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In the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time: Held Hostage at G20 Protest

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Freelance writer Jesse Ship was one of about 400 protesters and bystanders boxed in by riot police Sunday evening at the intersection of Queen St. and Spadina Ave. in Toronto. The following is an account of the rainy standoff.

I was one of hundreds of innocent bystanders stuck in last night's G20 blockade at Queen and Spadina in downtown Toronto.

Having just come home from two weeks of traveling overseas, perhaps it was a bit naïve of me to take a stroll down Spadina (without ID, as it had been lost in the trip), towards Queen -- and perhaps I may even be faulted for ducking down a back alley to reach the intersection after my path on Spadina was halted.

But never did I expect to be held hostage for more than five hours by a brute police force (estimated to be around 150 officers) who detained me and hundreds of innocent bystanders in the freezing rain, simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

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G20 Chaos in Toronto



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In this image taken from Flickr.com, protesters and bystanders alike are seen penned in by riot police at the intersection of Queen St. and Spadina Ave. in Toronto. Hundreds of citizens were forced to wait for hours in the rain as police made several arrests during the tense standoff.

Upon reaching the intersection around 5:30 p.m., my first sight was a group of maybe 50 peaceful protesters sitting on the ground raising signs and chanting for their causes. The rest, a few hundred other anxious, but curious onlookers, accredited media, and non-accredited gonzo journalists, were milling about.

The situation escalated quickly, as within minutes of my arrival, I was nose to nose with the front line of riot police shields, pushed up against a McDonald's, being funneled into a smaller group, with no path to exit.

Read More: [More Than 600 Arrested in G20 Sweep](#)

After a lengthy silence, a sudden announcement from an officer. "You are all being arrested for conspiracy to commit mischief." A wave of shock, and guffaws come over the crowd. Arrested? More than 80 per cent of us were bystanders. How can innocent civilians lose their rights at the drop of a hat?

We thought they may be bluffing or using fear tactics. But soon enough, members of the crowd were picked off, one by one. At first it was the usual suspects. The protesters with their signs, thuggish types who may have flashed the finger, or mouthed off at the cops during our waiting period. (We later learned via online media sources that police believed members of the Black Bloc were in our midst. There may be some truth to this as I do indeed recall seeing a couple of black face-masks on the ground.)

The situation got uglier as even members of the media were being taken away. I was shocked. I have just returned from Egypt, where I was congratulated constantly for Canada's rights to free speech and civil liberties. The irony is just too much.

We waited for hours with rain reaching hurricane proportions. Many in the crowd gave themselves up, thinking they would at least be taken out of the cold and the wet, but cruelly, they were simply sent to line up on the other side of the intersection.

Either way, morale deteriorated quickly and our group dwindled in size. A meager hundred or so were left, huddling in the rain. At this point, I started to get a bit nervous myself and feared arrest. I knew I was innocent, but I was without my ID. It was then I started to identify with those who live in actual police states, where innocent civilians are arrested on a day-to-day basis.

At 9 p.m., an announcement was made. "We understand that you are cold and wet. We do not want you to catch hypothermia, so we have arranged for TTC buses to be used as shelter, but this does not

change any legalities of the situation.

Cheers erupted, but some of us remained skeptical. I had no intention of being arrested in exchange for shelter.

We watched as a handful of the detainees were loaded onto buses but we were given no orders.

More deceit? It was unclear what was happening.









Forty minutes later, a final announcement. "You were all previously under arrest, but you are now being released."


At last, a real sigh of relief.


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