

Anarchists Scapegoated for Quebec Riot

Michael William

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June 24, Quebec's national holiday, St. Jean Baptist day, is usually an uneasy combination of healthy fun and not so healthy flag Waving. This year's celebrations in Quebec City, the seat of the provincial parliament, turned hotter than usual.

Following the traditional outdoor concert, people flowed into D'Youville Square, the hangout of punk and countercultural types in the city, joining others already there. Cops began making arrests, provoking resistance from the crowd. Bricks and bottles began to fly.

The cops brought in a water cannon and the riot squad—though the former proved as effective as a garden hose, the Cops pushed the crowd out of the square and 2,000 people continued to riot, looting 80 Shops.

At one point during the disturbance, a crowd of hundreds gathered at the Parliament and Hurling paving stones and other objects at the building. 140 windows were done in, including all those on the first floor of the main building. A statue on the grounds was upended, and people broke into another building, causing damage and setting a fire.

The next morning, Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard presided over an award ceremony at the Parliament while workers went about repairs. Ordering an inquiry into the riot, Bouchard quickly opined that attacking the Parliament was an "accident," an "irrational act" by "people who didn't know what they were doing."

Quebec City Police Director Norman Bergeron then advanced his shock take: an extreme right-wing group—which he refused to name—was behind the riot. "People from this group led the riot," he affirmed.

Anarchists Not Behind the Riot

Less plausible still was a theory in the tabloid Photo Police. In this version the purpose of the riot was to boost the U.S. tourist industry! "These riots were planned and organized by the CIA at the request of powerful New England lobbies so that the East Coast of the U.S. could profit from tarnishing Quebec's reputation."

Then a new voice made itself heard in the swirl of conspiracy theories. According to a local group called the World Anti-Fascist League (LAM), it was the anarchists, and more specifically, the collective which edits the libertarian-communist journal *Démanarchie*, who were behind the riot. LAM president, Alain Dufour, brandished a copy of *Démanarchie* on TV featuring a picture of a burning cop car and pointed to an editorial and articles discussing two recent riots in Quebec. The LAM's 15 minutes of fame at *Démanarchie*'s expense included interviews with Dufour on numerous TV and radio stations and quotes in most Montreal and Quebec City dailies.

Démanarchie responded in a statement rejecting "all claims of authorship and ownership" of the riot, stating "the riot belongs only to those who participated in it." Riots are "spontaneous," they repeated from a previous editorial. "The hunt for scapegoats is an attempt to disguise the authorities' responsibility for the ever-worsening social climate which is making more and more people feel like they have less and less to lose."

The LAM thesis was initially dismissed by police director Bergeron as “not serious.” He was aware of Démanarchie, he said, but the group was too marginal to create such an event. Soon, however, the focus of the police investigation began to shift. The offending Démanarchie cover again appeared on the front pages of the papers, brandished this time by the Quebec City police director of criminal investigation. The Cops were still concentrating on the “professional agitator” thesis, he said, though now they were unsure which ones “Left, right, I’m not into politics; I’m a policeman”).

Next, the raids started. The police first went to homes of people active with Quebec City Food Not Bombs which shares a post office box with Démanarchie (even though the people visited are not in Démanarchie). Although the Food Not Bombs members were out of town during the riot, the cops discovered several pot plants, providing an excuse to arrest them when they returned. The political nature of their treatment was evident from the outset. Refusing to grant bail, the judge stated: “It would sicken me to liberate philosophers of anarchy.”

The pot plants were part of a sinister plot, he theorized, a “way of putting people to sleep to get them to swallow propaganda easier.” The sentences handed down were harsher than the norm. Again linking them to the riot they hadn’t participated in, the judge informed them that, for a year following their release they were not to be present in the Parliament area or the walled historic section of Quebec City where much of the looting took place.

Then a member of Démanarchie was picked up while street selling the journal in Quebec City. The cops went on to raid his apartment where they confiscated a computer and other anarchist journals. Released without being charged, he was visited twice more by the cops, who asked him about his role in Démanarchie and whether he knew various people in the radical milieu.

Next, the Montreal apartment of one of the founders of the journal was raided. Again, a computer and anarchist journals were seized, but no charges laid.

In Montreal, a coalition of anarchists, community groups and leftist organizations called a press conference to denounce the arrest for street selling a radical journal, the witch-hunt against Démanarchie and the opportunistic role of the LAM. A demo was also announced.

Interviewed by the daily Montreal paper *La Presse* about the pro-Démanarchie press conference, Dufour of the right-wing LAM bashed back, saying it was his organization which was being used as a scapegoat. Dufour did not neglect to play up a major asset in the eyes of the mainstream media: his group’s non-radicalness: “The LAM isn’t perfect, but we’re not a subversive movement.”

Two hundred people turned up at the demo at Berri Square, a hangout for Montreal punks and marginals. In the last few months the square has been the object of a clean-up operation with cops harassing and ticketing people. Among the ten or so speakers were the two Démanarchie people who were raided and a representative of Food Not Bombs. As things were winding down, the cops arrested the anarchist who MC’d the event, saying he had broken his probation conditions which stipulated he not attend demos. Sixty people, mainly punks by this time, marched to the local copshop, sitting in front of it and blocking off the street. After a tense two-hour standoff, the person arrested was released, to the heated applause of those present.

The Disturbances Continue

At this point, the debate shifted to the “alternative” media, Montreal’s three news/cultural weekly freebies, where numerous articles, editorials and letters appeared about the role of the LAM and the witch-hunt against Démanarchie. By now, its credibility on the line, the LAM began to sing a different tune or rather a number of tunes. “I don’t like Démanarchie. They make no sense and they have no credibility,” said the president of the LAM out of one side of his mouth. “I don’t want a war with Démanarchie” he spouted out of the other, saying he had a “lot of respect” for anarchists.

As of this writing the dust has yet to settle.

* Several of the 81 arrested in the riot remain in jail, some with 18 or 20-month sentences.

* On July 29 a speakout at D’Youville square in Quebec City organized by Démanarchie and *Hé...Basta!*, a Quebec City anarchist zine, attracted About 100.

* On the same day an illegal demo took place at midnight in Berri Square in Montreal. It was called by Food Not Bombs to protest the recent change of status of the site from a square to a park, meaning it is closed from midnight to 6 a.m. and much more stringent rules are enforced. Food Not Bombs distributes cooked meals once a week in the square.

Two hundred people occupied the square, sitting in small groups throughout the one-block area. After vegetarian food was served, people gathered to listen to fiddle and banjo music. Later, song sheets were passed out, and anarchist songs sung. People then shouted along with political punk music from a ghetto blaster and swirled in an improvised pit. At about 2:30 a.m., a bonfire was built.

The cops remained discreet, circling the park without stopping their cars. At 4 a.m., the remaining people were rushed by riot cops moving in from different sides. People were forced out of the square, but regrouped and reoccupied it an hour and fifteen minutes later, after the cops left. The riot cops returned, surrounded the protesters, and made 70 arrests, including many anarchists. People were released the next day and hit with \$116 tickets for being in a public park when it was officially closed.

In early September, the fourth riot in six months broke out at an annual festival in West Quebec near the Ontario border. A half-dozen young people had been expelled from a concert by the cops. When the show ended, almost 50 youths gathered outside the site and pelted the police with objects. The crowd quickly expanded to 250 people. The cops were obliged to flee, leaving their cruisers which sustained \$ 1,000 in damage.

Reinforcements, including Mounties (the RCMP, national police force) arrived and the rioters departed, getting away with no arrests.

In June, a cop warned a Démanarchie member that charges for inciting the Quebec City riot could be lodged within 60 days. Now that this has lapsed, charges are less likely.

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