

An **Attack** on Democracy and Indigenous Freedom at the G20

Story: Danny Beaton, Mohawk www.beatondanny.ca

Photography: Ben Powless, Mohawk www.ienearth.org

As we walked out to catch the streetcar headed east on College Street, the rain was warm as it began to soak through our hair. On Saturday, June 26, 2010, we were going to join the protest of the G8 and G20 at the Legislation steps at Queens Park in Toronto, Ontario. The streetcar stopped near Grace Street, and my partner's son's drum teacher got on and sat in the seat in front of us. We exchanged greetings. Later in the day, we saw him drumming magnificently on his chrome snare drum belted across his chest as he and several dozen drummers and dancers celebrated the fifteen thousand concerned citizens, artists, teachers, mothers, fathers, even grandparents of all colours and backgrounds who had gathered to protest the many concerns we collectively inherited.

We stood on College Street watching the colours and banners of different groups, organizations, unions, and people all smiling and filling the air with positive energy with chants and slogans of justice. When I saw Greenpeace, I said to my wife, "Let's join them," as I have known some of their staff for many years. "No," she said. "We will wait for the Council of Canadians, as they will remember us and they will have some Site 41 people there, maybe some farmers, too." Sure enough, the Council began to walk by us, and we stepped in and shook hands with Don and Mary Jane and their two university children. We all exchanged hugs and began to chat as we walked down University Street, stopping now and then to wait for the crowd to catch up.

When we reached the American Embassy where the protest had stopped, hundreds of armed police in military combat stance stood in front of the embassy in all directions, staring at us with cold glaring eyes locked on us. We smiled in our now mindful experience of the military state we were entering. Military-style police stood on public benches, some wearing protective face masks, some with clubs and huge shields like an army ready to pounce, scare, beat, or confront an enemy. Many of these guards held what looked like shotguns, riot guns, assault weapons ready for a



A police car on fire in downtown Toronto. Photo by Ben Powless



A row of police officers in downtown Toronto prepare to meet protestors. Photo by Ben Powless

confrontation. I felt a negative force, and all I could say to them was, "What are you protecting?" I felt a monster present; that image in front of the US Embassy was something from a movie like *Apocalypse Now*. The entire protest, I am sure, was surprised at the size and array of goons in military style. My friends shook their heads in disbelief. We all exchanged comments regarding the police, and we all agreed this was uncanny for Toronto to have such a cold army of riot squads, like we were back in the days of Gandhi in India, boycotting the British rule.

The march continued south, and the image we saw as we passed the US Embassy that afternoon will remain etched in our minds, knowing what we are up against in our struggle for justice, freedom, and environmental protection. We continued down University Street with roughly 15,000 walking peacefully, calmly, now in a state of awkwardness, feeling like our message was being heard just by our sheer numbers. Everyone was positive. Many of us were carrying cameras,

snapping away at the momentum and unity achieved by the organizers. The Spirit of Unity, Harmony, Justice, and Peace had been achieved.

Now we had started at Queens Park and traveled to Queen Street, where we were confronted with two rows of shoulder-to-shoulder riot police with shields and batons. They forced our peaceful walk from south to west where every street north and south was guarded by the same 2 rows of shoulder-to-shoulder riot police forcing our walk west, giving us a boxed-in feeling with the reality of being truly controlled by a goon squad.

This once trendy shopping district filled with tourists, Torontonians, street vendors, and citizens alive with zest, peace, and calm now appeared to be under marshal law, about to explode with danger, and the feeling of danger was everywhere. Being surrounded by a riot squad and goon force was no easy feeling as we were not ready for battle, nor were we prepared for a beating; we were peaceful protesters

chanting and drumming for life. Just as we reached Spadina Street, a group of protestors turned around and headed east, followed by a hyper group of riot police running after them—this I believe was the beginning of the violence to come over the next three days.

Our city was now under siege; the monster was unleashed; the tear gas exploded. Billy clubs were stained in blood by angry police who came to Toronto for a confrontation. Several hundred innocent citizens beat to the ground by the riot squad, and for what? For who and why? The G20 and elite G8 were not in Toronto to discuss the most serious environmental disasters in the history of the earth (oil rupture by BP in the Gulf of Mexico) or the most serious environmental crisis (climate change or global warming enhanced by Canada's tar sands). North American Native peoples have never been consulted by this elite of western

Cont on page

G20
cont from page

political leaders about environmental issues in any serious strategic context regarding environmental protection or any forms of joint management of natural resources. Native peoples of North and South America and the indigenous peoples of the world demand the protection of Mother Earth for Seven Generations of Accountability for future generations to come.

The gathering of government leaders of the world in Toronto without the input of indigenous leaders was the first mistake Prime Minister Stephan Harper made to discredit any world debate on the solving of world problems. Realistically speaking, the G20 or G8s first priority or intention was never meant to solve environmental problems but was meant to keep the activity of material goods and consumption moving along so that the profits would continue, based on the exploitation of natural resources and development of indigenous territories without Native or Aboriginal consent. Now these political leaders have gone back to their own countries to try and keep their economy from collapsing—and the economy is a real issue, only there are even bigger issues. Real issues of environmental degradation have not been addressed. The fishermen by the Gulf of Mexico and so many others have lost their economy, but this was not a priority for western thinkers who gave the “go ahead” on deep sea oil drilling. The Tar Sands in Alberta are destroying rivers, lakes, streams, and Native homeland. Not to mention animals, birds, fish, the traditional Native diet, berries, plants, and medicines are contaminated, and for what? Profit. Contamination is now moving along to other communities.

We have to ask ourselves about what is more important: profit or water and sustenance. Economies should evolve around life, not death. We cannot let negative thinkers, businessmen, politicians hide with the police and army to protect them while they develop and destroy water and earth, because it belongs to our children and their children. Real problems like environmental protection need to be addressed now because soon there might be a dead ocean. Collecting the oil was not a first priority, and



Protestor being detained by police. Photo by Ben Powless



Protestors in peaceful protest at police row. Photo by Ben Powless

it created a far worse problem by dispersing toxic chemicals that have devastated the people's homeland and life.

The people have a human right to defend Mother Earth and her blood and their children's future because it is Our Way of Life—everything

has a right to live, and Respect is the Law of the Land. This is the North American way of life and always has been, and it is the Natural Law of life with the natural world. Mother Earth can take care of us, but we have to take care of her, too. The police should never have used force on

innocent protesters, artists, teachers, fathers, mothers, students who stood up for justice, unity, righteousness, and peace. Thank you for listening. All My Relations.