

G8/G20: A POST-MORTEM¹

Alexandria Mitchell[©]

With the G8 and G20 Summits over, one doesn't have to look far for examples of anger and frustration at what did and didn't happen.

There are many important questions being posed now that world leaders have left Toronto and the streets have been swept clear of broken glass and trash. From all NGOs being excluded from the media centre (the one with the infamous fake lake), and the violence on Queen Street in Canada's largest city, to the reluctance to discuss important topics like climate change - the G8/G20's legitimacy as effective bodies for global affairs has been called into question.

The concept of an overly expensive summit, which has long been a popular talking point for federal opposition parties, has become a hot topic for taxpayers and activists alike. The billion dollar price tag becomes even more of a black mark on Harper's government and the entire G20 body when we discover that past summits' security costs have been significantly less.

Toronto Mayor David Miller is demanding to know why negotiations were held in such a large city centre, while the "big-city mayors' caucus" is challenging Ottawa to pay up and compensate the businesses affected by protests and civil disobedience.

Public opinion may heat up one more level with concerns of what *The Guardian* journalist John Hilary called "skulduggery" in Toronto last weekend. International media filmed police cruisers going up in smoke while Toronto Police have since been accused of playing a public relations game. Cruisers were allegedly driven into crowds, and left to be lit on fire while TV cameras around the world captured footage of the proclaimed anarchists' handiwork.

All of these popular media headlines did little to explain real problems that have developed within the ranks of civil society. Furthermore, they entirely neglected to share with Canadians what actually happened at the summit. Only now have we begun to hear fragments of what happened with regards to the controversial bank tax, climate change, and national deficits.

Most problematic is the fact that people have lost faith in the Canadian government, corporations, law enforcement, and other relevant institutions. This G8 and G20 illuminated the holes in Canadian accountability, security costs being only the tip of the iceberg compared with broader issues.

Ideas on how to effectively deal with the big challenges of our time seem scarce. Perhaps this is the reason why 10,000 people felt they needed to flood the streets of Toronto to yell out their frustrations to what seemed like deaf ears within the summit.

Billions of taxpayer dollars have been spent on a meeting for world powers, while small nations were excluded from discussions on how to handle the global economy. The decisions made at the G8 and G20 will significantly affect the nations that didn't have a voice at the negotiating

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table. The G20 is essentially a special club that exists so countries like Canada and the USA can avoid the far less expensive and far more egalitarian United Nations - which gives a voice to small countries while allowing effective debate and discussion.

As Toronto returns to normalcy, my view of the G8 and G20 Summits has shifted dramatically. If the real problems of the world are ever to be solved, a more cohesive and effective method of dialogue and debate must be used. Now more than ever it seems necessary to try and unite advocates on the variety of causes people are currently campaigning for. The United Nations, an able body built on unity and cooperation, is there for us. Let's use it.