

TAX MAYHEM

MPs slam riot gangs

LABOUR moved swiftly today to join Tories in condemning the wave of anti-poll tax violence which swept the country last night.

The protests — one involving up to 2,000 people — disrupted council meetings, caused widespread damage and led to arrests.

Shadow environment secretary Bryan Gould said: "The Labour Party unreservedly condemns any acts of violence.

"The sense of outrage at the poll tax is now so widespread, however, that it has prompted many thousands of people to show their anger in a variety of ways.

"It is simply misleading to suggest that these thousands of protesters are all somehow the dupes of the Militant Tendency."

But he had no doubt it was extremist groups which had tried to exploit the protests for their own purposes.

Energy Secretary John Wakeham blamed the violence on "rent-a-mob" groups who had caused trouble in the past over such issues as the miners' strike, South Africa and cruise missiles.

He said: "Now we have it apparently over the community charge and I think it is a very disturbing and disagreeable sign."

Right

Mrs Thatcher made known her condemnation of the violence. She underlined the right of people to protest and demonstrate peacefully, but deplored the violence and the burden it placed on police.

The worst of the violence was in Bristol where police, facing missile-throwing protesters, drew batons and moved in on a crowd of about 500.

Twenty-one people were arrested and four police officers injured after crowds



● Protesters clash with police in Bristol where 21 arrests were made and four officers were injured

attempted to storm the Council House.

One of the biggest demonstrations was in Norwich where about 2,000 protesters stormed City Hall and forced the abandonment of the meeting.

Violence erupted in Birmingham when protesters invaded the city council buildings screaming abuse and waving banners.

The council meeting at Maidenhead was abandoned when a crowd of about 700 stormed the council buildings.

VILLAGE FACES £408 CHARGE

VILLAGERS are facing the highest poll tax bill in Notts.

The £408 shocker for the residents of Ruddington comes as a result of Rushcliffe Borough Council's decision last

night to levy an average £393 charge.

Police who stood in the wings at the council's civic centre in West Bridgford saw only three members of the public

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City 'rent a mob' claim

THE poll tax invaders of Nottingham's council chamber were today branded as a "rent-a-mob."

It was claimed that Nottingham's protesters were members of extreme political groups.

Anarchists, the Socialist Workers Party and Militant Tendency supporters formed the core of the protesters at Monday's meeting, it was claimed.

But each readily identifiable group worked independently of the others.

It has been alleged that anarchists, based in Forest Fields and Hyson Green, took control of the council chamber in an attempt to stop the

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city council setting the poll tax.

Three people from those areas were arrested and bailed without charge after the riot.

Meanwhile, Foreign Office Minister William Waldegrave said today that both the Socialist Workers Party and Militant have been active in stirring up emotions over the tax.

The chairman of the Police Federation, Mr Alan Eastwood, said much of the violence at last night's demonstrations was organised by those outside local communities.

"These people are simply rent-a-mob," he said.

Members of the unions of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation in the city were collecting signatures outside the Council House in Nottingham on Monday.

Federation secretary Mr Gary Freeman said whoever invaded the council chamber was acting out of a genuine grievance against the poll tax.

He said the individuals in the council chamber

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POST COMMENT

Cause is lost with 'mob rule'

LITTLE old ladies all over the country will be horrified to learn that the poll tax protest which they have supported is being led by political extremists and anarchists.

And one little old lady residing at Number 10, Downing Street will be absolutely delighted!

The worst thing that could have happened to genuine non-political opponents of the tax is to have their cause hi-jacked by rent-a-mob.

It emerges today that key figures in violent demonstrations at council meetings up and down the country have nothing to do with the communities they are purporting to represent.

It's the usual rag-bag of Socialist Worker and Militant supporters with the odd anarchist thrown in for good measure ... the sort of people who would stage a demonstration in support if you told them Big Ben was striking.

And they belittle and de-value the protest.

CONDEMN VIOLENCE

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The Tory architects of the poll tax will be well pleased if the flak they are taking from all quarters can be diverted and converted into justifiable criticism of orchestrated mobsters kicking lumps out of coppers.

That's not the English way.

We don't like mobs.

We don't like thugs who kick coppers.

When we see that sort of thing happening we very soon lose sympathy with the protesters.

And the cause is then lost.

Thus, politicians who refuse to condemn violent protest only add to the damage caused by the thugs who perpetrate it.

We saw it happen with the miners' strike.

How often did Arthur Scargill dodge invitations to publicly renounce violent disorder?

And with every punch thrown and every kick aimed on the picket line public sympathy disintegrated.

So diversionary was all the violence that it was only in the dying days of the strike, when mob rule had dissipated, that people really started listening to the miners.

By then it was too late. And so it will be with poll tax.

DEMOCRATIC

Pitched physical battles between mobs and police will have only one effect on the minds of the vast majority of English people ... all those resisting the poll tax will be tarred with the same brush as the thugs and genuine anomalies and injustices in the new system will be buried under a welter of anti-reaction.

The English will always support orderly democratic protest and we'll tolerate eccentrics — like the lady who chained herself naked to the railings outside the House of Lords yesterday to lend her considerable charms to the anti-poll tax campaign.

But start kicking our coppers and you've lost.