

# G-20 SUMMIT LEAVES PITTSBURGH, QUESTIONS ABOUT FREEDOM IN AMERICA IN ITS WAKE

*AS WORLD ECONOMIC LEADERS GATHERED TO ADJUST A FAILED FINANCIAL SYSTEM, PROTESTERS, PRESS AND RESIDENTS OF PITTSBURGH NAVIGATED MILITARY-OCCUPIED TERRITORY IN WHICH FUNDAMENTAL CIVIL RIGHTS WERE SUSPENDED*

**Press conference:** 10am, Monday September 28th, 2009 at the Thomas Merton Center, 5125 Penn. Ave, Pittsburgh, PA.

**Contact:** Nigel Parry, 646-812-0897, [consultants@nigelparry.net](mailto:consultants@nigelparry.net)

**Thomas Merton Center/Twin Cities Indymedia/Glassbead Collective NYC (Pittsburgh, PA, September 27th, 2009)**—On the first day of the G-20 economic summit in Pittsburgh, residents and visitors arriving in the downtown area of the two time "Most Livable City" winner were greeted with a town locked down with security fences, barricades, and checkpoints staffed by security forces in camouflage standing next to armored vehicles typically seen in TV news reports from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Apache, Blackhawk, and Chinook helicopters traversed the skies. National Guard and airborne regiments staffed local jails, extended with temporary holding facilities created from mobile trailers, portable toilets and generators, where incarcerated protesters were referred to with military terminology as "detainees" not "arrestees".

Activists planning G-20-related protest events were repeatedly harassed by police during the week preceding the Summit, and residents unconnected with any protest organizing saw similar visits from a police force acting as if it expected a foreign army to invade the city. As collectives who support activists by providing food services at similar scale events entered Pittsburgh immediately prior to the convention, they and anyone who offered space to their mobile kitchens were harassed and threatened by local police. Attempted public feedings in the downtown area, open to all, were physically blocked by police citing lacks of permits.

Police responded to demonstrations with riot control equipment including batons, tear gas, pepper spray, percussion grenades, and Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) used by the New York Police Department during the 2004 Republican National Convention and by the U.S. military to disperse crowds in Iraq. Pre-recorded dispersal orders including the phrase "no matter what your purpose" were blasted from police loudspeakers in crowded public spaces, making it clear that anyone who stayed in the areas following the warnings would be in danger of riot control weapons and arrest—including journalists.

On two consecutive nights in and around the campus of the University of Pittsburgh, hundreds of riot police assaulted students, journalists, and members of the public frequenting the busy residential and recreational district—in non-riot situations. Diners walking out of restaurants, bar patrons, and students trying to get back to their dorms were tear-gassed, clubbed and arrested, and over 100 persons were arrested on Friday night, most in a mass arrest situation. Students were tear gassed by riot police inside university buildings. Those arrested including 6 journalists—two from Twin Cities Indymedia. The University of Pittsburgh, who prior to the Summit posted warnings to students against involvement in any activities that 'may jeopardize their careers', announced that they would be additionally investigating arrestees to see if they were registered students.

Twin Cities Indymedia reporter Melissa Hill was arrested, had her camera broken and her footage confiscated by the Pittsburgh Police Department.

"I was outraged", stated Hill, "Immediately before the arrest, the police were acting extremely aggressive including using fear tactics like pointing rubber bullet guns at close proximity" . I repeatedly identified myself as a member of the press, was wearing a press badge, and when I was released 5 hours later, my camera was returned to me broken, and the recordable DVD with my footage on it was stolen"

Several other journalists were arrested and had equipment intentionally broken and footage confiscated during the Summit.

- Sadie Gurman, reporter for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.
- Dominic Dimauro - Freelance Journalist, arrested, camera and media confiscated with no receipt. Charged with Obstruction of Justice, Failure to Disperse.
- Tom Larkin - Freelance cameraman, had camera damaged by impact round, punched in the face by a policeman as he was filming.
- Keith DeVries - member of Pittsburgh Filmmakers, student at University of Pittsburgh. Had camera destroyed as police tried to confiscate his tape following his arrest. Charged with failure to disperse, and was part of the mass arrest on Cathedral Lawn.

"We had a peaceful and legal march of 8,000 on Friday, and hours later it was the police who acted violently and unlawfully," said Pete Shell of the Thomas Merton Center which organized the Friday Peoples' March.

During the last major political gathering to received a "National Special Security Event" designation, the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, MN, a similar pattern of police and security overkill was noted before, during and after the Convention, with infiltrators and preemptive arrests, a massive police and military presence in the city, and indiscriminate targeting of bystanders and members of the press. Of the 818 people arrested, 75% were arrested in mass arrest situations, and saw their charges dropped. Around 60 journalists were arrested. No public official ever saw censure for allowing this blatant violation of the freedoms to assemble and protest, the implicit requirement that police only arrest those seen committing a crime, and of the freedom of the press.

The normalization of state force and violence visible in an unarguably national pattern of preemptive arrests/harassment, mass arrests, militarization achieved by suspension of *Posse Comitatus*, that has become a hallmark of National Special Security Events runs contrary to the expected, Constitutionally-guaranteed rights to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to assembly. Furthermore, when state violence focuses public discourse on a struggle for these basic rights, it detracts from civic discussion around the substantive issues raised by dissenters, undermining the intent of the basic rights to promote open discussion in society.

As the G-20 leaves Pittsburgh, we are left with many questions about the state of freedom in America, about the casual and indiscriminate use of police violence and authority in non-riot situations as standard practice, and about a society that accepts the militarization of its cities in the name of "security".

For more information about the G-20, including substantive coverage of the full spectrum of dissent with the policies of the G-20, visit the Pittsburgh Indymedia website: <http://indypgh.org/g20/>

For more information about the 2008 RNC, see <http://rnc08report.org>

## **ABOUT US**

The Thomas Merton Center ([thomasmertoncenter.org](http://thomasmertoncenter.org)) is a group of people from diverse philosophies and faiths who find common ground in the nonviolent struggle to bring about a more peaceful and just world.

Twin Cities Indymedia ([tc.indymedia.org](http://tc.indymedia.org)) and Glassbead Collective ([glassbeadcollective.org](http://glassbeadcollective.org)) formed the core part of the team that made the documentary *Terrorizing Dissent* about the 2008 Republican National Convention.

The Pittsburgh Independent Media Center ([indypgh.org](http://indypgh.org)) has produced *Rustbelt Radio*, a weekly independent radio news program, since 2004, and during the G-20 hosted the G-Infinity media website and live radio stream to serve as a platform for independent news reporting on G-20 related events.