is facing disciplinary action for ordering the “kettling” and mass detention of hundreds of demonstrators and bystanders alike in two separate incidents in Toronto in late June 2010.

During the weekend of protests against the austerity policies of the world’s governmental and corporate elite, Fenton twice instructed police officers to encircle large groups of citizens on the city’s streets, prevent them from leaving the area, and begin making arrests.

Fenton’s actions were not the response of some “rogue” cop. He has presented into evidence e-mails from other senior police officers supporting his kettling decisions.

In the first incident, protesters were peacefully sitting in front of a high-end hotel. In the second, police detained several hundred people at a busy intersection for over four hours—many of whom were simply observing a small chanting crowd of demonstrators—then forced them to endure a driving rainstorm while proceeding to make random arrests.

“You gave and maintained these (kettling) orders notwithstanding that you neither found those so contained committing a breach of the peace nor did you have reasonable grounds to believe that those so contained had committed or were about to join in or resume a breach of the peace,” states the main charge against Fenton. It goes on to add that Fenton “failed to monitor the status of the detentions,” which were at a notorious downtown wire-cage holding facility set up by the police.

Disciplinary charges against Fenton were only brought after a chorus of outrage against police actions

from broad swathes of the population swept the city and the country in the aftermath of the global event.

Fenton’s defense strategy is quite illuminating. His terrorist fear-mongering comes as the right-wing government of Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper is ramming legislation through parliament that gives sweeping new powers to Canada’s national-security apparatus in the name of fighting “terrorism.”

Under Bill C-51, police will be able to detain people for up to seven days without charge, and Canada’s premier spy agency (CSIS—the Canadian Security Intelligence Service) is being empowered to break virtually any law so as to “disrupt” potential threats to “national security.”

CSIS’s new “disruption” power applies, as do many of the new or enhanced powers in Bill C-51, to a new, unprecedentedly expansive definition of “national security,” which includes threats to Canada’s economic stability” or critical infrastructure and “territorial sovereignty,” as well as espionage or anything that could endanger Canada’s diplomatic interests or challenge its constitutional order (see: “Canada’s Bill C-51: A sweeping assault on democratic rights and legal principles—Part 1”).

Fenton’s use of the “terrorism card” at his hearing is an ominous new sign of the ruling elite’s turn to the criminalization of opposition and police state measures in Canada and around the world. It comes on the heels of a similar provocation by Wisconsin governor and leading United States Republican presidential candidate Scott Walker, who recently compared the working class and student protesters who thronged the streets of Madison in 2011 to ISIS terrorists. “If I could take on 100,000 protesters, I could do the same across the world,” he said, boasting that his defeat of worker opposition in Wisconsin to a raft of right-wing

measures qualifies him to wage war against “terrorism” in the Middle East.

In mounting his defense at the still-continuing hearing, Fenton’s lawyer showed video of several incidents where a few dozen “Black Bloc” anarchists had earlier smashed store windows and set alight several police cars.

These events were completely unrelated to the kettling, and it need be emphasized, a largely stage-managed event. With thousands of police on hand, none could be found to do anything to protect stores and banks in the downtown area.

The claims by the police, who had infiltrated and carried out surveillance against organizers of the G-20 protest for a year and a half, that they were taken aback by the violence, are too crude and transparent to be taken seriously.

In reality, the police knew the anarchists’ plans in detail—and probably better than the anarchists themselves—since they had helped draw them up. As proven in a previous court proceeding, at least two 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 (see: “Police helped plan vandalism at Toronto G20 summit”).

The burning of police cars, which had been conveniently left unmanned in the path of the Black Bloc forces (one of them reportedly with its gas cap removed), was another dubious event, primarily intended to provide sensationalist video for the corporate media. A column in the *Ottawa Citizen*, written by an eyewitness at the time, noted that despite the \$1 billion spent on summit security, “At Canada’s busiest intersection, in the middle of the afternoon, the police were nowhere to be seen as members of the so-called Black Bloc darted in and out of crowds, just long enough to take pick-axes to store-front windows. Where were the police then?”

During that infamous June weekend in 2010, Canadian citizens witnessed martial law in downtown Toronto. The police violence and repression carried out was worthy of a police state. The wholesale suppression of democratic rights by the police—abetted and supported by all levels of government—shocked broad layers of the population.

Whether or not Fenton manages to extricate himself

from his crimes at the current hearing, Toronto citizens are under no illusions about what actually unfolded in the city in the summer of 2010.

Protesters 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. Only one police officer—caught on camera brutalizing a man observing a demonstration—has, years later, been convicted of any crime. Sentenced to house arrest, he is appealing his conviction.

The police operation, in which Fenton played a major role, 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, some 1,300 people were arrested and detained for at least 24 hours in terrible conditions. The vast majority were eventually released without charge due to lack of evidence of any wrong-doing. Many others later had charges dismissed or reduced.

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. Those following the events at the G-20 and the juridical aftermath will have no doubt as to who the real “terrorists” were on the streets of Toronto.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact