

C U S J

Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice

A national faith-based organization founded in support of Unitarian values

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The Honourable Steven Harper,
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons,
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Prime Minister Harper

[I]n an open democratic society the streets, the parks, and other public places are an important facility for public discussion and political process. They are in brief a public forum that the citizen can commandeer; the generosity and empathy with which such facilities are made available is an index of freedom.

Rt. Hon. Antonio Lamer, Chief Justice of Canada

Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice were shocked and dismayed to see masses of riot police attacking and detaining peaceful protestors in the City of Toronto last week during the G-20 meetings. We cannot understand why people who were sitting in, in defence of their civil rights, were herded into detention centres, while those committing vandalism and burning police cars were left untouched to do their unlawful work.

Given the amount of money spent on security for this summit, it is unbelievable to us that the police would not have been well informed as to the identity and plans of the so-called anarchists and their "black-bloc" tactics. We also cannot understand why no police were prepared to act to defend shop-keepers and peaceful protesters in the area where these tactics were employed. We are daily reading testimonials from witnesses and assigned observers of the process that:

- Shopkeepers in the demonstration zones called the police for assistance with no response
- Police stood by and watched the vandals destroying public and private property and did nothing.
- Police confronted and dispersed the crowds who were peacefully protesting in the designated protest area
- Police physically attacked and herded peaceful protesters and casual passers-by, followed by mass arrests without charges or access to civil rights.
- The detention centres where people were held were completely inadequate, and people were held for as long as 24 hours with minimal food, water, and medical assistance.
- The police announced that a special law was passed by the province allowing the police to do these things. This law was poorly communicated and did not authorize any special powers outside the security zone.
- Queer protesters complained of being segregated out and intimidated in the detention centre.

We can only conclude that either the Canadian Police forces are incompetent, or that there was some other agenda that we don't know about. We wonder, did the police use the anarchists to justify the big security budget? The actions of the government and the police during the G20 Summit in Toronto demonstrate the need for answers, accountability, and action.

Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice are deeply concerned about the potential erosion of Canadian democracy that comes with a new, more confrontational relationship with a highly armed, intimidating police force. We find this trend a threat to the democratic practices we cherish.

We support the call of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association for an independent public inquiry. This inquiry needs to:

- Examine in detail the various incidents and police actions and identify whether the civil liberties of Canadians were violated in the process.
- This investigation should include verification that people were segregated by sexual orientation and treated differently.
- Examine the role of all levels of government in setting up the circumstances where these potential violations took place.
- Make recommendations as to necessary changes in laws or regulations to better secure Canadian democracy in future similar situations.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Frances Deverell,
President,
Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice

Cc MP Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Opposition
MP Jack Layton, Leader of the NDP
MP Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Quebecois
The Hon. Vic Toews, Minister of Public Safety
Canadian Unitarian Council
Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada

Additional Letter sent to:

Premier Dalton McGuinty, Province of Ontario

Alok Mukherjee, Chair, Toronto Police Services Board,
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