

A canoe flotilla launched by the Council of Canadians was stopped by police on the waters outside the Deerhurst resort in Huntsville, Ontario where G8 leaders met in June. The Council delivered our "Scrap the Summits!" message to police who in turn, delivered it to G8 leaders.



Mark Calzavara



by Brent Patterson

Challenging the Monstrosity of the G8 and G20 Summits and Winning Over Public Opinion Along the Way

What do a fake \$2-million lake, a canoe flotilla and thousands of free earplugs have to do with a flawed global governance and global economy model?

They helped us raise awareness about the boondoggle billion-dollar G8 and G20 summits that took place in Huntsville and Toronto this past June. While the summits are now over, our work to challenge their "business as usual" agenda forges on.

The Council of Canadians consistently argued that these summits never made sense politically, democratically or financially. We made the case that the summits were to promote austerity but cost more than \$1.24 billion to stage and the major development contribution from Canada was \$1.1 billion for maternal health, less than the summits' hefty price tag for security and logistics.

We pointed out how the G8 pledged \$5 billion for maternal health, well short of the \$30 billion the United Nations says is necessary to stop preventable deaths, and that

even these pledges may not mean much since the G8 has failed to make good on more than \$20 billion of past pledges.

While the G20 was at times referred to as the more democratic version of the G8, it is still 172 countries short of the United Nations, which is often referred to as the G192. The G192 model would ensure that all countries – and all people – would be represented in global discussions.

In the months leading up to the summits – and while the meetings were taking place – we were able to speak out about the decisions that would be made behind closed doors over three days in June by the two exclusive groups. These decisions would have wide-ranging impacts on more than six billion people who hadn't been invited. Our "scrap the summits" and "these meetings should be moved to the UN" messages resonated widely and appeared in many commentaries, editorials and speeches.

Canadians seemed to agree. An Angus Reid opinion poll released just before the summits told us that 74 per cent of Canadians

viewed the summits as "not too important" or "not important at all." Seventy-eight per cent said the \$1-billion-plus price tag for the summits was unjustified.

The *Toronto Star's* editorial board noted that "Harper's extravaganza ought to be seen as the high-water mark for these affairs. It's time to curb the sheer scale, cost and disruption. Perhaps the leaders could task a handful of their 8,000 nimble-minded advisers with devising a way to meet on a smaller scale. There are options. Summits could be held at more easily protected sites. Secure châteaux, the United Nations, military bases, even cruise ships have been suggested.... These affairs are sinking under their own weight. It's time to lighten the load."

Even some national leaders agreed. Jonas Gahr Støre, the foreign minister of Norway, wrote in the *Ottawa Citizen* in mid-April: "The G20 is sorely lacking in legitimacy and must change." He said, "The self-appointment of the Group of 20 represents, from the point of view of international law and multilateral principles, a major step backwards in the way



Left: The Council of Canadians joined more than 25,000 people in the streets of downtown Toronto during the G20 summit to call for a more democratic economic and global decision-making model. Our call to "Scrap the Summits!" and move to the more representative G192 at the United Nations resonated widely.

day, we joined with 25,000 others for a peaceful People First! rally and march through the city.

Even with a strong showing of solidarity in the streets and many exciting events and interventions at the summits themselves, there are still many concerns. Many women and children will continue to die preventable deaths because the leaders of the most developed countries promised only a fraction of what was needed to improve maternal health. The G20 countries pledged to cut their deficits in half by 2013, which can only mean structural readjustment for millions of people, more fire-sale sell-offs of public services, and more cutbacks to critical social programs and social supports. The G20 summit communiqué noted that climate change would remain "top of mind" – an astonishing head-in-the-sand position given the climate crisis the world now faces. Finally, the G20 re-committed itself to the World Trade Organization's Doha Round (though admittedly few believe that will go anywhere now).

We also remain very concerned that more than 900 people were arrested at protests against the G20. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has said that many peaceful protesters were caught up in the sweeping arrests and police raids. People also experienced the provocation of the police in the days leading up to the summit – with the heightened and intimidating police presence many endured suspicious looks, the searching of bags, and unnecessary and intimidating questioning. We joined with Amnesty International and others in calling for an inquiry into the appropriateness of police actions both before and during the summits.

We did what we could do to challenge the monstrosity of the G8/G20 summits, and in many ways we won over public opinion. In the aftermath of the summits we need to assess, regroup, speak out for civil liberties and the necessity of dissent, and continue our struggle for democratic global decision making for trade, water and climate justice.

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international co-operation has occurred since the Second World War."

The Council of Canadians stayed front and centre in the lead-up to and during the summits, raising awareness about the groups' undemocratic decisions.

We protested at the G7, G8 and G20 ministerials in Iqaluit, Gatineau and Halifax. We quickly challenged threats to civil liberties by handing out free earplugs after the Toronto police purchased long-range acoustic devices. These crowd control devices use loud, high-frequency sounds that have been proven to cause hearing damage in some instances.

When news leaked about the Harper government's plans to build a \$2-million fake lake in the summits' Toronto media centre, we applied to the Geographical Names Society to name it "Harper's Folly." The stunt became an international media story and helped highlight concerns about the summits' extravagant costs.

In the week leading up to the G8 and G20 meetings, we took part in organizing and presenting public education workshops at The People's Summit. This event brought together community organizers, activists, non-governmental organizations, independent media, workers, impacted communities and artists to educate, empower and ignite positive change.

We also conducted an on-line poll asking if the billion dollars spent on the summits was a good use of public money.

An overwhelming 823 said no, and just 53 said yes. People could also watch a "summits expense clock" on our website that gave a second-by-second tally of the \$1.24 billion spent while the summits were taking place.

As the G8 leaders met in Huntsville, we took to the water with Council of Canadians Chairperson Maude Barlow leading a canoe flotilla on Fairy Lake attempting to take our "scrap the summits" message to G8 delegates. The canoe flotilla was buzzed by a military helicopter and closely monitored by Ontario Provincial Police boats. As the canoe flotilla approached restricted waters near the Deerhurst Resort where the G8 leaders were staying, it was stopped by officers in an OPP boat and we were told it couldn't proceed any farther. The police agreed to take our "scrap the summits" message to the resort while the media looked on.

In Toronto, where the G20 meeting took place, we challenged the new law announced for the summit requiring people to produce identification and state their purpose for being within five metres of the summit's security fence. We measured five metres out from the fence and marked the line with yellow tape for the media to see. Our actions led to intense questioning by watchful police officers.

We also hosted a sold-out crowd at historic Massey Hall on June 25 for an incredible line-up of powerful speakers (see article on page 23). The next