

Building A Campaign Of Solidarity And General Amnesty

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Since the Summit of the Americas, a large movement of solidarity with all the political prisoners arrested around these protests has developed. People from all over the world have taken to the streets in solidarity. Organizations of all types, and individuals from across the US and Canada, have sent money toward the non-sectarian CASA defense fund. This movement didn't appear out of nowhere. The fact that people and organizations are willing to be in solidarity with black bloc militants and peaceful demonstrators alike is clearly a result of the emergence of a new respect for a diversity of tactics.

Taking the Lead of Solidarity

The aftermath of the Summit could have been like other mass demonstrations. In fact, in the morning of A21, there was an isolated denunciation of "protestor violence" by the mainstream Peoples' Summit representative, Françoise David, and Quebec "non-violence" guru, Philippe Duhamel of Operation SalAMI. However, as the day unfolded, it became difficult to denounce "marginal groups planning for violence" since, as one Montreal medic put it, the black bloc wasn't "the violent minority of protestors," but rather "the minority of the violent protestors". At the end of the day, Philippe Duhamel was alone, with journalists and politicians, to denounce the violence of the protests.

We knew that the mainstream media, and some "respectable activists", would do all they could to swing the sympathies of the public back to "law and order" and "business as usual". That's why, on April 23rd, at its first general assembly after the Summit, the CASA tried to take the lead for solidarity with clear demands and an immediate plan of action. Since we were the first to issue demands — immediate and unconditional liberation of all the political prisoners and a general amnesty for all protestors — and a call to action, others had little choice but to follow the lead and the hardcore non-violent dogmatics were caught off guard.

A Movement of Unconditional Solidarity

The first activist group to answer our call and to align it's demands and actions with ours (outside of CLAC, but that was obvious), was OQP-2001. To their credit, during the Summit they had an absolutely irreproachable attitude and afterward they unanimously decided to support everyone, regardless of politics. The coalition, under pressure in their rank-and-file, simply made our demands theirs, mobilized for our actions and started asking for money on the behalf of our defense fund.

The first wave of demonstrations was launched on the week of MayDay. In Quebec City, over 600 people showed up for a powerful demonstration of solidarity, while in Montreal hundreds joined the union march under anarchist and anti-capitalist banners demanding a general amnesty. Solidarity demonstrations were also held in many other cities. On May 3rd, another demonstration disrupted the annual benefit dinner of the Canadian Liberal Party. During the protest, some 150 protestors clashed with Montreal police.

After that, CLAC and CASA issued a call for three days of actions in solidarity with the remaining political prisoners, starting on May 22nd. In the meantime, the "movement to free Jaggi" gathered momentum in English-speaking Canada and Quebec with almost daily actions and press coverage. He was finally freed on May 7th on a \$3,000 cash bail, and with peculiar conditions

such as “not having a megaphone at demonstration” and “not being in a position of leadership in demonstration”. After the release of Jaggi Singh, the struggle to make the rest of the political prisoners known intensified. Indeed, there were not many people who knew that there were still eight people behind bars because of the Summit. To highlight these cases, the CLAC and CASA demands for the days of actions were “Free the ‘Germinal Five’ and All Other Political Prisoners” and “General Amnesty for All Protestors”.

It’s during these days of actions that the first Summit of the Americas political prisoner, Stéphane Paquet, was sentenced on May 15th to nine months behind bars and a three years probation for smashing a few windows. Another political prisoner, Jean Pierre Bélanger, was also sentenced to six months in jail for “death threats against a police officer”. Finally, the case of Vaughn Barnett, a non-violent activist who crossed the fence on Sunday, April 22nd, who challenged the legality of his arrest and refused bail, also came to light during these days.

Finally, on May 22nd, a demonstration was held in Quebec City. Some 150 people took to the streets and headed toward the City Hall Building where there was a meeting in session. Upon arrival, about 50 protestors got inside and disrupted the meeting, pressing for the City Council to back a demand for an independent inquiry of the police work during the Summit. Outside the city flag was brought down and replaced with a black flag. Other solidarity demonstrations also took place in Toronto and Montreal. Harassment continued as two people were arrested after the Montreal demo for allegedly having Molotov cocktails in their bags, while two others were fined in Quebec City for wearing scarves and making “too much noise”.

The ‘Germinal Five’ were finally released on conditions on May 28th. These conditions not only include “having a good behavior” and “keeping the peace” but also forbade from communicating with each other. They must also report every two weeks to the police officer who conducted the investigation against them, and their parents where forced to agree to pay a fine of \$10,000 if they break these conditions.

Where to Next?

Right now, as the energy of the Summit has died out and all of the political prisoners that could realistically be freed have been, spirit is low in Quebec City. With more than 300 trials to start this autumn, and a handful of activists to deal with this massive work, CASA is clearly exhausted. We’ve raised a lot of money, but we will need much more. Hopefully, people will be able to take some rest during the summer and we can develop a political plan of actions for the autumn. Because we all know that this battle started in the street, and, ultimately, will be won there. As usual, we need to agitate, educate and organize (and not burn out while doing so!).

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