

PUBLIC INQUIRY NEEDED ON G-20

Tuesday, July 6, 2010

Labour Council Condemns Both Vandalism And Mass Arrests

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council supports the call of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Amnesty International Canada for an independent inquiry into the actions of the police forces and the unprecedented scale of arrests on the June 26/27th weekend. With over nine hundred people incarcerated, it was the largest mass arrest in Canadian history.

During the weekend, the Labour Council issued a media release that condemned the senseless acts of vandalism that erupted on downtown streets, pointing out that the destruction of windows and vehicles by the Black Bloc drowned out the voices of the thousands who marched peacefully to raise issues of global justice and environmental sustainability.

However, the extreme response of police in clearing streets late Saturday and throughout Sunday was clearly an over-reaction and a violation of the civil rights of hundreds of women and men, including journalists, who had nothing to do with vandalism or violence. Hundreds were arrested and held for many hours without being allowed to notify family or legal counsel. Many had merely been bystanders caught up in the day's events.

This is the largest mass arrest in Toronto since the infamous bath house raids of 1981 when 286 gay men were swept up by police. For trade unionists, it also recalls the bitter experiences of immigrant workers on picket lines such as the Artistic Woodwork strike in the early 1970's.

The events of June 26th and 27th require an independent investigation to bring to light every aspect of the disturbing images and experiences of the weekend. There are numerous stories coming to light of police aggression against peaceful protesters in the downtown area and outside the temporary detention centre on Eastern Ave. Those actions, and the secret adoption by the Ontario Cabinet of extraordinary regulations for arrest, set a dangerous precedent for abuse of power and erosion of civil liberties. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom is supposed to guarantee the rights to freedom of speech, freedom to assembly and freedom to exercise our right to peaceful and lawful protest.

There are other questions that need to be answered as well. How is it that the Black Bloc group was allowed to roam the streets smashing windows without any police presence? How did the police cars get torched without intervention? Did the chain of command change from one day to the next?

How could the bill for this rise to the astronomical figure of over \$1.2 billion?

There was good reason for people to be in the streets as the leaders of the most powerful nations adopted an austerity agenda that will result in deep cuts to public services and workers standards in many countries. There is reason to be concerned that the unacceptable police actions could become a standard practice in future demonstrations against the impact of that austerity agenda.

That is even more reason why there needs to be full accountability for the decisions made, and a renewed commitment to safeguard the civil rights of all Canadians in the future. The Executive Recommends that Labour Council:

Congratulate the thousands of Canadians from all walks of life that marched peacefully on June 26th to raise their concerns about the G20 Summit and its global agenda.

Condemn the senseless acts of vandalism that occurred on June 26th, and the subsequent police actions that fundamentally violated the right to peaceful protest.

Oppose the provincial government's secret passage of regulations that deprive residents of their constitutional rights

Support the call for a full independent inquiry into all aspects of the G20 weekend, including the detention and arrests; police tactics relating to both containment of protests and lack of intervention in the destruction of property; as well as the federal decisions around spending and location that set the stage for weekend events.

Urge affiliates to mobilize for a strong turnout at the rally for Civil Liberties being held at Queen's Park on Saturday July 10th.