

Toronto police culpable in class action lawsuit over their brutal suppression of 2010 G20 protests

By Carl Bronski
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More than 10 years after the brutal police state suppression of demonstrators during the 2010 G20 summit in Toronto, a settlement has been reached in a citizens' class-action lawsuit against the Police Services Board. Lawyers for 1,100 plaintiffs who were detained and/or arrested during the protests and the Board agreed on a \$16.5 million payout ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000 in compensation for each individual listed in the complaint.

The police attempted to block the complaint in the courts for years before the Supreme Court of Canada, unable to ignore widespread and egregious video evidence of police misconduct, ruled in 2016 that the suit could continue.

The amount awarded to each individual will depend on their particular experiences at the hands of the police. In addition, those arrested will have their police records expunged. The police further publicly acknowledged their malfeasance. The settlement now awaits formal court approval this October.

The June 2010 police-state blitz in Toronto was the largest mass arrest in the history of Canada—more than during the Great Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 or the suspension of civil liberties in Quebec under the War Measures Act during the 1970 FLQ crisis.

In the week leading up to the G20 summit, downtown Toronto had all the hallmarks of a city under a state of siege. Six kilometers of fencing, topped with concertina wire and anchored in concrete encircled the actual meeting area. Police checkpoints fanned out another kilometer from the convention location. Snipers were stationed on the city's high rise rooftops. American Navy Seals surreptitiously patrolled the harbour.

Citizens in the vicinity were instructed to carry picture identification and expect curb-side interrogation by any of the thousands of police officers brought in from across the country. Canine units waited in the side streets.

Phalanxes of federal, provincial and municipal police stood at every corner, buttressed by more mobile bicycle and

horse patrols. Identification badges required to be displayed by the police were often removed. A thousand private security guards were deployed throughout the city's adjacent financial and entertainment districts. Seventy-seven new closed-circuit surveillance cameras monitored all movement on the streets. Police helicopters constantly hovered overhead. Security Service operatives regularly swept through the hotels and Canadian Armed Forces soldiers stood "on the ready" at "undisclosed locations."

The wholesale suppression of democratic rights by the police on the streets of Toronto—abetted and supported by all levels of government—shocked broad layers of the population. Protesters were kicked, bludgeoned, tear gassed, trampled by police horses and shot at with rubber and plastic bullets. Even prior to the beginning of the 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 hauled into primitive detention cages, strip searched and denied legal counsel.

Despite the public outcry against the police-state methods, both then federal Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Ontario Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty issued statements supporting the security measures and refused to convene a public inquiry. For their part, Toronto City's Councillors, led by then social-democratic Mayor David Miller, voted 36–0 to "commend outstanding police work."

Sherry Good, an office administrator and resident of a neighbourhood that saw police, in a driving thunderstorm, kettle (trap, detain and/or arrest) about 400 bystanders, commuters and peaceful protesters for four hours, was one of the initiators of the class-action suit. That particular operation, captured on film, was viewed by hundreds of thousands of Canadians. "I'm just an ordinary person," said Good, who was out for a walk in her neighbourhood when

the police action began. “I am not an activist, but I got caught up in the police kettling operation at Queen Street and Spadina Avenue. I just feel that what happened to me and hundreds of others was very wrong. It shocked me that I was surrounded and held by police because I was just walking on the street where I live.”

Another incident—one among hundreds—received widespread coverage. While marching on a police-approved route in downtown Toronto, environmental activist Natalie Gray was hit by two rubber bullets fired by a police tactical unit, tackled and bundled into a police vehicle. She was then driven around the streets of the city for half an hour before receiving any medical attention for her injuries. Gray was subsequently incarcerated in a wire cage for 30 hours on a charge of obstructing a police officer. Those charges were subsequently dropped for lack of evidence when she appeared at a court hearing.

At the time of Gray’s arrest, the police initially denied firing rubber bullets into the crowd of demonstrators. But their lies were exposed when bystanders recovered some of the projectiles and Gray appeared on television to display wounds inflicted by the bullets.

“What happened to me during the G20 weekend—being shot, arrested, sexually threatened, strip searched, taunted, and left cold, hungry, and in pain—is in no way unique,” said Gray. “The police demonstrated utter contempt for democracy and the law. In a truly democratic country, the politicians and police responsible for such unprovoked violence would be put on trial. The weekend of the G20 Summit made blatantly obvious the Harper government’s fascist approach to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. We need to ask Harper how he justifies the one billion dollar police budget for the weekend. We need to ask ourselves whether we should put up with a government that funds and dictates such brutality.”

A brief spree of petty vandalism by Black Bloc anarchist demonstrators was endlessly trundled out by the police to justify their increasingly brutal actions. However, in subsequent court proceedings against several anarchists, documents were released as part of a plea deal that revealed 12 undercover police agents either led, spied on or infiltrated protest groups. At least two of these undercover officers played central roles in organizing protest activities of various anarchist collectives. This included helping to identify targets to be vandalized.

In the entire course of events only one police officer was convicted of criminal misconduct after he was filmed brutally beating Adam Nobody, a peaceful demonstrator. Officer Andalib-Goortani was found guilty of assault with a weapon in 2013 and was ultimately sentenced to a year of probation and 75 hours of community service for breaking

Nobody’s nose and cheekbone. In addition, police superintendant Mark Fenton, who had described demonstrators as “terrorists” and who commanded one of the kettlings of innocent civilians, after much public outcry, was docked 60 days’ pay by a police board.

More than 800 of those arrested were subsequently released without charge. Of 330 charges laid, most were stayed or dropped altogether. In the end, only about two dozen individuals were found guilty of any misconduct whatsoever during the G20 protests.

The fact that such arbitrary use of ruthless state violence could occur in a major North American city with virtually no consequences for the perpetrators testifies to the rotten character of democracy in Canada. This was not the product of a few rogue elements within the police, but a deliberately planned provocation that enjoyed support from all levels of the state apparatus aimed at intimidating activists and working people.

Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have arrogated vast, almost unlimited powers to the police and national security apparatus under the guise of the “war on terror.” The G-20 repression confirmed the *World Socialist Web Site*’s repeated warnings that the real target of such authoritarian state structures was the working class.

The intervening decade has witnessed a dramatic acceleration of this process, including the Liberal government’s granting of powers to the intelligence agencies to “actively disrupt” vaguely defined “threats” to national security. Earlier this month, it was revealed that in response to the coronavirus pandemic, Canada’s military activated a propaganda and surveillance operation to “shape opinion” by broadcasting government-approved propaganda. Driven by the fear of social unrest, military officers were prepared to use the very same methods employed to enforce the bloody neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan to crack down on popular protests and other signs of opposition. (See: **Canada’s military launched operation to “shape opinion” amid pandemic**)

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