

G-8 security operation-the stifling and criminalizing of dissent

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The arrangements surrounding this week's G-8 summit in Kananaskis County, Alberta underline that the assembled leaders are representatives of a privileged minority that is increasingly haunted by the fear of popular unrest. The leaders of the world's wealthiest industrial nations—the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the European Union—arrived in nearby Calgary by executive jet, then were helicoptered to the wilderness fortress cum Rocky Mountain recreation village of Kananaskis, so they could be spared the sight of many thousands of protestors.

Canada's Liberal government had indicated that it would make use of a provision in proposed new anti-terrorist legislation to declare the Kananaskis area a "military security zone". Ultimately, it backed down. Nevertheless, the G-8 summit has become the object of the largest security operation in Canadian history and the most important homeland mobilization of Canadian troops since the 1970 October Crisis.

The government admits to having spent more than \$US200 million on the summit. More than 6,000 Canadian Armed Forces personnel and 4,500 police have been deployed in Kananaskis and the city of Calgary, which is located about 100 kilometers or 60 miles from the summit site. A 6.5-kilometer no-go zone has been established around Kananaskis Village and three anti-aircraft missile batteries set up, as a last line of defence should a plane evade the CF-18 fighters that are policing a 150-kilometer radius no-fly zone. The only road that runs through Kananaskis County is blocked with security checkpoints, and anyone wishing to travel it must submit to security checks and a vehicle search before being escorted by security vehicles. In the words of Royal Canadian Mounted Police Corporal Jamie Johnston, a G-8 security planner: "We plan for

the worst-case scenario. Then we allow the intelligence to decide for us whether or not we implement it 100 percent or on a lesser scale... Everything here is intelligence-driven. We need to be reactive to scale up or scale down."

"Fortress Kananaskis," however, was not conceived to ward off the "worst-case scenario" of terrorism, but rather to ward off dissent, by ensuring that any protestors were kept far from the summit site. Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced the choice of Kananaskis at the conclusion of last year's G-8 summit in Genoa, which had become the target of mass protests, involving hundreds of thousands of workers and youth from across Europe. Italian police killed one demonstrator and injured more than 300 others.

Last summer, Canadian government spokesman readily conceded that the remote Rocky Mountain location had been chosen to shield the summit from the protest movement that has attached itself to the various meetings of international political leaders and the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization. Previous attempts by the Chrétien Liberal government to stifle protests at the 1997 APEC conference in Vancouver and the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City had been severely criticized by protestors, civil liberty groups, and even much of the corporate media. Since September 11, Canadian authorities have invoked the threat of terrorism to justify a clamp down on protests that extends well beyond Kananaskis County.

Because of the exclusive location and military security apparatus that surrounds Kananaskis, G-8 opponents decided to make Calgary and Canada's capital city, Ottawa, the focus of their protests. But here too they are encountering unprecedented restrictions and state harassment.

According to the right-wing *National* in Calgary resemble martial law, with vast numbers of police drawn from across Canada deployed throughout the city center. These include a detachment of 300 drawn from the Ontario Provincial Police tactical unit or riot squad, who are patrolling the streets equipped with revolvers, clubs, pepper spray and tear gas.

A planned “Solidarity Village,” sponsored by, amongst others, the Alberta Federation of Labour and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, had to be shelved after municipal authorities refused to grant permission to use a park or other suitable location. Indeed, all permits for demonstrations have been denied. The last demonstration to be officially sanctioned was a gathering of some 3,000 people last Sunday. While to date police have not arrested those who have protested peacefully without official permission, by refusing to give permits the police and city fathers have effectively given themselves the power to seize on any isolated instance of vandalism or violence to declare all the protests illegal and institute mass arrests.

Initially, the RCMP had granted an Amnesty International (AI) representative permission to observe police actions, so as to verify the police do not use excessive force or otherwise violate protestors’ rights. But it subsequently withdrew the credentials, claiming the AI representative lacked “the background and knowledge of the law required to make balanced and objective observations.”

According to veteran *Ottawa Citizen* columnist, Susan Riley, “there is more than a hint of intolerance” in that city’s air as well. Statements by police and government officials about the threat of violent protests are being used to instill a climate of fear in the local populace.

Several journalists have been arbitrarily denied media credentials to cover the summit, which would have given them access not to Kananaskis village, but simply to the media center located in Calgary. These include two employees of the environmental organization Greenpeace, Pamela Foster, of the human rights-oriented *Upstream Journal*, and photographer Elaine Briere, working on behalf of the Canadian Labour Congress. Foster, who has had frequent meetings with Liberal ministers, including ex-Finance Minister Paul Martin, says she was told by the RCMP that media

Postcredentials were ~~conditions~~ **conditions** to those who had a criminal record, are mentally unfit, exhibit anti-social behavior, or have political views that are “subversive, violent or extremist.” Says Foster, “I have participated in anti-globalization protests and spoken out against particular policies and practices of government. It is now apparent to me that the government has equated these democratic acts as being a threat to security and shown that they are equating activism and terrorism. ... If they define the work we do, which is to be a watchdog on government policy, to be critical of government policy... as a security threat or borderline terrorism, then that’s a real problem.”

Organizers of a counter-summit in Calgary, which billed itself as the G-6 (Group of the 6 billion inhabitants of the Earth), reported that of 60 African delegates hoping to attend, only five were given permission to enter Canada.



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