



Statewatch Analysis

UK

Shock and anger at the violent policing tactics used at the G8 Summit Part One

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The policing of the G20 summit in London in April 2009 has been severely criticised following an allegation of manslaughter and 270 complaints of police assault. Part I of a report on what happened and its aftermath

The London G20 summit of world leaders at the ExCel conference centre on 2 and 3 April 2009 was headlined as a platform for international cooperation in the face of global economic disaster. The “greatest gathering of leaders since 1946” [1] was estimated to have cost £19 million [2], less than a quarter of the cost of the 2005 Gleneagles summit, and a price apparently considered to be value for money by participants hoping to adopt a rescue plan for the global banking crisis. However some leaders, such as Brazil’s President Luis da Silva, pointed out that it was the behaviour of western financiers that had brought the economy down in the first place. The free-market profligacy that brought the world to its knees was typified by the bonuses and pensions with which the world’s elite rewarded themselves: in the United States in 2007 Wall Street paid itself with more than \$39 billion in bonuses and “light-touch” regulation was also the norm in the City of London. The divide between the “haves” and the “have-nots” was further accentuated at the summit by the leaking of a confidential Foreign Office memo on its preparations in mid-March, which argued that that the UK should focus on the 11 “priority” countries rather than the seven “tier two” ones, (Canada, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, Australia and Argentina).[3]

As has happened at summits elsewhere in Europe, notably at the G8 in Genoa in July 2001 [4], the presence of so many world leaders assembled in one capital encouraged activists from an array of different causes to take to the streets. Also like Genoa, the London summit was heralded by dire warnings of violence that was intended to bring the capital to a standstill. From mid-March onwards media reports, many based on police briefings, warned that veteran anarchists were coming out of retirement while others invoked international extremists who were converging on London to riot:

Thousands of activists from across Europe were converging on London today. Anarchists from Italy, France and Germany are mobilising to disrupt the summit.

Intelligence chiefs fear known agitators are arriving in London after a week of anarchist attacks in Italy.[5]

The free *London Lite* newspaper reported that bankers had been forced to employ private bodyguards while other city workers were advised “to stay at home, reschedule meetings and dress down”. Evoking the confrontational “Stop the City” protests of the 1980s, shop fronts were boarded up and meetings cancelled. [6]

With the looming media-hyped confrontation the Metropolitan police had little option but to respond to the stories it had placed in the public domain. It cancelled all officers’ leave for Operation Glencoe, “the most comprehensive security operation in a decade” (ibid), posting up to 3,000 officers across the capital supported by a similar number of CCTV cameras. The total cost of the operation was around £7.2 million, of which about £2 million were additional costs, such as overtime [7]. Six forces from in and around London were directly involved in the operation with support from another 30. The right to protest may be upheld as the cornerstone of British democracy, but when Metropolitan police Commander Simon O’Brien told CNN that his force was “up for it” he was making clear the security agenda had priority. His words were echoed by junior officers, who anticipated “going up against the scum of our society...” [8]

In the run-in to the Summit the brunt of the police operation had been felt by residents residing near the Excel Centre in Canning Town, who were advised to carry photo identification “to ensure they can pass through police roadblocks and access their homes” [9]. They “must carry two forms of ID, including one with a photo, to ensure only those who need to can get through roadblocks”. Shami Chakrabarti, director of Liberty [10], questioned the Met’s authority to enforce the measure pointing out that: “The police don’t have the legal authority to require people to carry ID papers. If they are asking them to, they had better come up with some proper reasons.” [11] Residents also believed the move to be “a step too far”, asking why the police had to resort to imposing something so draconian?” A Metropolitan police spokesman insisted that the measures were necessary to ensure safety:

Naturally, we regret any inconvenience [but]...this is not any ordinary conference - half of the world’s leaders are coming to London (ibid).

Meanwhile groups such as Climate Camp were mobilising supporters using social networking sites and holding seminars to discuss how to defuse the predicted confrontational situations.

Financial Fool’s Day

On 1 April two major demonstrations took place. The first involved a series of marches by the G20 Meltdown coalition of anti-capitalist protestors starting from four London underground stations and converging at the Bank of England. Angered at the government’s bailouts of bankers, several thousand protestors lay siege to “the old lady of Threadneedle Street” and sometime around 1.30 pm windows at the Royal Bank of Scotland [12] were smashed and a handful of activists in balaclavas scrambled inside, throwing computer monitors and other pieces of office equipment outside. People were then tightly “kettled” [13] by the police for an hour or more as the crowd grew restless. A large number of people alleged that they had been assaulted by police officers, including the Liberal Democrat councillor, Greg Foxsmith, who attended the demonstration as a civil liberties lawyer. He says that he was attacked by a balaclava-clad riot police officer after he witnessed him assaulting an elderly man [14]. One unnamed protestor echoed the widely-held belief that police forces are much more interested in protecting the interests of big business than the civil liberties of protestors: “A lot of fuss has been made about a few broken bank windows, but what about the police using truncheons on protestors.”

The second major action on Financial Fool's Day was the Climate Camp. A coalition of environmental activists defied police barricades to set up their fourth [15] camp outside the European Carbon Exchange (ECX), off Bishopsgate, under the banner of "Stop carbon markets because nature doesn't do bail outs". The Camp pitched tents and set up stalls with bunting and banners around midday and it had an enjoyable festival atmosphere throughout the day, despite some arrests and harassment by police units. Just after 7pm, police streamed into the camp wielding batons and shields. People held their hands in the air chanting "this is not a riot", but many were nonetheless assaulted. Around 2,000 people were kettled and remained so for between five and seven hours, only being released in the early hours of the morning when public transport had ended. Video footage shows 24-year old Alex Kinane being hit in the face by an officer wielding a shield while other footage shows a man being punched in the face by a policeman [16]. Some of the officers alleged to have used excessive force could not be identified because they had removed their identification numbers, a longstanding, but increasingly common occurrence, particularly among officers from the Territorial Support Group (TSG). Around 9.30 pm, Section 14 of the Public Order Act was imposed to shut the Climate Camp and people gathered at the North end of Bishopsgate were forcibly moved with baton charges and police dogs. Protestors, many of whom by now wished to leave, and those who had simply been caught up when the kettle was imposed, were eventually released around midnight, nearly five hours later; it was shortly before 1 am before the police cleared the road of the remaining protestors [17].

Demonstrators said that they were detained for hours in order "to be taught a lesson" or punished by being made to miss the last public transport. Journalists also remonstrated at being detained and refused permission to leave. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) received 270 complaints against the police, 60 of which concerned allegations of assault. The Liberal Democrat justice spokesman, David Howarth MP, questioned the legality of the kettling tactic. [18] However, Metropolitan police Commander, Simon O'Brien blamed small pockets of "criminals" for outbreaks of violence. Speaking at New Scotland Yard he pledged to track the ringleaders down, claiming that some of them had been placed under helicopter surveillance as they left. An estimated 93 people were arrested over the course of the day [19].

Demonstrating respect for human rights?

On 14 April the Climate Camp Legal Team, which is comprised of volunteers who provide information on legal rights, train people to act as legal observers and collect evidence during protests, published a report that focused on the policing of Climate Action's Camp in the City [20]. It did so in the context of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights report on the policing of protest, entitled *Demonstrating Respect for rights? A human rights approach to policing protest*, [21] which was published a week before the G20 protests began. The Committee found that although there are not "systematic human rights abuses in the policing of protest" in the UK, the government should "protect and facilitate the opportunity for people to protest peacefully", emphasising that:

To fail to do so would jeopardise a number of human rights including the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of expression.

Among its concerns, which should be addressed by legal and operational changes, was that police are too heavy-handed in dealing with protests, harassing and intimidating people.

The Committee's report had also criticised the misuse of legislation against demonstrators, calling for tighter restrictions to prevent the misuse of anti-terrorism laws. It also heard evidence that the use of officers in riot gear could "unnecessarily raise the temperature" of

crowds, making conflict more likely and for similar reasons police should not be using Taser stun guns at peaceful protests. The Committee said police Forward Intelligence Teams (FIT) were too heavy-handed with journalists reporting on demonstrations and the National Union of Journalists presented evidence showing that officers took part in "intrusive" filming of its members, denying them access to protests, refusing to recognise press cards and even assaulting them. The report highlighted the policing of protesters at an earlier Climate Camp in Kent, where 1,500 officers, including riot police, dealt with only 1,000 protesters. Committee chairman Andrew Dismore MP said:

The right to protest is a fundamental democratic right and one that the state and police have a duty to protect and facilitate.

Police witnesses responded to the committee by insisting that they were already acting lawfully and a Metropolitan Police statement placed: "Human rights and the right to protest... at the heart of our policing philosophy."

The Climate Camp Legal Team (CCLT) report compares the policing of the Climate Camp in the City with the recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee. They observe that the Parliamentary Committee remark that human rights law meant that "police should be exceptionally slow to prevent or interfere with a peaceful demonstration simply because of the violent actions of a minority", is a statement that is "difficult to reconcile with what happened at the Climate Camp". The Legal Team also noted the Committee's concern that "protestors have the impression that the police are sometimes heavy-handed in their approach to protests", observing: "If the report had been written a couple of weeks later following the G20 protests, we think the Committee would have shared the impression of protestors." Finally, the CCLT takes issue with the Committee's failure to find any systematic human rights abuses as a result of the policing of protest in the UK:

Our experience is that there are systemic problems with both the policing of protest and with the accountability of police for their actions.

The team makes six main points based on its observations of policing at the G20 protests and the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights report. In summary they are:

Police accountability: There is no effective mechanism to hold police forces accountable for their actions and the means to challenge the actions of individual officers is rarely effective.

Legal recourse for protesters: As the Joint Parliamentary Committee also acknowledged, there are "significant practical limitations inherent in the legal process" for protesters.

The police complaints system: The IPCC is ineffective and is in need of reform. "How the IPCC addressees what may be increasing policing controversies associated with protest movements will be a critical test of whether it is worth preserving or is a failed model." The Legal Team also expresses significant concerns that in reality we have a national police force overseen not by parliament, but by an unaccountable private body - The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).

The criminalisation of protesters: "Exercise your right to protest in this country and you will at best be treated as a potential criminal, and at worst as a potential terrorist, and policed as such. You will be photographed and filmed by Forward Intelligence Teams... You will be stopped and searched and pressured into giving your name and address. You will be corralled by police in riot gear, your freedom of movement restricted, and in physical danger from officers' 'losing it' and the use of disproportionate force to restrict protest."

Police spin: Police briefings before the protest "talked up" the potential for violence at press briefings. At the Climate Camp satellite television vans were moved on before the

significant escalation in police violence occurred. An embedded television camera crew entered with riot police during police raids on squats where protesters had been sleeping. Police media spin is not compatible with any reasonable notion of institutional accountability in a democracy.

Climate activists demonised as domestic extremists: There are worrying signs the police are identifying Climate Camp activists as the next generation of domestic extremists, a new enemy within for which the legal translation seems to be “terrorists”.

The police assault and death of Ian Tomlinson

Newspaper vendor, Ian Tomlinson (47), collapsed and died after he was caught up in the policing of the protests as he walked home from work in the City of London around 7 pm on the evening of 1 April. The Metropolitan police promptly released an inaccurate statement saying that officers attempting to resuscitate him had been forced to move him when they were pelted with missiles by protestors. The effects of this statement led to reports that he had died “after bottles were thrown at him and he collapsed” [22]. The IPCC was informed of Mr Tomlinson’s death, but did not take over the investigation into the death for a further week, on 8 April. Ian Tomlinson was the first person to die at a heavily policed demonstration since the IPCC assumed responsibility for investigating deaths which involve police contact in April 2004.

Ian Tomlinson’s final movements that evening have been reconstructed by Inquest [23], which is working with Mr Tomlinson’s family. In summary, he left Monument underground station after finishing work at about 7pm to return home. On route he was blocked by lines of police officers at least twice, and probably on three occasions, before he made his way up Royal Exchange. Video footage on Channel 4 News showed him standing still as a line of policemen, including Metropolitan police officers, officers from the TSG and City of London dog handlers, swept down Royal Exchange from Threadneedle Street. Tomlinson is shown walking away from the police with his hands in his pockets [24]. Police dogs can be seen to go for him at least twice, before an officer in a riot helmet holding a raised baton approached and struck him before violently pushing him to the ground. No officers went to Tomlinson’s assistance but a bystander did help him to his feet. The video footage shows Tomlinson staggering away from Royal Exchange Passage along Cornhill clutching his side looking dazed. Photographs show that he did not walk far before collapsing.

It was later reported in *The Times* that the officer being questioned over Mr Tomlinson’s death had previously been accused of using unnecessary force against a motorist. Despite this, he was able to join Surrey constabulary and later transfer to the Metropolitan police “because the unresolved disciplinary issue was not flagged up during vetting.” [25]

In its report Inquest draws “evocative and disturbing parallels” between the death of Ian Tomlinson and that of the unsolved police killing of Blair Peach 30 years ago, (on 23 April 1979). [26] Blair Peach died of head injuries while demonstrating against a provocative National Front march in Southall, west London. No police officer was ever charged over his death despite witnesses who claimed to have seen him being hit over the head by members of the Metropolitan Police’s Special Patrol Group (SPG), the predecessor to the TSG. There is also well documented use of excessive force by officers from the same group while policing the Southall demonstration. The investigation into Blair Peach’s death was conducted by Commander John Cass but has yet to be made public [27]. Inquest points to the “supervision and tactics of the TSG” at the G20 demonstrations and the lack of accountability of the “investigation processes following deaths in police custody” as areas that parallel the cover-up that followed Blair Peach’s death. They therefore call for the

IPCC investigation [28] into the death of Ian Tomlinson to be fully compliant with article 2 (right to life) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Footnotes

1. *The Independent* 28.3.09.
2. *Evening Standard* 10.3.09
3. *The Independent* 14.3.09
4. For Genoa see Yasha Maccanico in *Statewatch* Vol. 17 no 2, Vol. 18 nos 1 & 4, Vol 19 no. 1
5. *Evening Standard* 30.3.09
- 6.. *London Lite*, 26.3.09
7. Metropolitan police “Operation Glencoe policing and security for the G20 London Summit”
http://cms.met.police.uk/news/updates/operation_glencoe_policing_and_security_for_the_g20_london_summit
8. See CNN website
<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/03/26/g20.protests.police.london/index.html>. The Times newspaper (1.4.09) captured the gung-ho spirit in quoting one anonymous officer on a police internet forum: He talked of “going up against the scum of our society, the immature thrill seekers and anonymous cowards who hide in large crowds with scarves over their faces chanting meaningless slogans to hurl whatever is at hand at the lines of police deployed to maintain order.”
- 9 *The Independent* 31.3.09
10. Liberty website: <http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/>
11. *Evening Standard* 30.3.09.
12. See: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7977489.stm
13. A controversial and widely criticised police tactic whereby officer’s coral and forcibly prevent people from leaving an area. Within the kettle there are frequent complaints of excessive police violence; when people are allowed to leave they are often photographed and have their identification details taken. Kettling is indiscriminate, often trapping passers-by, tourists and journalists alike. It is also used as a punitive measure, for instance when those corralled are refused access to toilets and other facilities, or when people are deliberately detained until after public transport has closed.
14. Foxsmith has written to the Metropolitan police commissioner, Sir Paul Stevenson.
15. Previous Climate Camps had been held at Drax, Heathrow airport and at Kingsnorth power station in Kent. For more on the Kingsnorth camp see Panorama “Whatever Happened to People Power” (BBC-1) 6.7.09. Here too police attempted to manipulate the media regarding protester violence, claiming that 68 officers were injured in violent confrontations; in reality only four cases involved contacts with protestors. Website: <http://climatecamp.org.uk/?q=node/468>
16. See Panorama: Whatever Happened to People Power (BBC-1) 6.7.09.
17. Climate Camp Legal Team Demonstrating Respect for Rights?: the policing of the Climate Camp in the City of 1 April 2009 18.4 09.
<http://climatecamp.org.uk/themes/ccamptheme/files/report.pdf>
18. *Ibid*
19. *BBC News* 2.4.09
20. Climate Camp Legal Team Demonstrating Respect for Human Right: the policing of the Climate Camp in the City of 1 April 2009 18.4 09.
- 21 Joint Committee on Human Rights Demonstrating Respect for Rights? A human rights approach to policing protest.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200809/jtselect/jtrights/47/47i.pdf>. The Joint Committee is made up of 12 members appointed from the House of Commons and the House of Lords who heard evidence from civil liberties groups, from members of the police force and the government.

22. BBC News 2.4.09. The Evening Standard was even more graphic: "Police had come under a barrage of missiles yesterday as they tried to save the life of 47-year old Ian Tomlinson. Officers were hit by bottles thrown from the crowd and were forced to carry Mr Tomlinson to a safe location..." For eyewitness testimony rather than police spin or tabloid fiction, see Indymedia's witness statements:

<http://london.indymedia.org.uk/articles/1019>

23. Inquest "Briefing on the death of Ian Tomlinson" (2009), Appendix 1. The briefing is available as a free download:

http://inquest.gn.apc.org/pdf/INQUEST_ian_tomlinson_briefing_jun_2009.pdf

24. Channel 4 News,

<http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/uk/tomlinson+death+missing+moment/3076487>

25. Times 6.7.09

26. For more information on Blair Peach's death see Jenny Bourne "The political legacy of Blair Peach" IRR website, 23 April 2009.

<http://www.irr.org.uk/2009/april/ha000025.html>

27. Inquest and the friends and family of Blair Peach have been campaigning for the release of the report for 30 years. In June 2009 at a meeting of the Metropolitan Police Authority the Commissioner agreed to the publication of the report into the death subject to any legally necessary redactions.

28. The IPCC investigation into the death of Ian Tomlinson is expected to be published in 2010.

UK

Shock and anger at the violent policing tactics used at the G8 Summit Part Two

Trevor Hemmings

In the aftermath of the violent policing of the G20 summit in London in April 2009 community organisations highlight longstanding problems of police indiscipline while official inquiries develop strategies for future protests.

The Inquest report [1] is critical of the role of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) in failing to immediately launch an independent investigation into the death of Ian Tomlinson, an omission that has seriously undermined: "public and family confidence in the IPCC and the police complaints system more generally." Instead, within hours of the death the IPCC had sanctioned a misleading Metropolitan police press release that omitted to mention that there had been repeated police contacts with Ian Tomlinson before his death. It focussed on a version of an alleged bottle throwing incident as police administered first aid to the dying man. These allegations are strenuously denied by protesters who had gone to Mr Tomlinson's aid and called an ambulance (which the police may have prevented from reaching the scene). The IPCC's prevarication meant that Metropolitan police assumed responsibility for forensic analysis and initially conducted the investigation. On 2 April Scotland Yard referred the investigation to the City of London police which played a key role in evidence gathering but "completely failed to persuade

the Tomlinson family of its impartiality”. This bias was typified by the force’s assertion that that the assailant may not have been a police officer at all, but “a member of the public dressed in police uniform.”

Police mistreatment of the Tomlinson family

The casual mistreatment of bereaved families of police victims over the years has been well documented by Inquest. [2] In the case of the Tomlinson family it can be encapsulated by the failure to even inform them of the death for over nine hours. Moreover, the City of London coroner neglected to tell the family that a post mortem examination was to be carried out on 2 April 2009 and of their right to attend; the IPCC was also refused access although a City of London police sergeant was present. The pathologist instructed by the coroner was Dr Freddie Patel, a questionable choice given that he had been discredited by his conduct in another police restraint death, that of Roger Sylvester [3], for speculating to the press about the victim’s possible drug use (an act for which Patel was reprimanded by the General Medical Council).

The findings of the first post mortem, that Ian Tomlinson had died as a result of a heart attack, and the failure to mention other injuries, reinforced the police narrative of death by natural causes. After this finding was released on 3 April the IPCC reported that the Metropolitan police maintained that there had been no police contact with Ian Tomlinson and they failed to correct this false information. A subsequent post-mortem examination conducted by pathologist, Dr Nat Carey, instructed by the IPCC and by solicitors acting for the family, found that Mr Tomlinson had died of abdominal bleeding, raising the possibility of a manslaughter charge against a police officer. The IPCC said:

Following the initial results of the second post mortem, a Metropolitan police officer has been interviewed under caution for the offence of manslaughter as part of an ongoing inquiry into the death of Ian Tomlinson.

Despite these disturbing signs it was not until 8 April that the IPCC launched an independent investigation [4]. Inquest concludes that this failure to investigate police conduct is not only detrimental to the IPCC’s claims of independence, but led to the “potential for the loss, suppression and/or distortion of crucial forensic evidence in the ‘golden hours’ following Mr Tomlinson’s death”. Through these delays the:

clear impression that emerged was that the IPCC and the Metropolitan police sought to avoid an investigation into Mr Tomlinson’s death by incorrectly suggesting that he had died of natural causes.

In many earlier contentious deaths there was also a concerted attempt by the authorities to deflect attention away from official criminality or incompetence. In this light, it was hardly surprising that the initial reports of the death of Ian Tomlinson were “at best partial and at worst an attempt to deflect attention from the potential wrongdoing of police officers.” Mr Tomlinson’s family has also expressed its concern over what has appeared in the media, much of which appears to have been given to the press by public authorities. These attempts to control the narrative development of events by smearing the reputation of the deceased, serve to deflect attention away from those at fault. It also underlines “the importance of a robust and immediate independent investigation” because:

there is an obvious risk that if police officers (who may be motivated towards protecting their own) have control of the early stages of an investigation their approach may taint this process.

The issue of police misinformation regarding Mr Tomlinson's death is now the subject of a formal complaint by his family and an IPCC inquiry into media handling by the Metropolitan police and the City of London force.

Inquest's investigation concludes:

The task for the IPCC in the aftermath of a contentious death following police contact is clear: to immediately begin an independent, effective, accountable, prompt, public and inclusive investigation so that the rule of law is seen to be upheld and applied equally to all citizens including those in police uniform. Without this there can be no hope of public confidence, not least in the aftermath of a heavily-policed protest and the abundance of camera and CCTV evidence of excessive force by police officers....The fact that the IPCC was unable to take immediate control of the potential crime scene or indeed to have any input at all during the golden hours and early days of the investigation means that the suspicion of a cover-up will always linger.

Operation Glencoe part 2

The second day of "Operation Glencoe" (as the police operation was called) began, as complaints began to emerge about the police excesses of the previous day, with midday raids on two squats housing demonstrators (many of whom had been compelled to stay after being kettled by police until the early hours the previous night). Superintendent Roger Evans said that intelligence squads had the squats under surveillance for two days and that police were hoping to match some of the occupants with photographs of "troublemakers" and "ringleaders" from the previous day. He told *The Metro* free newspaper:

We have had officers keeping this building under overt surveillance. Our intelligence teams have been watching this [premises] for the last two days. I don't know exactly how many people were inside but it's around 70 so far. There are all sorts of people inside. People with piercings, people without piercings, people with dogs - the sort of people you might expect to find at a pop festival.
[5]

The Rampart Street Community Arts Centre, which has existed for about five years, was widely publicised on the internet as a place where people attending the G20 protests could meet and sleep. An early open meeting at the centre was "infiltrated" by the *Evening Standard* newspaper resulting in a report entitled "Anarchists planning to storm city banks." [6] It said: "At the meeting, held in a three-storey squat called rampart in Whitechapel, anarchists discussed plans to "swoop" on the area in "swarms of two or three" and break through police lines by any means necessary". It continued: "Groups who attended the meeting include the Whitechapel Anarchists Group, Class war and the Wombles. The Met has warned that anarchists from the 1990 Poll Tax riots have been lured out of retirement by the prospect of violent clashes." The vision of a "dad's army" of anarchists launching a re-run of the UK's largest riot of the twentieth century may seem ludicrous, but this kind of hyperbole is fairly typical of the tabloid coverage.

Film from the Earl Street raid [7] shows occupants appealing for negotiations with riot police before the building was stormed. An officer can be observed beating at least one man with a baton as riot police forced their way inside and another officer, armed with a laser-sighted Taser, forced people to lie face down on the floor with their limbs outspread. Many were taken outside and questioned some were restrained with plastic handcuffs. Four people were arrested at the Rampart centre and two people at Earl Street.

Outside the ExCel conference centre 1,500 police officers formed a “ring of steel” in a military-style operation, surrounding the venue and outnumbering peaceful demonstrators by three to one as the summit began. Three DLR stations were closed and police turned away anyone within a half mile radius who did not have accreditation. When the G20 leaders arrived helicopters surrounded the area, marine police units were put on standby and snipers were positioned on top of flats.

Further evidence of systematic police violence towards protestors came when Nicola Fisher [8], from Brighton, was filmed being struck by TSG sergeant Delroy Smellie as she made her way to a peaceful vigil in commemoration of Ian Tomlinson. The footage shows the officer smacking her across the face with the back of his hand and ordering her to “Go away”. Ms Fisher is seen remonstrating with him as he draws his baton and strikes the woman on her legs. Fisher later said: “If he wanted me to move he could have asked me politely.” Smellie, another officer with no visible identification number, was suspended from duty pending an IPCC inquiry into the assault.[9] “People were there for the vigil out of respect to remember Ian Tomlinson,” said Tristan Woodwards (25) who captured the attack on film. Fisher said that a number of men witnessed the incident and scuffles broke out between them and some of the police officers when they remonstrated about the abuse of a woman.

The Labour MP, David Winnick, a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee, said that Nicola Fisher’s beating was “totally unacceptable” behaviour by a police officer:

The home secretary should make a statement about events at the G20 protests. That statement should include first and foremost Ian Tomlinson’s death and explain why police made a totally misleading statement about their contact with him. [10]

After footage of the Fisher assault came to light the Metropolitan police issued a statement saying that the actions of the police officer had raised “immediate concerns”. In September the IPCC passed its investigation into Smellie, who is currently suspended from duty, to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) which decided that there was sufficient evidence for him appear at Westminster magistrates court in October charged with assault. [11]

The Met should also have been concerned at a similar incident that occurred the previous day at Climate Camp, when a 23-year old unnamed female graduate was injured by police officers. The incident, in which the woman was struck violently with police shields and truncheons and kicked by officers, was the subject of the first IPCC report published in August [12]. The attack left her with bruising to the arms and legs and heavy vaginal bleeding, which her GP told her could have been indicative of a miscarriage. The woman does not know if she was pregnant. Despite her injuries police officers had refused permission for her to leave Bishopsgate for five hours, a situation that the IPCC described as difficult to justify. Nonetheless, the IPCC has decided not to refer this case to the CPS.

A campaign is born as the police narrative unravels

Over the next weeks, as more blogs, tweets, photographs and mobile phone films from protesters and independent journalists entered the public domain, the credibility of the police narrative of events was firstly undermined and then overturned. Senior officers, defending the policing of the Summit at City Hall, were greeted with jeers and heckled throughout, resulting in the Conservative Party Mayor, Boris Johnson, threatening to suspend the meeting. Members of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) criticised the kettling tactic and the violence used by officers while clearing the Climate Camp. The Police Federation, however, raised fears of an “anti-police bandwagon”, while *Police*

Review, ran a story entitled “Brain Storm” asking: “Did Airwave radios trigger officers’ behaviour at the G20 protests?” [13] It cited independent research suggesting that the radio frequency had interfered with officers’ brainwaves possibly causing unintended “violent behaviour, aggression, sleeplessness, irritability or agitation.” One former Scotland Yard commissioner, David Gilbertson, was probably nearer the mark when he suggested there was a “frightening new mindset - officers see the public as the enemy and protest as illegitimate”. [14]

On 11 April, hundreds of people marched in silence through the streets of London in commemoration of Ian Tomlinson. In a letter read out beforehand Mr Tomlinson’s stepson, Paul King, said it had been very painful to watch the images of his stepfather being violently assaulted. He made a plea for justice: “We are hopeful that the IPCC will fulfil their duty to carry out a full investigation into his death and that action will be taken against any police officer who contributed to Ian’s death through his conduct.” Mr Tomlinson’s father, Jim, also spoke, demanding an explanation and accusing the police of giving his son a beating. He said:

I’ve seen film of police pushing Ian over. They need to explain why they did that. Were their actions justified? He was never a troublemaker. He might have been gobby [loud], but is that what you get for being gobby now - a good beating?

On 17 April the London Coroners court published the results of the second post-mortem which revealed that Ian Tomlinson had died of internal bleeding.

A few days later a coalition of trade unionists, anti-war activists, campaigners against deaths in custody and others who oppose police violence and want to defend civil liberties launched the United Campaign Against Police Violence (UCAPV). [15] Supporters are comprised of campaigners from the United Friends and Families Campaign, RMT (London Region), the Public and Commercial Services Union, Labour MPs John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn, the Socialist Workers’ Party, the Stop the War/Gaza coalition, the Green Party and G20 Meltdown. Speaking about Ian Tomlinson, Paul King, on behalf of the family, said:

First we were told that there had been no contact with the police, then we were told that he died of a heart attack; now we know that he was violently assaulted by a police officer and died from internal bleeding. As time goes on we hope that the full truth about how Ian died will be made known.

A “remarkably successful” police operation

As the growing controversy over the policing of the G20 protests intensified, calls for a parliamentary inquiry became louder after House of Commons speaker, Michael Martin, blocked an attempt to force an emergency parliamentary statement on the allegations of brutality by the Labour MP, David Winnick. Scotland Yard is not releasing the contents of the investigation by Ian Johnston, head of the British Transport police, into the policing of the protests and the death of Mr Tomlinson. However, at the beginning of May an official report setting out the police version of events, by assistant commissioner Chris Allison, was submitted to a meeting of the Metropolitan Police Authority. It was described as “full of serious inaccuracies” by the Liberal Democrat justice spokesman, David Howarth MP, and Scotland Yard was accused of “misleading its own watchdog.” [16] Allison defended the report and the kettling of demonstrators; the MPA unanimously agreed to examine this and other public order tactics in its civil liberties panel.

On 23 June, the Home Affairs Committee (HAC) [17] published its report on the G20 policing strategy [18] which it described as “a remarkably successful operation” that “aside from a few high profile incidents...passed without drama”. This operational “success” balances precariously with the evidence of excessive police force used against the “extremely peaceful and successful” protests. A caveat acknowledges that the operation’s success was “partly down to luck” and that:

These incidents and the tactics...caused considerable adverse comment and have the potential to seriously damage the public’s faith in the police.

The report also expresses wider concerns over the policing of the G20, and other large-scale, public protests. In particular it highlights:

Kettling: The Committee found that the use of close containment and distraction tactics (the controlled use of force), “while legitimate according to the police rule-book, shocked the public”. The report states that: “It is not acceptable for a blanket ban on movement to be imposed”. It calls for a review of this tactic and questions whether kettling can “continue to be used”, arguing that it should “form the basis of a wide-ranging discussion on the future policing of public protests.” Above all, the report concludes, “the police must constantly remember that those who protest on Britain’s streets are not criminals but citizens motivated by moral principles, exercising their democratic rights.” However, kettling has already been through the UK courts and on appeal to the House of Lords, in relation to Lois Austin (in the 2001 ‘May Day Detainee Case’), and it supported the Court of Appeal’s finding that the Metropolitan police acted correctly by detaining Lois and several thousand peaceful anti-capitalist protesters in Oxford Circus on May Day, 2001. The case is likely to go to the European Court. [19]

Communications between police and media: David Howarth MP, who acted as an observer at the G20 protests, told the Committee: “I was increasingly concerned about the hyping up of the possibility of violence...What we were doing there was as a result of what was happening in the previous weeks in the media and concern about the police apparently...raising the spectre of major violence.” The Committee expressed bewilderment that “the police would use language which would only serve to create a “them and us” attitude and antagonise the most violent elements within the protesters. We feel that such statements essentially become a self-fulfilling prophecy and they should be avoided in future.”

Refusing to display identification numbers: This longstanding issue was frequently raised as a serious problem by protestors as long ago as the 1980s. [20] The report states that there are still “no circumstances in which it is acceptable for officers not to wear identification numbers” and calls for “urgent action” to be taken “to ensure that officers have the resources to display identification at all times”. Those officers deliberately removing their identification numbers “must face the strongest possible disciplinary measures.” Despite the strong words the Met chose milder action, disciplining most officers who refused to display their numbers with “words of advice.”

In September the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) criticised police chiefs for failing to even discipline officers who failed to wear their ID numbers with Dee Dooley, stating that it was “extraordinary” that officers caught without ID should escape with a slap on the wrist [21]. However, Dooley’s observations grossly underestimated the situation, as was exposed in a leaked Metropolitan police email instructing staff to cull photographs of officers at G20 who were not displaying identity numbers. The revisionist email, published by the *Evening Standard* newspaper (6.11.09.), says:

As of now, any still or moving photography or images of police officers must show them wearing their correct shoulder numbers / markings and name badges if these areas of uniform are included in the shot.

If any of these items are missing the photography or images must not be used.

As a precaution, if you hold any photography or images that do not meet this instruction they should be culled from your libraries or other systems you may have for their storage.”

Untrained and inexperienced officers: The report was “deeply concerned that untrained and inexperienced officers were placed in such a highly combustible atmosphere.” The members said: “We cannot condone the use of untrained, inexperienced officers on the frontline of a public protest and feel that an element of luck must be attributed to the success of the operation. This HAC conclusion was rejected by the Met’s Assistant Commissioner, Chris Allison, who said: “It is wrong to suggest that our officers are not trained. They are. To suggest otherwise can only serve to damage public confidence in us.” [21]

“A National Overhaul” for police tactics?

On 7 July, HM Inspector of Constabulary, Denis O’Connor, published his review of the handling of the G20 demonstrations which called for reform of the way in which such protests are handled. [22] The review identifies a number of “genuine concerns”: kettling and the dispersal of peaceful demonstrators, the absence of police identification numbers and the effectiveness of communication between police, public and protesters. However, O’Connor manages to overcome these “concerns” and the report cannot be called critical, focussing on the public’s perceptions of the police rather than issues of policing.

O’Connor supports the continued police use of kettling, stating that there was a “clear rationale for the use of containment” at the Bank of England. His criticism is merely that it was inconsistently applied elsewhere at G20. Given the frequency with which the tactic was - and still is - used it is unlikely that his suggestion that officers on the ground be given greater discretion to allow people to leave will make a great deal of difference. This is particularly the case if, as the report says, senior Metropolitan police commanders do not understand human rights law and their legal duties regarding containment.

O’Connor is also silent on the role of the Territorial Support Group, the “force within the force” responsible for public order policing and the subject of numerous complaints made at G20. It should be recalled that investigations into its predecessor, the Special Patrol Group, only resulted in a cosmetic name change.

The HMIC review describes the police planning for the G20 protests as “inadequate”. It found that although “intelligence briefings indicated that there was no specific intelligence which suggested any planned intention to engage in co-ordinated and organised public disorder and/or violence” the Metropolitan police had not planned for facilitating a peaceful demonstration. Its preparations were directed at dealing “robustly” with any form of protest or demonstration that was not lawful. This is a remarkable admission, given the outcome of Operation Glencoe, in which one man died, well over 100 people were arrested and dozens were injured by “robust” policing. In light of this, to call for a human rights-based approach to the policing of protests that focuses on an individual’s criminal behaviour rather than criminalisation of the protest as a whole misses the point.

O'Connor's recognition that the police have a duty to facilitate peaceful protest is welcome, but meagre. The same is true of his acknowledgement that it should become a legal requirement for police to display their identification numerals, something as necessary today as it was when it first became a serious problem some 30 years ago. The need for a review of police training and tactics, including the use of shields and batons, is self-evident, as footage of G20 shows.

It is common practice on demonstrations for police to disrupt journalists filming controversial police tactics and the expanding role of Forward Intelligence Teams (FIT) in harassing reporters has been an integral component of this policy. The practice has been criticised by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the union's secretary, Jeremy Dear, has said that:

The routine and deliberate targeting of photographers and other journalists by the FIT undermines media freedom and can serve to intimidate photographers trying to carry out their lawful work. The rights of photographers to work free from threat, harassment and intimidation must be upheld. [23]

The increasingly proactive role of the FIT is the formalisation of a process to ensure the coverage of the official narrative of events.

Given the success of independent media outlets in challenging this narrative, O'Connor discusses limiting independent journalistic activity by embedding reporters with the police to "facilitate communication" and avoid confrontational situations. Embedded journalists would be discredited as neutral observers. In the immediate future the battleground will be less over the nature of public order strategy and practice but over strategic control of the information that is allowed into the public domain.

Footnotes

1. Inquest "Briefing on the death of Ian Tomlinson" (2009), Appendix 1. The briefing is available as a free download:

http://inquest.gn.apc.org/pdf/INQUEST_ian_tomlinson_briefing_jun_2009.pdf

2. See the Inquest website for numerous well documented cases of the abuse of families bereaved in police custody. <http://inquest.gn.apc.org/>

3. For background on Roger Sylvester the Inquest website. See also Statewatch Vol. 9 no. 1; Vol. 10 no. 5, 6; Vol. 11 nos. 3/4, 5; Vol. 13, no 5 and Vol. 17 nos. 3 and 4

4. IPCC press release.

http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/news/pr080409_iantomlinsoninvestigation.htm

5 The Metro.

http://www.metro.co.uk/news/article.html?Police_raid_squats_linked_to_G20_violence&in_article_id=607262&in_page_id=34

6. Evening Standard 31.3.09.

7 See Panorama "Whatever Happened to People Power" BBC-1 6.7.09. for film of the Earl Street raid.

8. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FppDEJUG7fE>

9. Guardian 15.4.09.

10. IPCC press release "G20 update: Met officer summoned" 28.9.09.

11. See the IPCC report "Commissioner's Report following the IPCC Independent Investigation into a Complaint that Officers used Excessive Force against a Woman during the G20 protests"

http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/bishopsgate_report.pdf

The woman also gave an interview recounting events to BBC's Newsnight programme

12. *Police Review* 5.6.09. In what appears to be a developing theme, another *Police Review* article, "Short Fuse" by Sarah Bebbington, asked whether working long hours affected police "tolerance levels" at the G20 protests (17.7.09).
13. *Guardian* 20.4.09
14. See <http://againstpoliceviolence.blogspot.com/>
15. *Guardian* 1.5.09
16. The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Home Office and its associated public bodies. Its current chair is the Labour MP, Keith Vaz.
17. "Policing of the G20 Protests" 23.6.09.
<http://www.statewatch.org/news/2009/jun/uk-hasc-g20-policing-report.pdf>
18. *Opinions of the Lords of Appeal for judgment in the cause Austin (FC) (Appellant) & another v Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (Respondent)*.
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldjudgmt/jd090128/austin-1.htm>
19. The concealing of police identification numbers was raised by the IPCC at the pro-hunting Countryside Alliance demonstration in September 2004 and was an issue of great concern at Tamil protests earlier this year. Despite repeated complaints that the practice makes police unaccountable and encourages violent behaviour there has been little enthusiasm by the authorities to resolve the problem.
20. Cited on BBC News 17.9.09.
21. BBC News 29.6.09
22. Denis O'Connor *Adapting to Protest* 1.7.09.
<http://inspectrates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic/docs/ap/G20-final-report.pdf?view=Binary>
23. See "Home Secretary told "end police surveillance of journalists" NUJ website:
<http://www.nuj.org.uk/innerPagenuj.html?docid=816>

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