

VIDEO: Who Commanded the G20 Commander?

It's time for the Prime Minister to take responsibility for the G20 fiasco.

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A room filled with police officers stare at pulsing screens; feeds from 85 cameras cover most of Toronto's downtown core. This was the command centre for the G20 Integrated Security Unit (there was another ISU command centre in Barrie). In charge was the RCMP Chief Supt. Alphonse MacNeil.

It may have been Toronto police on the streets, but the Feds ran the show. It had been that way from the start. It was the Prime Minister that insisted, over Toronto's objections, on holding the G20 at the Convention Centre. It was the ISU that wanted the Public Works Protection Act. [Toronto Police chief Bill] Blair is wearing it, but operational command was MacNeil's.

At some point over the weekend the Operational Commander of the Integrated Security Unit watched the action unfold and made two fateful decisions. The first was not to immediately move some of the thousands of available police officers into position to stop a hundred or so people from breaking store windows. More importantly, not to quickly stop the trashing of several police cars.

CSIS had decided there was no credible terrorism threat. The whole rationale for all the security was that a small segment of protesters would cause some property damage and might try to storm the security fence. Yet when the windows broke and police cars burned, for perhaps as long as an hour there were no police in sight.

[Watch the CP24 coverage](#) of police cars on fire Saturday night on Queen Street. The journalists ask over and over again, where are the police? One says the police were here and then they left, leaving the cars to be torn apart and torched. Read the [Toronto Sun reports](#) on embarrassed police who say they were told to stand down.

MacNeil told his hometown paper, the [Cape Breton Post](#):

"We have the ability through our video feed to see everything that is going on"

"...there are even helicopters and planes providing video feed."

"We can see them from the air, we can see them from the ground, if there is anyone trying to interfere, we would see that."

We know the police had [infiltrated the Black Bloc](#), we know they had cameras that could see "everywhere," so why couldn't they defend their own vehicles? Was this part of a plan or a

“lack of available resources” as we have been told? Only a public inquiry can answer the question.

Television images of police cars ablaze set the stage for mass arrests.

The decision to order the arrests of around nine hundred peaceful protestors was the second major decision by the Operational Commander. It was clear to everyone who watched the television coverage (never mind the police cameras), that the actions against property were isolated incidents and did not involve the vast majority of protesters and onlookers.

What was the reason for such a blanket attack on the freedom of assembly, one of the Charter’s fundamental rights?

Not only were there mass arrests, but the culture of brutality exhibited by police was extraordinary, given they knew that every move was being watched and taped by their command.

Who ran the training programs that led up to the weekend and created such a sense of impunity?

Who decided that journalists were fair game? Journalists were punched, shoved, arrested, and told they would be arrested if they didn’t clear the scene. Having G20 press accreditation was no protection.

What meaningful right to a free press will there be if journalists can’t report on how the state exercises its authority? If the government is going to have a legal monopoly on the use of violence, then the public must have the ability – and for this they rely on journalists – to witness, investigate and report on how the machinery of coercion is wielded. There is nothing more important in maintaining some level of democracy.

A month before the G20 I wrote a commentary that said this:

“Is it possible at a time when Canada’s government debt is reaching European levels – and we are sure to hear another round of ‘deficit mania’ that the banker’s political and ‘journalistic’ representatives are fanning from Athens to Washington – that a massive investment in Canada’s police force would be a hard sell?”

So, we get back to the one billion dollars (ok, to be exact according to the PBO it’s \$929,986,110). If Toronto police spent \$122-million (that included their own men and all the city police who travelled from across Canada, airfare, hotels and overtime), and the OPP bill for the G8 in Huntsville was around \$35-million, how much of the remaining \$840-million or so was actually for the G8/G20 weekend?

National Defence got \$77-million and CSIS \$3-million, but the Mounties received the lion’s share – at least \$500-million. They did have to guard the foreign guests, deal with the major meeting sites in Huntsville and Toronto, and coordinate the overall security. But given how much more this is than the cost of thousands of men paid out of Toronto’s much smaller budget, it’s hard to fathom that this was mostly manpower cost.

Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, in a report roughly breaking down the costs

says, “It is still unclear how the RCMP will spend its sizeable share of incremental costs.” So, where did the money go? It’s just way too much security for a city that has a history of peaceful protest. So what’s it really all about?

One is forced to wonder if a hidden agenda of the government was to build the RCMP’s technical and surveillance capacity. Are they preparing for the kind of social unrest that might develop in the future if Canada is serious about meeting its G20 pledge of halving its deficit by 2013 – at a time when the world seems heading back into recession? Do our security forces look at the rising tide of strikes and protests in Europe and decide to get ready here?

Ok, a lot of questions and speculation, but some of it is easy to answer with a full and unrestricted report from the Auditor General.

But here’s the big one, in terms of accountability, and only a public inquiry with the powers of subpoena will get at this.

Who gave Supt. Alphonse MacNeil his marching orders? Who gave him the green light to violate the Canadian Charter of Rights? Who wanted the Public Works Protection Act? Imposed on the Convention Centre and covertly served up by the Ontario government, it was a test of what civil rights lawyers are calling a form of martial law.

It’s not too many degrees of separation to get to the real man in charge – The Prime Minister. This was his show from the start.

Should not Mr. Harper step forward and straightforwardly defend his decisions? If he thinks Canadians should be willing to support and pay for a massive investment in more policing aimed at domestic dissent, and be willing to compromise basic charter rights in the process, then say so. Let’s have a proper public debate about it.

And for that matter, shouldn’t Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty join him? He went along with the imposition of the archaic 1939 PWPA meant to stop German agents from attacking public buildings.

Only a public inquiry, with subpoena power, led by a person of courage can really get to the bottom of this. But that’s not likely to happen, unless dear readers, you raise your voices and demand it so. [Ed. see [July 10 rally on events page](#).]

Note #1: The Toronto Police Services Board said Tuesday they would create an independent review into police conduct during last month’s G20 summit. It will not have subpoena power. Much will depend on who the Reviewer is. If it’s someone with guts and wide respect, it could make a contribution.

Note #2: The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has a petition going in support of:

1. An independent inquiry into the actions of the police during the G20, including:
 - The dispersal of protestors at the designated demonstration site in Queen’s Park late afternoon, Saturday June 26th;
 - The detention and mass arrest on the Esplanade on the night of Saturday, June 26th;
 - The arrests and police actions outside the Eastern Ave. detention

- centre on the morning of Sunday, June 27th;
 - The prolonged detention and mass arrest of individuals at Queen St. W. and Spadina Ave. on the evening of Sunday, June 27th;
 - The conditions of detention at the Eastern Ave. detention centre;
- 2. Repeal or amendment of the Public Works Protection Act to meet basic constitutional standards; and
- 3. Law reform to ensure that the Criminal Code provisions relating to “breach of the peace,” “unlawful assemblies” and “riots” are brought in line with constitutional standards.

You can watch [The Real News Network G20 coverage here](#). It includes reports and testimonies from people who were witnesses or subjects of police actions over the weekend.

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