

“We live in police states, but people don’t realize it”

Quebec City anti-G7 protest forced to “run police gauntlet” its entire route

Our reporters
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The anti-G7 march that took place Saturday afternoon in Quebec City suffered the same fate as protests organized earlier in the day and on Friday, both there and in La Malbaie, the resort town 140 kilometers (87 miles) to the east where the heads of the principal imperialist powers were holding their annual summit. Small numbers of protesters were met by a massive and intimidating mobilization of state security forces, including police armed with assault rifles.

The organizers of Saturday afternoon’s Quebec City protest had emphasized their opposition to anarchist “disruption” tactics and, in accordance with anti-democratic regulations adopted in response to the 2012 Quebec student strike, submitted the march’s itinerary to police for their approval well in advance.

Yet, from beginning to finish, the few hundred demonstrators were forced to march through a corridor of police, many of them outfitted in full-riot gear. The police visibly sought a pretext for confrontation, while surveillance helicopters circled overhead.

For the two days of the summit, several thousand police effectively placed the center of Quebec’s capital and second largest city under occupation.

Moreover, in the run-up to the G-7 and with the transparent aim of intimidating protesters and justifying state repression, the corporate media and authorities, particularly Quebec’s Liberal government and the right-wing Quebec City administration, mounted a fear campaign, with warnings of possible violence in the streets. Thousands of civil servants were told not to report for work on Friday and the media instructed people to stay off the streets and to shut their windows so as to avoid tear gas.

This massive military-style mobilization and the

government-media fear campaign that accompanied it underscore that Canada’s ruling elite, like those of its G-7 allies, is intent on criminalizing social opposition.

“We feel intimidated by this police presence that is everywhere,” said Claude Vaillancourt, president of ATTAC-Québec and spokesperson for the Coalition for an Alternative Forum to the G-7, a group of civil organizations and unions that organized Saturday’s protest against “the inequalities generated by the G-7.”

Vaillancourt bemoaned the fact that “there are people who normally would have come here and who are not here.” Undoubtedly, the massive police presence did have an impact, as did the summit’s deliberately-chosen remote locale.

But these factors alone don’t explain the sparse number of anti-G-7 protesters.

Quebec’s trade union federations, which have in the past bussed tens of thousands of their members from all over the province to mass protests in Montreal and Quebec City, had no interest in mobilizing against the G-7 or the Trudeau Liberal government, whose election in 2015 they hailed. With general elections set to take place in Quebec this fall, the nationalist and pro-capitalist union bureaucracy is solely focused on once again diverting the mass opposition to austerity and social inequality behind the Parti Québécois (PQ), the big business party to which it has politically subordinated the working class for decades.

Protesters interviewed by the *World Socialist Web Site* denounced the police mobilization against the demonstration.

“There are almost more police officers than demonstrators,” said Éloi. He criticized the more than half-billion dollar G-7 security budget in no uncertain

terms: “This is completely unnecessary spending, all to scare people.” But he said he was not going to be deterred: “I came here to oppose the economic policies of the world’s most powerful countries.” Éloi was surprised to learn from WSWs reporters that Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government has hiked Canada’s military budget by 70 percent over the next decade. He declared himself “against any increase in military expenditure.”

Fabien, another demonstrator, also condemned the security measures. “We live in police states, but people don’t realize it. Now it’s right in our face! We have a police state that can spend between \$600 million and \$1 billion for security, for nothing! Just to scare people. In the last month, listening to the media, one would think barbarians were at the gates of Quebec City, ready to smash into the city.”

In an official report, the Integrated Security Unit (ISU)—that included the Canadian Armed Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Sûreté du Québec (provincial police) and the municipal police of Quebec City—said a total of 13 arrests were made during anti-G7 events.

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At the start of Saturday’s demonstration, the Quebec Civil Liberties Union and Amnesty International, which had observers on the ground, denounced “unacceptable police behaviour towards demonstrators.”

“Our mission observed two cases of seemingly unjustified situations akin to kettling of protesters,” they wrote in a joint statement. “We deplore that practice, which risks constraining freedom of movement for no evident reason and undermines the right to protest.” Both civil rights organizations were particularly concerned that a police officer pointed “a weapon with blunt impact projectiles... at people who appeared to pose no danger.”

Amnesty International said police had repeatedly blocked its observers. “We were surprised and even shocked to learn that some observer teams were treated cavalierly on several occasions by members of the Quebec City police force,” said its Quebec director, Geneviève Paul. “Some were even prevented from observing an arrest to which journalists had access.”

The Manoir Richelieu hotel, where the G-7 leaders met and slept, was transformed into a veritable fortress

for the summit, and La Malbaie itself into an armed camp. A 3.7 km-long fence rooted in concrete surrounded the Manoir; access to the highway that goes through Malbaie was cut off; and the entire town placed under a 20 km radius air and maritime exclusion zone. Meanwhile, protests in Malbaie were consigned to an Orwellian-style “free expression zone”—a museum parking lot that was entirely fenced off from the rest of the town.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote last week, “The Canadian government and state are using this year’s G7 summit to accustom the population to state repression and to refine the techniques of the police and military forces in countering social unrest.”

The authors also recommend:

Canadian authorities prepare mass repression of anti-G7 protests
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