

Mounties Cracked Down on Protesters to Please Suharto

By Clive Thompson
TORONTO

Canada is not a place where you'd expect the government to quash free speech to please a foreign dictator. But Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien is currently up to his ears in controversy over exactly that. Secret documents recently have come to light suggesting that Chrétien personally ordered a crackdown on student protesters—so that visiting Indonesian President Suharto wouldn't be "embarrassed" by public dissent.

Suharto visited Vancouver on November 25, 1997, as a delegate to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. APEC is a classic example of modern geopolitics: It's a forum where Canada and the United States get together and make business deals with some of the worst human rights abusers in the Asia-Pacific corridor.

In an uncharacteristically fierce show of force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) liberally used pepper spray to break up more than 2,000 student protesters at the summit, which was held at the University of British Columbia (UBC). They arrested almost 50 students, many of whom were strip-searched. In one case, law student Craig Jones was arrested merely for putting up signs on his dorm lawn declaring "Democracy," "Free Speech" and "Human Rights." The police actions were so over-the-top that, after enduring weeks of gruesome headlines and news reports, the RCMP launched its own embarrassing inquiry into the officers' actions.

And that's when the surprises began.

The inquiry has revealed documents suggesting that the crackdown was orchestrated directly by the prime minister's office. In particular, they show

that Chrétien's staff was obsessed with quashing even basic dissent for fear that Suharto wouldn't show up. In the months leading up to the APEC summit, the prime minister's office bargained with the Indonesian president, promising to implement increasingly draconian limits on protests in a frantic effort to entice the dictator to attend. The prime minister's office "expressed concerns about the security perimeter at UBC, not so much from a security point of view but to avoid embarrassment to APEC leaders," reads one e-mail memo dated September 12, 1997, from Robert Vanderloo, a Canadian foreign-affairs official in charge of organizing the summit. Another government document warns that Suharto demanded that he not even see a protest while in Canada.

Police documents, too, point directly to the prime minister. "PM wants tents

strangely vindicated, since the documents show what they suspected all along. "It's pure appeasement," says Jaggi Singh, a 27-year-old former linguistics student who helped organize the protests. "They threw free speech out the window and brought Suharto in." Singh was arrested the day before the protest, and forced to sign a document promising he wouldn't go on campus the day of the summit.

Government officials say the inquiry, expected to last several weeks or months, will vindicate them. "There's been nothing that is inappropriate," says Peter Donolo, Chrétien's director of communications. On the contrary, he argues that "leaked memos" and "incomplete excerpts of documents" have been taken out of context and blown out of proportion by Canadian media. "It's scandal envy," he jokes, suggesting that Canadian media, casting their eyes south at the Lewinsky fiasco, are desperate for their own miasma.

Though public opinion isn't quite sympathetic to the protesting students, it is swinging against the prime minister. It doesn't help that some of those arrested were extremely clean-cut

types. Jones, for example, is hardly a radical; currently working at a corporate law firm, he describes himself as a "nonviolent civil libertarian." "It's all pretty insane," he marvels.

Most importantly, though, this incident sheds some interesting political light on the oft-debated issue of how democracies ought to deal with dictators. Political leaders on the right and the left have argued that Western countries have to trade with dictatorships to steer them toward democracy.

In this case, precisely the reverse happened. To play host to a dictatorship, Canada had to behave like a dictatorship too. ■

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The Suharto Welcoming Committee

out," reads one police memo, in reference to the crackdown on a tent city set up on campus. Another discusses the presence of anti-APEC banners, arguing that "Common sense tells us we do not want banners nor would the PM's office."

Protesters are incensed—though also

There's Something About Marriott

By David Bacon
SAN FRANCISCO

At the end of September, the Marriott Corporation handed out more than \$1.5 million in wage increases to housekeepers, room servers and the rest of the 1,000 unionized employees at its San Francisco flagship hotel. Workers who hadn't had raises for two years suddenly went home with back paychecks for as much as \$2,000.

But it wasn't an act of generosity. The hotel was desperately seeking to cut its liabilities in the face of a massive labor board complaint over a union-busting strategy that has blown up in its face. For embattled union workers inside the hotel, it felt like victory.

Over the past year, more than five dozen Marriott workers have been spending long hours giving affidavits in the San Francisco office of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). On September 1, union activists carried that fight back into the hotel itself, forcing its human relations director, Donna Shepherd, to retreat as they took over the employee cafeteria.

Housekeepers, bellmen, waiters and kitchen workers all turned in their chairs to watch, as a stocky, dark-haired man in his thirties stood up. "My name is Ramon Guevara," he announced, "and I work in the room service department. We're basically here today because you deserve to know the truth about the unfair labor practices being committed by Marriott management." For the next 10 minutes, Guevara gave a stinging critique explaining why, 18 years after the Marriott chain signed a neutrality agreement and nine years after its San Francisco flagship hotel opened, workers still have no union contract.

The downtown Marriott, nicknamed "the jukebox," is so big that its 1,000 workers have four separate, staggered lunch times. Repeated throughout the day, the lunch teach-ins were intended to do more than keep workers up to date. "It was a very bold step," room server Amy Cavanaugh says, "We were afraid at the start, but part of the pur-

pose was to get rid of the fear. And people loved it."

The battle in the lunchroom is evidence of a much larger struggle inside the hotel, as workers assert their right to



San Francisco's HERE Local 2 is getting angry.

openly support the union. Management hostility has been so pervasive, the union says, that it has filed more than 100 allegations of illegal conduct against Marriott with the NLRB.

The charges outline an intense war in the workplace intended to remove the representation rights of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) Local 2, rights it took the union 15 years to win. Marriott first proposed building the hotel in 1980. To win over opponents of development, it was forced to reach an historic agreement with the city: The company pledged it would hire community residents to work in the hotel, and that it would not oppose efforts by Local 2 to organize its employees. It was a major concession from a large corporation with an anti-union reputation.

In 1989, the hotel finally welcomed its first guests, but despite the agreement, Marriott spent the next six years fighting legal battles with Local 2. Finally, under a court mandate, the hotel agreed not to campaign further against the union, and to recognize it if an independent arbitrator found a majority of its employees had

signed union cards. However, despite claims of neutrality, the hotel held 22 mandatory employee meetings where the company clearly expressed its desire to remain union-free. Arbitrator John Kagel eventually found the hotel in violation of the neutrality agreement in the spring of 1996.

In August 1996, union workers inside the Marriott felt strong enough to hand out union cards. In eight days, they rolled up a majority. Kagel certified the union's right to bargain, and negotiations started in late November. The first half of the contract was nailed down in the following months, but negotiations soured by spring 1997. "From day one, there was a real question whether the company would live with the city-wide standard the union has negotiated with other hotels," Local 2 organizing director Kevin O'Connor says. "Our minimum and their maximum were not in the same ballpark."

One thorny issue was the hotel's refusal to guarantee workers two consecutive days off. Human relations director Shepherd says that's no longer a problem, but the hotel still won't agree to the union's proposed work rules.

As bargaining grew more difficult, workers began signing petitions and forming delegations to talk to management. Then, last fall, employees in jobs not covered by bargaining—engineers, front desk staff, clerical workers and others—began wearing anti-union buttons. The buttons quickly spread into the bargaining unit as the hotel held department meetings to talk about the bargaining delays.

Housekeeper Josephine Cruz Rivera remembers a big meeting her department held on November 14, 1997, which Shepherd attended. "She told us that we would get a raise if the union went away," Rivera says. "I told her that the union wasn't going away, and she shouldn't say that. She wanted us to fight among ourselves."

"I told people we couldn't raise wages for them until the contract was resolved," Shepherd says of the meeting. "If someone wants to assume that it's resolved by the union going away, they can do it. We expect to get a contract."

But on that same day, a mysterious group appeared—Associates for a United Marriott. ("Associates" is the term the company uses for employees.) Petitions

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Appall-o-Meter

The In These Times Index of Indecencies

By David Futrelle

Spell Checked

Fifteen-year-old Wiccan Jamie Schoonover recently discovered that the practice of witchcraft is no more popular with officials of Baltimore's Southwestern High School today than it was with the town fathers of Salem, Mass., all those years ago. After a dispute with another student, Reuters reports, Schoonover was suspended from school for "casting a spell on a student," as her suspension slip put it. "Baltimore schools officials later pronounced the whole thing a misunderstanding and said Schoonover's suspension order should have cited her for making an alleged verbal threat," Reuters notes. "Schoonover, whose father is a 45-year-old transsexual named Colleen Harper, stands out at school because she wears all-black clothing and is a devotee of gloomy 'Goth' rock music, school officials said." At least they didn't burn her at the stake.

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began circulating in the hotel to decertify Local 2. Shepherd denies any connection to the group, which would be a violation of federal labor law. But Paul Webb, a room server at the hotel since its opening, thinks otherwise. He saw engineers not covered by Local 2 carrying petitions. One of them had a confidential company list of people employed in each department. "Every time we had department meetings," he says, "Shepherd would mention signing the petition."

Key to the decertification effort, the union charges, were two 4 percent raises Marriott gave its non-bargaining unit employees in January 1997 and January 1998. Nonunion workers also received a cut in medical costs. "The message was, if you make the union go away, you can get these benefits too," Guevara says.

Marriott's recent raises for its union employees give them the same deal it gave its nonunion workers. While Shepherd denies any connection to the union's campaign or the NLRB charges, Local 2 President Mike Casey says management moved "only in response to the

Dangerous Minds

In yet another ill-starred school suspension case, a fifth-grader at a South Carolina school was suspended for 10 days after bringing a knife—a butter knife—to school. Citing the school's "zero tolerance"



policy, Horrell Hill Elementary School officials defended their suspension of butter-knife-wielding youngster Christopher Wood as

impending NLRB prosecution and to pressure its workers."

The decertification petition was filed with the NLRB on December 30, 1997, but it remains in legal limbo until union charges of illegalities are resolved. Meanwhile, pro-union workers inside the hotel recently have stepped up pressure through cafeteria teach-ins, wearing buttons and the boisterous picket lines that have surrounded the hotel entrances two and three times a week for the past few months. "We've stopped the decertification campaign dead in its tracks," Guevara says. "There's no way they're going to get the union out of here."

The Marriott fight is a key national test of strength between the hotel union and the corporation, which has the goal of owning 2,000 hotels by 2000. Although some Marriott hotels have unions, those were already in place when the corporation bought them. The "jukebox" campaign marks the first time a union may win a contract for a hotel directly under the company's management.

For the union, the campaign tests the value of neutrality agreements, a key

necessary to maintain proper discipline in the lunchroom. According to school spokesman Greg Plagens, the school is "just not going to tolerate any child bringing a knife or gun or any kind of weapon for any reason." Woods' mother, who packed the knife with her son's lunch, says she did it so that her son, with sensitive teeth, could cut up and eat a banana.

Potty Politics

When millions of Americans rushed to download their very own copies of the Starr Report, some tech boosters celebrated the event as the coming of age of the Web as a news source. Well, it's time to celebrate yet another medium: toilet paper. *U.S. News and World Report* recently discovered the report published on toilet paper for sale at Washington's Political Americana for just \$6.95.

tactic in the plans of Local 2 to organize San Francisco's six remaining nonunion Class A hotels—the biggest and most expensive ones in the city. In Las Vegas, the largest HERE local in the country uses such agreements frequently to organize the huge casinos. Across the bay in Oakland, HERE Local 2850 wants to require such agreements as a condition for building new hotels downtown.

The Marriott campaign is the first attempt to enforce neutrality while a company wages an all-out campaign against it, and success will provide a precedent. "Neutrality isn't without its problems," explains Local 2 president Mike Casey. "But it gets us to bargaining faster, even when an employer is committed to fighting the union."

At the San Francisco Marriott, it has taken 18 years. "The hotel has to accept that they have to settle the contract," Guevara says. "We had eight years without the union, and we didn't like it. We're going to get a contract. That's final." ■

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