

Reporters see demo mayhem



● Police use riot shields to protect themselves against 'missiles' thrown at them during the demonstrations in the heart of London



● A protester kicks the window of a fast food store in Lower Regent Street, London, as rioting turned ugly



● A chair is thrown at mounted police guarding the area outside the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square

Terror in the Square

A HARD-CORE of two or three thousand anti poll tax protesters gathered in one corner of Trafalgar Square after the speeches — chanting and ignoring stewards' pleas to disperse.

"Suddenly the crowd turned on a lone police van. Perhaps 30 surrounded it smashing every window, the terrified driver first reversing and then driving forward blindly through the crowd.

"Then the police in riot gear appeared from Whitehall and the missiles began to fly.

"Everything was thrown — sticks, placards, bricks, bottles, cans, even a fire extinguisher.

Charging

"The horses came, charging in eight-strong waves only to be pelted with missiles and turned back.

"A fire was started outside the South African Embassy which was tackled by the fire brigade which was booed for its work.

"By now the hard-core of rioters had been pushed back to the church opposite the National Gallery.

"The crowd built barriers and rocked railings until they came out of the ground, using chunks of paving stones for missiles.

"Again the police pushed forward, splitting the crowd between St Martin's Lane and Charing Cross Road.

"In St Martin's Lane tourists watched open-mouthed as one man calmly put a match to the open fuel cap of an over-turned Volvo.

"Another man walked up to the Scottish TV offices with a spade and smashed two massive windows.

Two Post reporters, Andy Gilgrist and Phil Hendry, were in London on Saturday at the massive poll tax demonstration that turned the capital into a battle ground.

Here they give their first-hand story of the confrontations and the looting on the streets of the capital.

"Three women on a shopping trip desperately hammered against the barricaded doors of the English National Opera: "Let us in," they said.

"The looting began. The man next to me put his foot through the window of a chemist and was busy pulling out handfuls of gold chains from a window display.

"The police were now using the tactic of watching for missile throwers, singling one out and rushing forward to arrest them.

"But this went badly wrong just two yards in front of me.

"The police picked out their man, set off but the first officer pushed a woman out of the way to get at his target.

"His colleagues following, hit her as she lay curled up on the ground before she was dragged off to a police van."

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Phil Hendry writes: "It became clear that protesters were being forced back up Charing Cross Road and back along the Haymarket in two separate groups.

"I followed the group up the Haymarket as queues of theatre-goers huddled in doorways and were pushed against walls by the sheer numbers of both demonstrators and riot police.

"I saw outside the square an attack on McDonald's in the Haymarket and this seemed to be the rally cry for further attacks on cars and shops.

"Some protesters and bystanders tried to run ahead of the mob warning diners in restaurants to get away from windows.

Chanting

"By around 6.30pm it was noticeable that a number of other elements were joining rioters.

"I saw several groups of football supporters — in particular youths chanting "Eagles, Eagles," — the chant of Crystal Palace.

"Tottenham Court Road — home to numerous hi-fi and camera shops — was decimated by looters although there were repeated charges by police to clear it, which forced rioters into side streets.

"Police used 'snatch squads' during the rioting to pick out specific agitators, and often innocent targets were caught up in such incidents and I saw several injured women — who formed a large proportion of those involved on the front line."

Maggie's riot horror

HOME Secretary David Waddington was making a Commons statement today on the riots which erupted during the anti-poll tax rally in central London.

The Prime Minister expressed "absolute horror" at the violence that brought terror to the capital and injured more than 400 people. She promised an inquiry, but gave no details.

Mrs Thatcher blamed "extremist groups who used violence with no consideration for others or their property".

The man in charge of policing the march, Deputy Assistant Commissioner David Meynell, said

● Demo terror — see page three

London had witnessed "a patch of anarchy".

The condemnation came as shops, restaurants and other businesses in the West End were clearing up after the rampage.

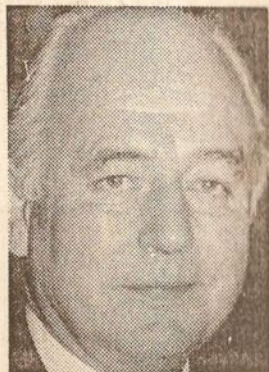
Scotland Yard said 331 were injured, including 58 who needed hospital treatment. Of the 86 injured, two were still in hospital today with head injuries, described as conscious and "stable".

A spokesman said 68 people in custody were appearing before magistrates today. Charges

included public order offences, looting, theft, burglary, and assault. Another 273 people had been released on bail to appear in court at later dates.

Violence flared again briefly yesterday as the Home Secretary inspected the damage. Four people were arrested.

● Fifty-two people have been released on bail to appear before magistrates in Cheltenham in May and June on charges of assaulting police and public order offences in the wake of Saturday's mob violence which followed an anti-poll tax rally in the Gloucestershire town.



● Mr Waddington — Commons statement

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