

DiManno: G20 Youtube video a sorry affair indeed

Sun Dec 5 2010



Video: [G20 protest](#)

Police detain a man in this video shot by bystander John Bridge.



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Toronto G20 Summit»

Sorry chief — truly I am — but sorry just isn't good enough.

A man of integrity, which Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair is, would at least *offer* to resign.

And a police services board that has the authority to hire and fire this city's top cop — no one else can do that — should think seriously about terminating Blair's renewed contract.

Some professionals, because of the power they wield and all the moral heft they carry in our society, don't have the luxury of being so profoundly wrong or misguided.

It is not simply about taking the blame for the misdeeds of others — officers who answer ultimately to their chief through the chain of command — because the buck stops in that brass-and-braid invested office.

It's about acknowledging one's own misjudgments, statements and actions (or inactions) that have brought law enforcement into disrepute, from the top down.

Blair is neither a private citizen nor a talk-radio loudmouth, a defence lawyer who can stand on the courthouse steps and spew nonsense or a bloviating politician. He's our No. 1 cop. His is the face of law, order and probity.

And the chief is far too polished a public persona to have just sloppily put his foot in it when vehemently condemning the independent Special Investigations Unit last week.

Blair knew very well what he was saying and the impact it would have coming from so virtuous a source when he lashed out at the SIU on a radio show, slamming the agency for relying on a YouTube video as corroboration for allegations of brutality against a cop during the G20 Summit protests in June, accusing it of “guesswork and speculation.”

SIU director Ian Scott called Blair's bluff, announcing the watchdog had reopened the investigation into custody injuries sustained by Adam Nobody — broken nose and shattered cheek — during his arrest. Further, Scott revealed that a sworn affidavit had been obtained from the man who shot the 26-second video. John Bridge has declared he turned the camera off for only a few moments, fearing he too would have to run from police, before flicking it back on and capturing the rest of the incident.

What was Blair thinking when he teed-up on the SIU? That kind of stuff is expected from the obstreperous police union. It was shocking and, frankly, insupportable coming from the police chief.

So Friday Blair took it back, in a manner of speaking, a thrust-reversal in which the chief simultaneously managed to cut himself a whole lot of slack.

“In an effort to demonstrate the potential significance of the missing audio and video, I said police were attempting to arrest an armed criminal and that the missing video images might have shed light on the reasons force was used,” said Blair in a released statement.

“This statement created a false impression that I wish to clarify. I have no evidence that he was armed or violent and all charges against the injured man have been withdrawn. I regret the false impression that my comments may have created and apologize to Mr. Nobody.”

Well, that's all right then. It was only the police chief, after all, running off at the mouth, insinuating, accusing; perplexing even his most ardent acolytes.

But should "Tapegate" be allowed to end there, on a self-justifying grace note, without any stern consequences?

Blair impugned the trustworthiness — insofar that it had much — of the SIU. At minimum, he trashed their investigative competence, implying the damning YouTube video had been edited, "tampered" with, and then ineptly scrutinized by SIU analysts so that the potentially exculpating unseen was, unfairly, never taken into consideration.

He bullied by proxy a couple of civilians by essentially calling them fabricators of evidence.

Wind the tape back further: Blair misled about the applicability of that wrongfully exploited five-metre fence law used to pick off G20 protesters.

On his watch, a scary seizure — chainsaw, crossbow and fuel-tipped arrows — was proffered by police as weapons-porn, a sly bit of theatre to pre-emptively rationalize formidable use of force, although those items were not taken off demonstrators.

And he's been unable to exercise the muscular sanctions of his office so that cops who whaled on harmless citizens — doesn't matter if they're annoying or provocative — can be identified and charged.

If cops remove their badges or change the numbers so that their identity can never be traced — despite the face recognition imagery and other high-tech gadgetry available to police investigators — they are not merely a small pack of lone wolves, rogues unfit to wear the uniform. Somewhere in the back of their minds, I dare say, lay a conviction that such conduct would be acceptable on the front line of heated police-public collision.

And that culture of entitlement does not exist in a vacuum. Those anonymous cops must surely know who's watching their backs: other cops.

How can Blair ever again admonish witnesses to shootings and assaults who adhere to the street-level code of silence? That see-no-evil covenant has now — though hardly for the first time, where police are concerned — been consecrated by cops themselves.

About 100 officers caught on camera without their identification tags during the G20 protests will face a one-day suspension without pay — hardly an onerous penalty. Yet a half-dozen believed to have caused actual injuries are in the wind, the SIU unable to lay

criminal charges because they can't put a name to a shielded face. And Blair is purportedly unable to flex either command or moral suasion against colleagues protecting them.

Taken separately, all these lapses, these baffling blunders, would still not severely damage Blair's reputation. He can draw on the bona fides of a long and meritorious career record. No fool he — far from that — Blair also enjoys political clout, having successfully manoeuvred the thickets of Toronto's policing hierarchy and civilian oversight. He has friends in high places and that is of inestimable value in a political culture averse to challenging police brass.

Collectively, however, Blair has diminished himself.

It's been a sorry display indeed.

Rosie DiManno usually appears Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.



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