



The One Summit Benefit

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Did anything good come out of the G20 meetings? Apart from a luke-warm pledge on maternal health (which is unclear on abortion), and which might turn out like many G8-G20 “pledges” (remember aid to Africa?), was there a benefit?

Torontonians were unified in their assessment that the summits were a negative experience. Even if they support the idea of world leaders meeting at such summits, they agreed that the protests, police activity, and closing of much of downtown were not something worth repeating.

In the days and weeks following the event, there has been much in the press documenting the negative reaction. And some civil society groups like the Canadian Civil Liberties Association have focused on the abuse of Canadians’ Charter rights.

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The G20 weekend will go down as a lost week for merchants with no business and too much property damage, for many citizens who were detained for peaceful protests, and for Canadians who were required to pick up a price tag of well over \$1 billion, mostly for security. And Toronto tax payers will likely have other bills to pay from city coffers.

The question is, did anything good come out of it?

Perhaps the one good thing is that such a large expenditure from the federal government put to rest their argument that government can’t act because there is no money. No money for kids who go to school hungry, no money for disabled people who need some living supports, no money for energy innovation, no money for aged Canadians to live out their lives in dignity.

For years federal governments of both Conservative and Liberal stripes have argued that there was not enough money to deal with critical needs. Even when they established important programs like the Child Tax Benefit and the Working Income Tax Benefit, they underfunded them. It was as if they were comfortable with a little less poverty rather than wanting to take a dramatic step to lift people out of poverty.

And the excuse was that there was not enough money.

The G20 expenditures exposed the government. Not enough money, when police officers were shipped in to Toronto from around the country with daily meal allowances of over \$100 per day, with no obligation to provide receipts? Not enough money when they were building a fake lake within view of a Great Lake? Not enough money when they were uprooting then replanting saplings for a week lest they be used as weapons? Not enough money when new policing vehicles, shields and batons were being unloaded daily, including the infamous but idle noise cannons?

Civil society leaders should have a new confidence in pressing the federal government for funding for Canada's social needs, now that we know the cupboard is not so bare. The extravagance of the G20 showed us that the money is there. The only thing that needs to be confronted is the government's lack of will in helping vulnerable Canadians live productive and dignified lives. Surely they can't argue that they're against that.