

# I Have a Pacemaker: Reflections on the G20 Toronto Protests

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Toronto, Canada — It is Thursday evening, July 1, Canada Day, and we are on Dundas Square enthusiastically applauding the performers.

Toronto, perhaps the most pluralistic city in the whole world, is recovering from a tumultuous week. Garbage bins were put in place by Wednesday and bus shelters will be back by Friday. The police cars are hardly seen on the streets, and neither are the police from across Canada. But what was wrong with this city a few days ago?

The downpour, World Cup excitement and the threat of new weapons did not prevent about 30,000 people from participating in the rally against the G20 Summit on Saturday June 27. They were, as described by Sid Bryan, President of the Ontario Federation of Labour, “moved to stand up against injustice.” It may be said that the protest against injustice was twofold. On the one hand, they stood up against the effects of policies adopted by such summits on international matters; the policies being implemented in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Sri Lanka are currently among these. On the other hand, it was about local issues; the worsening status of the working class, the increasing number of homeless people, the unequal status of women, and the suppressed rights of minorities and aboriginals are among these issues.

However, those 2000 or so foreign journalists who were in Toronto during these days will, most probably, not file positive reports of the type that Toronto Mayor David Miller asks them to send home. The unprecedented police presence, the arrest of more than 1,000 people, and the violence are among the most striking features of these three days.

The scenes which one could witness involving the actions by the police in the last few days, though less harsh than the police behavior internationally criticized for instance in the Middle East, are not essentially different. Once the integrity of the capitalist system is

felt to be threatened, the reaction is going to be more or less the same. If it is harsher there – and it is – one important reason is simply that it is thought to be a bigger threat there. What do you think the reaction of the police would be if the crowd, for instance, decided to halt the summit meetings, and ask the G20 summit leaders to unload the burden and let people decide for themselves? They used their teargas and rubber bullets at this stage, but they have other weapons to use later. What is to stop them?

The Summit leaders do not negotiate for the benefit of everybody and they simply can't: they are the defenders of the rights of the public just so long as their decisions on behalf of a minority are unthreatened. Consequently, freedom is tolerated by them just so long as it leads to nothing further than a squeak of complaint. Otherwise, it gets cracked down on immediately. So the whole issue is a matter of degree. Once the capitalist system feels a threat it reacts accordingly, and the brutality of their action depends primarily on the size of the threat. If this is so, then what we experienced in Toronto, what working people are experiencing in Europe in general and in Greece in particular, and even what they are experiencing in countries famous for not abiding by the democratic system, as in the Middle East, is just a matter of difference in degree, not in kind; different shades of the same color. Whether or not this was a real threat needs further discussion.

Yes! The summit leaders are back to their offices, but B., whom I met in the Tent City the night before the big demonstration, is still homeless; and to aggravate his currently miserable situation he has to take what Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty called “strong medicine for a strong economy”, which at this moment means paying his portion of the average \$470 cost which each family has to pay over a year owing to the new Harmonized Sales Tax.

In 2007 Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government paid Maher Arar 10 million dollars as compensation for the wrong he had suffered. The government had wrongly accused him and had to pay for that. Regardless of the question how you can measure one year of imprisonment and torture in terms of money, another question may be asked: Was that the government who paid for this? Each Canadian paid about 30 cents in this case. But who is going to pay for the estimated \$1.5 billion cost of the two-day Summit meeting? The working class in the widest sense of the term will pay, including factory workers, nurses, teachers, the staffs of companies, the unemployed and the students, as the future members of this class and the current members of the workers' families. They are the hosts of this whole unnecessary and ultra-luxurious meeting.

According to Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Chief Superintendent Alphonse MacNeil, “What we really had at the end of the day was only a few broken windows and a

few damaged police cars, and therefore the twin summits on the street were a success.” That is, of course, what he had, but what we had by the end of the day was the Charter of Rights and human rights more generally being monstrously trampled in an unprecedented manner for Canada.

MacNeil, like the police on the scene, seems not to have heard Adam McIsaac as he screamed “I have a pacemaker”, while being kicked in the ribs and stunned with a stun gun. The sad point, however, is not that he did not listen to Adam; it’s that he can’t help it. The bitter truth is that we, even we too forgot his voice or overlooked it, as we were applauding Sarah, one of the dancers in Dundas Square in the evening of Canada Day.

We needed another shock to remind us that the system is untenable.

– Kaveh Boveiri is the co-translator of the Persian edition of *Capital*, Vol. I (2008) and is currently translating the *German Ideology*. He would like to thank Danny Goldstick for his suggestions about the present article.