

People and Planet before Profit

Brisbane Community Action Network – G20 (BrisCAN - G20)

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Review of the G20 (Safety and Security) Act 2013

Crime and Corruption Commission

Policy and Research unit

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Brisbane Qld 4001

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Dear Sir/Madam

Review of the *G20 (Safety and Security) Act 2013*

1. BrisCAN is pleased to make the following supplementary public submission in relation to the review of the *G20 (Safety and Security) Act 2013* (Qld) ('G20 Act').
2. This submission supplements BrisCAN's earlier submission. This submission deals with one matter only, that is the comments of one activist, [REDACTED], in relation to policing at the G20 and how the G20 Act impacted upon himself and fellow activists.

Yours faithfully

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Welcome To Brisbane, Ferals. (a reflection on the G20)

I can't remember the first time I found out the G20 would be in Brisbane. That in itself says something. We're not in the mid-2000's any more, when leaders summits like this were the focus of the anti-globalisation movement. I never went to an anti-summit rally back then, and it seems like the activist world has moved on from that moment and tactic, exhilarating though some of the summits might have been.

Still, I can remember a couple of years ago, talking about what we could do, and people starting to call meetings and form groups for planning.

But it was not the activists who were the ones leading the discussion. Last October, the state government presented us with the extraordinary G20 Safety and Security Act, a set of laws breathtaking in how overwhelming and dangerously vague they were, giving police unbelievable powers.

In December the right-wing media got in on the action as well, with the Courier Mail managing to dredge up a quote on an internet message board from a fictitious anarchist group that had been written 6 months earlier and claiming it was conclusive proof that anarchists were vowing to bring "anarchy and chaos" to the summit.

At the time I made a parody [radio news story](#) saying that the Courier Mail had vowed to report anarchy and chaos at the summit no matter what the reality was, and it seems that was pretty much the plan they stuck to from that moment on, as they fabricated one sensationalist front page story after another, interspersing fear-mongering about anarchists/terrorists with excited stories on all the new weapons and toys the police would be showing off.

Don't get me wrong, I would love it if there was an anarchist movement large and willing enough to challenge the \$400 million paramilitary police force and disrupt the summit. But there isn't, and the only purpose of the Courier Mail's continual reporting of the issue was to build up a fictional enemy that they could construct some hollywood narrative around instead of reporting on actual news.

A few weeks out from the summit I did an [action](#) attempting to spin the talk of "violence" from the make believe threats of anarchist violence to the very real everyday violence perpetrated by the economies represented at the G20. Despite misgivings about how I would be represented, I did an interview with a Courier Mail journalist, calmly and rationally putting across my point. The next day's paper contained no mention of the interview with a real life anarchist, instead showing on the front page a picture of storm clouds looming over the Brisbane skyline with proclaiming "anarchists corporate chaos threat".

The media narrative never changed. When the summit happened, there wasn't a single act of violence from a protester and (unsurprisingly) no international terrorist groups appeared. The police still managed to arrest 14 people and hand out 27 exclusion notices. The Courier Mail didn't think to question the need for the spending on security. Instead they praised the police for keeping everything under control! It was a win-win situation for the state – if there had been any incidents the reporting would have been that we needed more cops. There wasn't, but still the police got the credit.

Naturally, all this hyperbole came at the expense of actually reporting any of the points protest groups had to make about the excessive laws, the the policies of the G20 or the way the summit affected the everyday life of people in Brisbane.



At the same time as this was happening though, activists and interested people were starting to meet together to talk about a people-focused response to the economic summit. There were stuttering attempts at setting up a coalition response, and then eventually after a couple of meetings, one group settled on the name Brisbane Community Action Network, or BrisCAN.

As with any attempt to work across different political groups, BrisCAN had a few obstacles. There was the debate about whether the group endorsed or condemned violent protest, and then the debate about what is violence anyway?

Some of us who have a more decentralised view of organising found this a bit frustrating. I didn't intend on ever attempting to speak for all the members of BrisCAN and I didn't expect that anyone else from BrisCAN spoke for me. I'm against violence both practically and ideologically but don't believe property damage necessarily constitutes violence (especially not in the face of the extreme and wide-ranging violence done by the G20 leaders) and would never dream of, as was suggested several times in the meetings, turn into the police a protester who didn't match my beliefs on the matter. The real shame of this long and painful conversation was that we had bought into the mainstream media myth of the "violent protesters" when in fact the reason we were there was because we were against the destruction caused by G20 economic policies.

Working with indigenous people, who had always said they would be organising in response to the G20, represented its own challenge. All of us agreed on the importance of supporting the indigenous struggle but there were frustrations when it was tried to work out how. I remember a meeting around the fire at Musgrave Park quite early on where some of the people from the Aboriginal Sovereign Embassy said pretty bluntly that it was a case of join in the Genocidal20 events organised by the embassy or nothing. Which was pretty harsh considering the effort other people had put into other issues and struggles, and the potential gains of working together. It was a shame in the end that BrisCAN and the embassy seemed to be viewed as competing events by a lot of people who came for the summit but weren't there for the organising, because I know that wasn't people's intentions.

After the long buildup, it seemed like the summit came up all of a sudden. I noticed more and more fences going up around town, the police to civilian ratio seemed to be increasing, as was the number of helicopters flying overhead. A series of government funded "cultural celebrations" (including music, a plywood "BRISBANE" sign at Southbank and wrapping scarves around trees in the city) occurred. Thankfully we began to also see some of the Brisbane artistic community being a bit more critical of the event, after what seemed like a long silence there were creative responses popping up in different places.

The terrifying G20 Act ("a lot of it will be up to the discretion of the police officers" said the police chief) came into effect a week before the summit. On the night the laws began, there were media reports that someone was arrested for taking photos of the convention centre. I never heard anyone say they knew who it was, so I'm going to assume that it was either an unlucky tourist or a local trying to preserve for posterity the sight of Brisbane turning into a police state.

The indigenous encampment set up a week before the summit as well. That involved a bit of drama too. A week before the embassy were due to set up camp in Musgrave Park, Lord Mayor Graham Quirk announced with remarkable timing that Jagera Hall (at Musgrave) was to be closed due to asbestos which has presumably been in the building for 40 years. One of the real gains to be found from the activist response to the G20 occurred when a group of 80 indigenous activists turned up at City Hall demanding the hall be signed over to aboriginal control, which it was.

Too often our institutions are happy to pay lip service to aboriginal culture, assuming that the culture is dead and an acknowledgement of country or a painting on the wall is all you need. Aboriginal culture is alive and well, as shown by the Genocidal20 protests, and the elders sleeping in that hall so that they have the energy to do as week of protests is the way it should be used.

The first group G20 protest was a week before the summit; NGO coalition Micah Challenge organising a public tropical tax haven to raise awareness about corporate tax evasion and its cost to developing countries. No one was quite sure what to expect, hence the fact there were half a dozen "independent legal observers" (who said they were strictly impartial, as if the law is impartial) there to observe the world's tamest protest. A few media outlets came as well, after all the hype it was becoming clear that the media would be interested in reporting the protests. Which makes sense really, since so little actually happens inside the convention centre. Having built it up as this massive thing, they have to report something.

We got a taste of the weather to expect as well. Which was scorching, with hotter predicted for the actual weekend. It was like mother nature was doing her part, trying to set the stage for some epic confrontation.

On the Monday morning as I rode into the city for the first of the Genocidal20 rallies (against the removal of aboriginal children), it was like some kind of surreal dystopian vision – unbearably hot and humid, with a group of police officers on literally every corner. At the rally a battalion of liaison officers in light blue caps were there, the friendly face of a \$400m army. The rally though went off without a hitch.

The next day I got a taste of the city chaos we would have for the next week. I arrived late for the rally, and the group had already left on the march. I tried to join, but had negotiate a labyrinth of closed roads,

temporary fencing and police blockades. When it became apparent that I actually wasn't going to be allowed to join the march, I went back to Musgrave Park to help set up there.

Musgrave Park would be my home for the next seven days. Though I live only a couple of suburbs away, I set up camp in Musgrave to be close to the action and didn't go home for the whole week. Despite police patrols around the clock, helicopters overhead and the insanity of the city around us, Musgrave was like an oasis – friendly conversation, a lovely vibe, volunteers working together to feed everyone, strangers welcomed and often music playing. And there were very few problems there during the week. It made for a very poignant comparison with the fences and guns surrounding the convention centre.

On the Wednesday the People's Summit began. It had been one of the key things BrisCAN had planned for the G20 and a phenomenal amount of effort had gone into organising from a small group of people, including trying to piece together multiple venues in a climate where a number of places refused to support anything that could be seen as anti-G20.

Actually, let's digress for a moment here to talk about the repression of dissenting voices in the temporary fascist zone that was Brisbane circa G20. Besides all the laws, cops and military specially brought in to control where we could go and what we could carry; besides the media who instead of speaking to dissenting voices, made up hysterical stories about violent terrorists; we got a more subtle form of censorship too.

I already mentioned venues not wanting to get involved. The ██████████ refused to put up billboards paid for by some NGO's because they had pretty benign anti-corruption or climate change messaging. ██████████ refused to print any material with the word G20 on it, apparently under police orders. Both companies said they didn't allow "political messages". Let's be honest for a second here. It's very difficult to define what actually is "political", and I don't think these corporations had any interest in doing so. What they meant was that they didn't want a certain type of political message. Nobody was taking down "welcome to G20" signs or billboards advertising mining companies or military recruitment. As for ██████████, this pathetic company that would so pettily deny people their freedom of speech deserves to be boycotted as soon as possible. It's a real shame that so many of us within radical political circles frequent their ██████████ as often as we do, and hopefully this censorship will be the boost we need to build alternatives.

But back to the People's Summit. I didn't get to as much of it as I would have liked because of other duties, I know some people were disappointed by the turnout. But I can only commend everyone involved for the work that they did in difficult circumstances. There was a wide range of topics represented, an inclusive atmosphere and the workshops I went to had ok attendance and good discussion.

The summit and the G20 response in general weren't quite the convergence of everyone in Brisbane (or Australia) working on people-focused organising that they could have been, but I think we can put this down more to the media fear campaign and a radical community that didn't see much worth in the concept than we can to any of the groups attempting to organise what things did happen.

On the Wednesday night, a guy I had met during the week named ██████████ was stopped by police. He was on the very edge of the G20 declared zone and walking away from it (into the non-fascist rest of the city) but still was arrested, detained for a couple of hours and given an exclusion notice for the rest of the week because he was carrying a portable sound system (one of the prohibited items in the G20 laws).

By this point in the week there had been half a dozen arrests and a few more exclusion notices given out, most of which had nothing to do with the protests. Mostly they were people, homeless or otherwise marginalised, who had been stopped by the cops and arrested for obstructing police when they refused to give their name. I know of another instance where a person with disabilities was told they would be detained if they kept going to places in the city where they (unbeknownst to them) were no longer allowed to go. This is what you get for \$400 million – a clampdown on trivial offences, a couple of thousand bored cops ready to arrest anyone just for something to do. A city whose inhabitants are no longer free to walk

the streets. Did this get reported in the media? You bet it didn't. Even with every TV camera in the country in one place, some people will always be invisible.

The next day saw more police action when long-time peace activist ██████ became the third person (but first Brisbane resident) to be added to the "prohibited persons" list. The day before, ██████ had put out a media release, humourously saying he would "shirtfront" Barack Obama over his persecution of whistleblowers Manning, Snowden and Assange. Now he was sitting on a bench in West End holding a sign when an unmarked cop car pulled up and a couple of detectives gave him his notice saying he would be arrested if he entered the declared zone. He made the most of it, getting a few interviews and then a few more the next day when he walked one block into the red zone and was arrested. He refused to sign a bail agreement saying he wouldn't re-enter, and hilariously spent the weekend as the sole occupant of the special G20 watch-house at the Supreme Court made to hold up to 150.



I was inspired by ██████ ability to change slightly the media narrative, so I went away and wrote a press release on behalf of the [Brisbane Lizard Liberation Front](#) responding to the fact that our reptilian friends had been included on the prohibited items list. As if in a world of wear, climate change and economic exploitation; lizards are our biggest threat. Disappointingly most of the nation's media failed to run with it, but it did later become a bit of a social media hit.

Friday morning the rallies went up a notch in intensity. In scorching heat, with the sound of helicopters overhead, the Genocidal20 mob protested against aboriginal deaths in custody. There had been four deaths in custody in the previous four weeks (did you hear that in the media?), but the community was also mourning the death a couple of months earlier of 22 year old ██████, who died in a West Australian watch-house; imprisoned for \$1000 in unpaid fines. What's more, the G20 week marked the anniversaries of the deaths of ██████ (murdered by the police in West End in 1993) and ██████ (murdered in the Palm Island watch-house in 2004). I've been to many death in custody rallies over the years and they are always highly charged events. That day was no different but the timing of it did mean that a lot more of the world's eyes were watching. And it was a necessary contribution to the narrative of "violence" at the G20.

I spent a bit of time that day thinking about how to do a public response from the anarchists of Brisbane. Up to that point we had mostly just not replied to incessant contact from journalists wanting to talk to us about "our plans at the G20", knowing full well that they would squeeze in whatever quote they wanted to legitimise the crap that they were consistently printing. But I figured that every news outlet in the country would be writing a story on the G20 and a lot of them would be hungry for a quote from the anarchists – the bogeyman du jour. And I did think we have something worthwhile to say about the G20. To try to stop them putting words in our mouths, we would send out a communique with no media contact details. In the evening we sat in the park nutting out what we wanted to say. I felt like the plan was vindicated when we were quoted in various online publications the next day saying

"the true nature of our system has been on display during the summit, with mass state surveillance, armed police controlling dissent and fences dividing those who are allowed to make decisions from those who are not."

We also talked about what to do at the march. Once upon a time marches were the public show of strength of a movement – workers would stop the city to show what they could do if the issue they were protesting wasn't changed. There was nothing very powerful about this march – forced through the back streets, outnumbered and surrounded by police. Still, doing something is always better than staying at home and there are always little victories you can claim along the way.

I wanted to do something again because we anarchists had been demonised and misrepresented and I felt we should speak for ourselves. My suggestion was that we paint a big banner and carry it (banners bigger than 2x1m were among the many prohibited items) as a statement that you don't have to always fear the state, and if a law is stupid then it needs to be broken for everyone's sake. Someone suggested "shirtfront the state" for the banner (for those who missed it, Tony Abbott's ridiculous pre-G20 promise was to "shirtfront" Vladimir Putin regarding the shooting down of the MH17 over Ukraine. "Shirtfronting" is a term from Australian football that means to smash into someone leading with your shoulder.), and we liked the humour implicit in that slogan as opposed to the fear-mongering of the government and media. So we spent the night painting and the next day snuck it through the police blockades to unveil it at the start of the march. Happily, our five metre long banner was actually dwarfed by the 20m long "GENOCIDAL20" one that I helped paint at the park that morning. Both banners made it through the march without any hassles from the law enforcement.

Not so lucky in the morning were two young women I consider friends and comrades who were stopped and searched outside the train station. Worried (fair enough too) about what the police at the march would be like, they had brought gas masks, which along with another banner, were confiscated and they were arrested in front of the TV cameras. I found out afterwards that a couple of other friends had been given exclusion notices before they even got to the rally. Their crime was being dressed up in fancy frocks, having planned to do some street theatre. Hardly the "anarchy and chaos" the media had hoped for; but the quote "it's ridiculous" as [REDACTED] was dragged off by the cops, which ran on the television news that night, was probably the most succinct appraisal of the whole G20 schemozzle I had heard yet.

The rally itself was mixed. The idea was to have a mixed rally with aboriginal speakers from the sovereign embassy talking first, followed by a few others who had been brought to Brisbane from around the country by BrisCAN (which also featured another indigenous speaker – it wasn't that segregated) then have everyone march together, led by the indigenous contingent. Inevitably, the rally started late and ran way over time in unbearable heat, meaning that by the end the crowd was impatient and not really paying attention to the last couple of speakers.

So it was a sunstroked and tired crowd of a couple of thousand that was corralled through the empty streets of Brisbane by the police. One of the more surreal things was looking around at the city. If you took away the protesters, cops and the media, the city was a ghost town. I couldn't help but laugh when I recalled Campbell Newman pleading with people to still come and shop in the CBD. The place looked like a warzone. I felt like putting out a statement claiming responsibility – "you said we couldn't do it, but despite a \$400m police budget, anarchists have succeeded in shutting down the city!"

Back at the park, the crowd dissipated, wilting in the heat. There had been so many different issues and groups (including big Falun Gong and Ethiopian contingents), but getting together to build a new society in the shell of the old wasn't going to happen that afternoon. Still, I think people talking down about the march (and comparing it to previous G20 responses) was unwarranted. In the face of a sustained fearmongering campaign, paramilitary security and brutal weather, people still came and a number of people I spoke to found it inspiring. While it might feel like a missed opportunity, a better world won't come from a single march anyway. It will come from the communities and bonds that are built over a long period of time. The question should be whether our response to the G20 contributed to that.



There was a bit more action that night. A group of women dressed up as the “climate guardian angels” unsuccessfully tried to arrange an impromptu meeting with Tony Abbott. A few of us talked about wanting to organise an action for the next day since the leaders summit was still going. I put the word out then crashed. For a week I had been walking around in a haze of sleep deprivation, staying up late and waking at 6 with the blazing sun, continually trying to work on different things. I consoled myself that it would soon all be over.

I wasn't the only one lacking energy it seemed, as there wasn't a lot of movement in the morning at Musgrave Park. For a while it seemed that the scheduled indigenous march wouldn't even happen. I went to do some media stuff and then headed into the city just too late to see some of the young aboriginal activists burning Australian flags and effigies of indigenous leaders whose authority they don't recognise. It was bound to bring controversy, but coming at the end of a week where the group had announced the formation of a collective called the Warriors of Aboriginal Resistance (W.A.R.), it was a symbolic gesture that there was a new generation of militant young aboriginal activists rising and they were ready to carve out their own space.

I remember earlier this year seeing an interview with ██████████ talking about activism in the 70's . When asked about things now he said “that's for the next generation of young people with a conscience to discover.” One day the men and women in WAR will be older and a bit more circumspect too, but it's the radical firebrand ██████████ from the 70's that people remember and that continues to catch the imagination, so I say go for it to those young guys. One of the legacies of this G20 resistance could be what that group gets up to in the next few years.

After all the buildup, there were only hours left of the G20 leaders summit. I was exhausted but wanted to do one more action while we had the chance. Nobody had yet exploited what seemed to be an obvious opportunity – standing on the street at Ernest St. where the motorcades were exiting the convention centre. So I talked to a few people and we decided to do an action there for West Papua in the hope we would by chance catch the Indonesian convoy, or at least show whoever did come past.

We had been there a couple of minutes when the police came over. Our banner was bigger than the allowed size of 2x1m. Plus we were holding it where the world leaders could see it. I had never had a cop so blatantly tell me that the reason he was intervening was to suppress a dissenting voice. After telling him what I thought of his censorship I figured there wasn't much point in arguing, so I folded up the banner and started to leave. But apparently not quickly enough to appease the sergeant, who took the banner off me and gave me an exclusion notice from the G20 declared zone for the rest of the weekend. It was petty and basically just a power trip (I was already leaving, so he clearly wasn't preventing any crime), but I must admit it felt kind of satisfying. Like I had tried as hard as I could for the G20 and then ended not by giving up and going home but by being kicked out. Plus it was Sunday night and time to go to church anyway.

During the G20 I had been too busy to really stop and reflect much on the whole thing. I took a break the next day before I went back to the police HQ to try to get back my hand-painted “Free West Papua” banner that had been confiscated. The cop told me that it had been destroyed , under a special provision in the G20 law that allows police to destroy political material.

It's weird the things that set you off I suppose, but I was seething. I spent the next couple of days fluctuating between depression and anger – anger that they had turned our city into a fascist police state and were completely unrepentant about it; anger that so many of us pour endless time and energy into activism for no motivation other than we want to see a more just world, yet we are the ones who are regarded as criminals. Anger that despite everything I had done I felt completely powerless.

It's now over two weeks since the summit and I think I'm still trying to get over those feelings. But in the big scheme of things, the G20 is nothing – two days where world leaders get together to talk? Does anybody actually believe that what happens at the summit affects anything? Capitalism doesn't come from 20 people, it is a way of organising society that affects every moment of our lives. And it is over a lifetime, not a weekend, that we need to struggle for a better world. Which people have always done and will continue to do. The world leaders, helicopters and bullet-proof fences are gone from Brisbane, the media have forgotten the G20 and gone looking for the next big story. But we are still here, with the challenge in front of us of trying to create the world we want to live in.