



METROPOLITAN POLICE

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2nd November 1990

I am writing in response to the Press briefing which was given by your organisation on, 29th October on the subject of the disorder following the Anti Poll Tax demonstration on 20th October in Brixton.

Firstly may I say how disappointed I was that disorder occurred. It was my hope that the march to Brixton Prison and the following picket would be as peaceful as the two marches which preceded them.

At the press briefing you rightly drew attention to my assurance to you on the day before the march that police were not treating this as a re-match of the events of 31st March in Trafalgar Square and that I demanded a high standard of behaviour from all my officers. I stand by that. I understand from a report of the same briefing that some of your stewards and legal advisors have said that some officers did not behave with restraint and further actually provoked violence.

If that is the case I believe that it is important that the allegations should be investigated thoroughly and without delay. The very few complaints of police behaviour which have been made thus far are being investigated and the Police Complaints Authority have been asked to supervise those investigations. I would wish similar supervision to be exercised over the investigation of any further complaints in an effort to give confidence to complainants in the procedure.

May I ask that you forward details of any incidents where you feel police behaviour merits criticism to me together with details of witnesses, assuming that such persons agree. It would also be helpful if copies of the video film on which you rely could be made available to the investigating officer.

Yours sincerely,

J.E. Metcalfe

J.E. Metcalfe
Deputy Assistant Commissioner.

Above is the defensive response by the Metropolitan Police to our Oct 20th Report - protestors allegations are not denied. This follows our exposé of the truth on TV and the resulting climbdown on his threats to ban APT demos. WE CALL ON ALL WHO WITNESSED POLICE BRUTALITY TO WRITE TO THE TSDC (not the Police Complaints Authority) TO BE REFERRED TO SOLICITORS FOR POSSIBLE ACTION.

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE POLICING OF THE ANTI-POLL TAX DEMONSTRATION OF OCTOBER 20TH

TRAFALGAR SQUARE
DEFENDANTS' CAMPAIGN

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☐ Donations appreciated - for the legal and political defence, and welfare, of all those arrested on March 31st and October 20th.

In the event, the feeder march, the main demonstration to Brockwell Park, and the march to Brixton passed off peacefully. However, the Prison picket was violently dispersed by police more than an hour before it was due to finish. Dozens of protestors and bystanders were injured, and there were 135 arrests.

Charges so far are as follows:

Cautioned and released:	5
Possession of Class 'B' drugs:	1
Obstruction:	9
Theft:	1
Criminal damage:	4
Assault:	10
Offensive Weapon:	1
ABH/GBH:	2
Arson:	1
Public Order Act:	
Section 5 (Disorderly conduct):	12
Section 4 (Threatening Behaviour):	22
Section 3 (Affray):	19
Section 2 (Violent disorder):	27
Section 1 (Riot):	1

Given that the maximum sentence for violent disorder is five years, these are very serious charges, and there has to be some question as to whether they are justified given the scale and nature of the events.

On the evening of October 20th, Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) Metcalfe – the senior officer in charge of policing the day's events – held a press conference at which he alleged that "anarchists intent on clashing with police" had precipitated "running battles" through Brixton, that petrol bombs had been thrown, and that future anti-Poll Tax demonstrations might have to be banned.

Press reports on Sunday repeated police allegations and accepted their categorization of the events as "disorder... running battles between police and protestors." Despite the care that the organisers took to inform the police at every stage of their plans and despite the support of the organisers of the main demonstration, the march was also consistently referred to as a 'breakaway' or 'splinter' protest.

The following day, the Home Secretary David Waddington called for a full report on the events, and back-bench Tory MPs echoed DAC Metcalfe's comments about the banning of future anti-Poll Tax marches.

In the light of the seriousness of the allegations, and the threat which now hangs over the right to demonstrate against the Poll Tax, we decided, as the organisers of the demonstration, to produce a report on the day's events.

This report has been compiled from the notes and photographs taken by our 60 legal liaison volunteers, and from statements taken from hundreds of other witnesses. It has not yet been possible to collate all the information we have collected, but given the seriousness of the situation, we felt it imperative to produce a preliminary report at this stage.

It is our sincere hope that this report will be read carefully and with an open mind by those with responsibility for public order, and that it will lead to a serious re-assessment of the role of the police in public order situations such as this.

Section 1: Background

On March 31 1990, the eve of the implementation of the so-called 'Community Charge' or Poll Tax, one of the largest demonstrations this century took place in Central London. Nearly a quarter of a million people marched from Kennington Park to Trafalgar Square, demonstrating conclusively that this flat-rate local tax is the most unpopular piece of legislation enacted since the war.

Many refuse to pay the tax on principle, and many more simply cannot afford it. The latest figures indicate that the overwhelming majority of the population disagree with the tax, and that there are over 12 million non-payers throughout the UK.

The Poll Tax has provoked mass opposition, uniting previously-disparate organizations, and drawing hundreds of thousands of people into political activity for the first time in their lives.

This opposition has taken many different forms, from passive refusal to pay through active door-to-door campaigning to mass demonstrations.

As is now well known, the demonstration on the 31st of March ended in violent clashes between police and protestors.

Politicians, the march organisers, and the police originally concurred in blaming a small minority of the demonstrators – variously identified as 'anarchists' or 'trotskyites' – for precipitating the violence. Since then, however, much evidence has emerged which directly contradicts this version of events.

The Channel 4 documentary 'Battle of Trafalgar' showed that the fighting was actually precipitated by a baton charge into a peaceful sit-down outside Downing Street, and the use of police horses against bewildered and terrified demonstrators in Whitehall.

Nearly 400 people were arrested on the 31st of March, and the police acted quickly to obtain photographs and film of protestors from the broadcast and print media. 'Operation Carnaby' – the police codename for the hunt for those they believe they have identified committing offences – has resulted in over 100 more arrests of anti-Poll Tax activists.

The trials of these people continue in an atmosphere of persecution and hysteria, with defendants being convicted on the flimsiest of evidence, and receiving heavy fines and long prison sentences.

It is widely accepted that the last fifteen years have seen significant changes in the way that public protests, demonstrations and pickets are policed.

There have been consistent allegations – during the Miners' and Printworkers' disputes, for example – that policing has become a political tool to contain opposition to government policy. Serious questions have been raised as to whether the policing of these kinds of events is designed to preserve public order or to criminalise political protest and beat protestors off the streets.

The behaviour of the police in such situations has been the subject of severe criticism from well-informed and respected bodies such as the National Council for Civil Liberties and the Police Complaints Authority. These criticisms have even been acknowledged by the police themselves at the highest possible level – the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Section 2: Chronology of significant events

- 9.30: Picket outside Horseferry Road Magistrate's Court. Plain clothes police, police camera teams and photographers spotted by LLVs at picket. Large numbers of police lining both sides of picket before march starts. (HCDA)
- 10.50: Feeder march from Horseferry Road Magistrate's Courts to Kennington moves off. At this stage there is near constant liaison between the march organisers and the ranking officers present. Large numbers of police down both sides of march. Aggressive policing: people not allowed out of the march. Plain clothes police spotted integrating into the march and police camera crews observing. Police warned demonstrators with drums that they would be arrested if they used them, and a man with a megaphone was also warned twice that he would be arrested if he continued to use it (JT/HCDA).
- 11.53: Police attempt to arrest a man carrying a 'For Sale' sign as an impromptu placard at the corner of Kennington Park Road and Kennington Park Place. After a short discussion, the man was not arrested. However, CV158 instructed CV68 to follow a man who had intervened with the police. CV68 then followed the protestor, clipping his heels for 8—10 minutes. Eventually a section of the march chose to stop and refused to continue until the two officers stopped following him (JT/HCDA).
- 12.07: Despite high profile policing, mood of the march generally good-humoured and jovial as it arrives at the assembly point in John Ruskin Street (HCDA). Police reports referred to "a carnival atmosphere".
- 12.10: TSDC march meets main march in John Ruskin Street.
- 12.13: Joint march moves off towards Brockwell Park. Policing now comparatively relaxed. Much lower density of police down sides of march. (HCDA)
- 13.26: March approaching Brockwell Park on Herne Hill, procession spreads out from allotted lane to cover whole of road. Police make no attempt to prevent this happening. (HCDA)
- 13.53: March comes to a halt at junction of Herne Hill, Half Moon Lane and Milkwood Road, approaching entrance to Brockwell Park. Bottleneck at park entrance. March proceeds very slowly. Loud drumming, chanting and other musical accompaniment along with dancing. (HCDA)
- 14.30: Whole of march now in Brockwell Park. Demonstrators who have climbed on the roof of the building housing the park toilets are surrounded by approximately 70 police. Stewards persuade people on roof to come down. Situation defused. In general, police remain near the main gate, and do not approach the rally. Presence in the park very discreet, consisting mainly of occasional pairs of officers in ordinary uniform. (HCDA, SW)
- 15.30: TSDC contingent forms up as agreed with the police near Herne Hill gates in Brockwell Park. Organisers make contact with Chief Superintendent Hird and Sergeant Noel. (PB)
- 15.45: TSDC march leaves Brockwell Park for Brixton Prison picket. Approximately 2,500—3,000 on march. Control van at head of march. Heavily policed — lines two to three deep on each side of march. Large group of 2—300 police behind demonstrators. Five unmarked minibuses and one coach bring up rear of march. About 40 officers marching hurriedly in loose formation 100 yards behind rear of march. It appears that a number of the police at the rear were initially stood down at Brockwell Park and have been re-mobilized at the last minute. March kept moving at rapid pace. (HCDA)
- 16.10: PC MS112 heard by LLV CM saying loudly, so that marchers could hear: "I'd like to start kicking some people's heads in now", alongside rear of march along Brixton Water Lane. Police shepherd stragglers trying to keep up with the march into the procession and box it in. (HCDA)
- 16.13: Head of march arrives at police line opposite Jebb Avenue (point A). (WL) CS Hird, senior officer in charge of policing the picket, and PS Noel, officer in charge of steward liaison, disappear from view of Chief Steward. (PB) March hemmed in on left-hand lane of Brixton Hill Road with barriers and police standing shoulder-to-shoulder. Stewards prevented from crossing police lines and unable to move due to congestion. Stewards experiencing difficulties communicating with demonstrators as van containing PA and megaphones stopped from meeting head of march. (BS)
- 16.18: Van coming down clear lane of Brixton Hill unloading crowd control barriers in middle of road to reinforce police line. Jeers from crowd. (WL) Two empty drink cans thrown aimlessly from back of picket, landing in the middle of the clear lane. (AC)
- 16.20: A sergeant is observed, passing down the line of police at the side of the picket, instructing officers to fasten chin straps and "watch the sky lads" (ie for missiles). (SW)
- 16.25: Police at front of demonstration fasten chinstraps. Traffic continuing to flow past in opposite direction. (WL) Police two deep at barriers. (AC) Back of march comes to a standstill. (HCDA)
- 16.28: Line of police in yellow jackets march up to the head of the demonstration and reinforce police penning in crowd opposite Jebb Avenue. (WL) Buses 250 and 133 move down clear lane of Brixton Hill.
- 16.30: Report of police seen in riot gear down side street. (ES)
- 16.33: Violent arrest at barrier west side of picket, opposite Jebb Avenue. A protestor is punched in the face and dragged over the barrier landing on his head (DP/SW) Single empty can strikes officer who had removed helmet to fasten chin strap (no apparent effect). Two placards and three more empty cans also flung at police lines. There are chants of "Maggie Thatcher's boot boys" but the crowd is calm. Traffic is still moving North down the clear lane of Brixton Hill (VT1 11.35)
- 16.34: PC NH403 noted to be provoking protestors. One demonstrator kicked barrier and PC NH660 gave a description of person to colleagues. About 300 protestors leave demonstration. As protestors are leaving, police at the rear take the opportunity to push rear forwards. Rear of march pretty good-humoured: drumming, chanting and dancing. Police cordon three deep. (HCDA)

- 16.35: It is evident by now that the police have been deployed in Police Support Units consisting of one inspector, two sergeants and twenty constables. (PSUs are riot formations.) One PSU advances south down the clear lane of Brixton Hill to beyond the head of the demonstration, is briefed by senior officer, deploys along east side of picket, in front of Methodist churchyard railings (point B). (VT1 14.20)
- 16.36: LLV unable to see number on policeman's jacket. Had to ask him for his number. WW515 said it was "new jacket". (PF)
- 16.38: Build up of at least 200 police around George IV pub and Waterworks Lane (LW)
- 16.39: Two PSUs deployed from green coaches to the south of Brixton prison. Briefed by Chief Inspectors. (VT1 20.20)
- 16.40: These officers cordon off Elm Park at junction with Brixton Hill, dividing off protestors on Elm Park from main body of demonstration. Police line continues to form up cordon along east side of Brixton Hill in direction of Endymion Road along fixed railings (point B). (VT2 2.40)
- 16.42: The PSUs deployed in front of the churchyard push forward into the crowd, attacking demonstrators with violent and indiscriminate use of batons. There is much shouting and confusion, and a total of four cans are thrown at the surging police. After 20-30 seconds, the police resume their positions in front of the churchyard, and the crowd becomes calm again. (VT1 23.40) At the same time, 20-30 officers enter the churchyard, clearing demonstrators and making one arrest for apparently no reason (HCDA).
- 16.44: The officer in charge of the PSUs deployed at point B signals repeatedly to police on the other side of the picket, and CI Joy runs South to the end of Jebb Avenue along the clear lane of Brixton Hill. (VT1 25.13)
- 16.45: At front of demonstration, Superintendent Giblin from Stoke Newington (name given to LLV HP) leans over the barrier and grabs a smallish man, aged about 40 and wearing a cap, and violently pushes him into the crowd. (HCDA) Megaphone taken from organiser SW, who was using it to explain the situation to crowd and get them to join in good-natured chanting. No warning given. Crowd respond angrily. One or two placard sticks thrown in high arc. (AS)
- 16.46: Chief Superintendent talking to two vanloads of police who then head towards George IV pub. (AC) Police begin to pull demonstrators off railings outside George IV pub forecourt. No prior warnings given. Inspector then ordered everyone off George IV forecourt, not allowing them to finish their drinks or to ask why they had to move. Police then spend next few minutes picking up glasses and smashing them on the floor. (HCDA, witness RP) Unidentified police officer overheard saying "This is it." (ES)
- 16.47: A police snatch squad enters the crowd opposite Jebb Avenue. 2 or 3 people arrested and pulled violently over barrier. (WL) Police lined up against churchyard railings push forwards across Brixton Hill Road to join police cordon in the middle, separating head of demonstration from main body. After initial pushing and the throwing of two empty cans and a placard stick, crowd becomes calm again. (VT1 28.20) Police in PSU carriers on Endymion Road are seen to have put on riot gear. (HCDA)
- 16.50: LLV asked MM 38 where people expected to go. Reply: "Until we contain this, no-one's going anywhere." LLV asked "Contain what?" No reply. (PF) Riot police emerge from vans in Endymion Road (VT2 20.51).
- 16.51: Organisers SD, DM, PB and IV place themselves between police and protestors at the front of the main section of the demonstration, which is now cut off from the head. Organiser DM appeals to the ranking senior officer present to withdraw his men 10 yards to diffuse the situation and enable the stewards to maintain control. The officer refuses point-blank, and the police lines are reinforced. (VT2 19.27/DM) The organisers appeal to the crowd to remain calm despite provocation.
- 16.52: Police helicopter over crowd. Crowd surrounded on three sides. Shouting, tension and anxiety rising. (EJ) MM154 snatches whistle off a woman because she was blowing it. Inspector Serial no. 503 grabbed LLV saying "You - get out! You've been warned". Man on floor being kicked by police officers. Woman attacked by four officers as she was screaming. (PF)
- 16.53: PC ??651 said to nearby officer "We'll get him later", referring to organiser RR, who was then speaking on the megaphone. (IG) Crowd surrounded vans in Endymion Road. (EJ)
- 16.54: More riot police in Endymion Road. Few empty drinks cans thrown aimlessly. Firecracker goes off releasing smoke. (EJ) Police officers KW149, KW233 and KW214 grabbed white male, punched and kicked him. The victim's name was given to LLV with tape recorder. (LW)
- 16.55: Unidentified police officer announces "Clear area - shield officers will be deployed". (WL) LLV AS and others decide to head back to Brockwell Park to avoid trouble. (AS) Four vans down Waterworks Road: Police in arc round the mouth of Waterworks Road. (ES)
- 16.57: Few missiles thrown at police officers dividing demonstration. Approximately fifty officers charge into the crowd, north down Brixton Hill. (WL) In the course of the charge organiser DM is truncheoned in the head from behind, despite being clearly identified as a steward. (DM) Police officer ??502 hits man on head while he is running away. (EJ) PC KG950 shouted "Yes lads". Charged with six other PCs. (LW) Many demonstrators injured including woman M.

- 16.58: Demonstrator lying on road with split head arrested. (WL) Two demonstrators carrying woman M with head wound towards ambulance in the clear lane of Brixton Hill. Police prevent woman M from entering ambulance. Man objects and is arrested. (WL/PF)
- 16.59: Riot police march out from Endymion Road and form cordon across southbound carriageway of Brixton Hill. (SP) LLV AS and others reach police line at the top of Brixton Water Lane on way back to Brockwell Park. They are turned back.
- 17.00: Police vans drive into retreating crowd at North end of Brixton Hill. (TM/RM) Police HQ car speeding down Brixton Road towards prison. (OO)
- 17.01: Group of approximately six police officers against railings on south side of Endymion Road. Demonstrator repeatedly asks "Can I have your number please?" of unidentified officer in cap. Another officer without epaulettes approaches demonstrator from behind, grabs him by both arms, swings him round and pushes him away. Turns back to face other officers smiling. At least three officers in the said group are not wearing epaulettes. (VT2)
- 17.03: Riot police move in and clear Rush Park from Endymion Road and Brixton Hill. They push and shove protestors standing about (CL/SW)
- 17.04: Police conversation overheard "three guv'nors going around... Don't know what we're doing". Police in riot gear moving in from Waterworks Road (opposite Endymion Road) to form cordon across whole of Brixton Hill. (WL) Protestors between Elm Park Road and Endymion Road forcibly moved Northwards by police.
- 17.05: Riot police in cordon across Brixton Hill North of Endymion Road shout "We're on!" (RM) and charge. (LW) In this charge, young male arrested and handed to officers by the side. PC took him to van and was heard to say "I don't know what I'm arresting him for". Senior officer replied "Arrest him for assault on PC". The two officers were TW5 and YF143. (DW) Three riot vans in Effra Road, 3 more in front of the Ritz. Entrance to Brixton Road sealed off, traffic being diverted up Acre Lane. (AP) Seven riot vans and 40 riot police outside Lambeth Town Hall. (DH)
- 17.06: Police lines block across Brixton Hill: riot vans blocking also. (EJ)
- 17.07: Explosion and smoke, possibly from a firecracker. Vans in Blenheim Gardens containing riot police. (WL) Effra Road car show room riot police run to vans. (AP)
- 17.10: Five police vanloads debus at Brixton Oval, walking up to Brixton Hill stopping traffic. (OO) Police vehicles come down Brixton Hill following line of police. (DW) Effra Road car show room 12 police motorbikes from Brixton Road assemble by vans. (AP/DH) Organiser PB meets DAC Metcalfe clad in full riot gear South of police line. Approaches Metcalfe and demands possible dispersal route for remaining demonstrators left in area between Jebb Avenue and police line driving main body of demonstrators North. DAC Metcalfe, after some initial indecision, directed organiser to inform demonstrators to head South through police lines at Jebb Avenue. (PB)
- 17.11: Two vans blocking Town Hall Parade. (OO)
- 17.12: Police line charge down Brixton Hill. (EJ) Brixton Oval riot vans 4047, 3510, 3773, pull down riot shields. (AP)
- 17.13: Riot police form line at the junction of Brixton Hill and Josephine Avenue. As they begin to charge down Brixton Hill a riot PC identified only by a number on his helmet 25/1, on left most side of road, for no apparent reason slams his riot shield forcefully onto the head of a photographer who was facing away from the charge. (VT2 40.59) Police in riot gear marching up Brixton Hill from Brixton Oval join up with police line driving down Brixton Hill. (EJ) People moving in considerable numbers from Brixton Hill into Brixton Road and towards Tube, mixed with traffic. (AP)
- 17.20: Three vans slowly pushing marchers down Brixton Hill, there is clear space behind them. Some riot police are seen walking back up Brixton Hill. (ES) Police blocking the junction of Brixton Hill and Brixton Water Lane. (SP)
- 17.22: Parked vans opposite 'Hill Autos'. (SD)
- 17.24: Brixton Road blocked off to traffic. (AP)
- 17.25: Riot police serial 8 coming down road near Josephine Avenue. (IG) Riot police given order to quicken advance. Officer 383 pushes man to the ground in a violent fashion. (EJ)
- 17.26: Line of riot police behind demonstrators moving down Brixton Hill. (OO) 12 riot vans in line up Pordon Road. 50 plus officers move into Pordon Road. (SP)
- 17.30: Large crowd being moved towards Brixton tube. Opposite Brixton Community Law Center uniformed police move in front of riot police. (OO) Riot police and vans appear under railway bridge, (CP) Now four vans under railway bridge and 12 to the south of the Tube. (CP) An estimated 50 police assemble opposite the Ritzy and start to march towards those gathered in Brixton Road. (DH)
- 17.31: Numerous police vans following crowd pass 'The Fridge'. (EJ)
- 17.33: Riot police serials 2 and 4 charge outside 'The Fridge' on Brixton Hill. (EJ)
- 17.34: People in Brixton Road break into a run towards the Tube and are pursued by riot police. A total of 28 vans now in immediate area. (CP)
- 17.35: Police move down towards Brixton center from Brixton Water Lane. (SP) Police charge down Electric Avenue. (DH)
- 17.37: More police vans advance down Brixton Hill towards tube. (EJ) Riot police charge in market (AP, DH)
- 17.40: Police on foot moving towards Brixton followed by vans: 4736, 4447, 3167, 4163, 4230, 3654 (e), 3730 (e), 3052(e) plus four others, plus hire van FUU 979V ('(e)' indicates TSG e-branch.)

- 17.41: Further charge by riot police on Brixton Hill. (EJ)
- 17.43: Corner of Brixton Water Lane and Brixton Hill. Police stop car. Short argument ensues and man is dragged out of car by police. (SP) Police in traffic control jackets advance on tube station. (AP) Followed by 250 riot police. (DH)
- 17.48: Riot police charge down Atlantic Road. (AP)
- 17.50: Electric Avenue blocked by police (DH) Brighton Terrace sealed off by police vans. (AP) Riot police charge crowd of people outside Brixton tube. (OO)
- 17.52: Estimated 10-12 riot vans heading towards tube from South and a further 8-10 from the North. (DH)
- 17.55: Police chase demonstrators down Atlantic Road. (DH) Riot police at Brixton tube close gates to tube. The tube station is now closed, no trains are running out of Brixton rail station and no buses are running as Brixton center and surrounding roads are blocked off by police vans. (OO, PB)
- 17.58: Area in front of tube now clear, with crowd being forced down Atlantic Road and Electric Avenue. (DH)
- 18.02: Number of riot vans go down Atlantic Road. (DH) Group of 100-200 protestors pushed north by about 300 police. Forced to move at a fast walk/jog (including young man with broken leg who, having lost his crutches was forced to hobble on his cast) all the way up Brixton Road to the Oval tube station where police chased/threw protestors down the up escalator. (SW, HCDA)

Section 3: Conclusions

The events that we have outlined above raise some very serious questions about the policing of our demonstration on October 20th, and by implication, the policing of past and future anti-Poll Tax protests.

The most important question must be why the police felt it necessary to disperse violently a peaceful demonstration more than an hour before it was due to end.

From our observations it is clear that there were at least 3,500 police officers deployed or on standby in Brixton. Given that there were at most 4,000 protestors, and that at least 300 had left within half an hour of our arrival at Brixton Prison, there were therefore more than enough police to deal with any situation that might have arisen.

Right up to the point at which the first police charge took place, the demonstration remained peaceful, and the situation was under control.

It is clear that the police came prepared for violence and that their action in dispersing the demonstration had little to do with maintaining public order. Indeed the decision to disperse the demonstration appears to have been made almost immediately the march arrived at Brixton Prison. A number of observations support this:

- The deployment along the eastern pavement of Brixton Hill of police who were later used to divide the demonstration and to clear a space for the further deployment of short shield units. This began at 16.35, only 20 minutes after the head of the march had arrived.
- At 16.45 a few minutes before the first baton charge by yellow Jacketed officers, two vantage points from which protestors and bystanders would have been able to observe the police attack - the George IV pub and the railing on the Methodist Churchyard - were cleared, in one case with a provocative arrest, and in the other case with unnecessary force.
- The order to fasten chin straps and to watch out for missiles (16.20) and the deployment of police in riot formation PSUs (16.35) all came along before the first placard sticks and empty cans were thrown in response to apparently random attacks.
- The police have alleged that the first arrests were of missile throwers. This claim is directly contradicted by the evidence that we have marshalled above. In fact missiles were thrown by angry protestors in response to arrests.
- On a number of occasions, organisers appealed to the police to withdraw a few yards in order to claim the situation. They refused point blank even to consider this.
- At 17.55 the police had, in a pincer movement on Brixton Road trapped the majority of the protestors and a large number of innocent bystanders outside Brixton tube station. They had closed the station and refused to reopen it despite a fax sent by the march organisers to the operations room in New Scotland Yard appealing for them to do so in order to facilitate a peaceful dispersal.

We regard this a clear evidence that the police intended to make the maximum number of arrest. We suggest that this should not be one of the prime motivating factors in the dispersal of a demonstration.

In addition, and despite the assurances that we were given by DAC Metcalfe, it is clear that many officers were treating the days events as an opportunity to 'get their own back' for the clashes in Trafalgar Square.

This is demonstrated by the attitude of a number of police on the feeder march and later in Brixton. Comments such as "Well, that's on call, then" made to arrested protestors and "They're all scum, let's get the lot of them" are not indicative of a reasonable outlook or of professional detachment.

There also seems to be a contradiction between the apparent confident expectation of a peaceful demonstration shown by the senior officers involved in negotiations with the march organisers prior to the day, and what could generously be called contingency plans such as the cancelling of police leave and the block-booking of Horseferry Road Magistrate's Court. Such contradictions do not serve to foster mutual trust and respect between the police and the organisers of demonstrations in the future.

The question as to the motivation for the police's violent dispersal of the demonstration is further heightened by their obstructive attitude towards the organisers of the picket. In effect they prevented communication among the stewards and between the stewards and the demonstrators. Several specific instances illustrate this attitude:

- The organisers' van, which was equipped with the public announcement system necessary for communication with such a large demonstration, as well as additional megaphones, was not allowed to join the organisers at the head of the march.
- The police did not allow stewards access to one another. Since the police had packed the crowd so densely along one side of the road, the only means of moving from one part of the picket to another was along the southbound carriageway of Brixton Hill. Stewards were not allowed past the police lines and onto this carriageway. Thus they were prevented from communicating either with each other or with parts of the demonstration that were beyond earshot. Their only means of communication was by cellphones, with which only four were equipped.
- At 16.40 the police did provide one steward with a megaphone to assist his communication with the crowd. However, after the space of about one minute this was snatched by two ranking officers without either explanation or negotiation. This in itself was seen by the crowd as an inflammatory act.
- Most seriously, however, both the stewards and the named organiser of the Picket were denied access to the commanding officers. In particular, the steward Liaison officer Sgt Noel and 'Bronze' commander Chief Superintendant Hird absented themselves from the front of the demonstration upon its arrival at the prison, and could not thereafter be located, despite numerous appeals.

It is clear that as soon as the head of the picket arrived outside the prison all communication and authority structures, previously agreed with the police, were ignored. Instead, the police immediately began to behave as if dealing with a serious public disorder, a situation which by no means prevailed at that time. This can only lead us to conclude that the police were in fact putting into operation a pre-planned series of moves designed to disrupt and disperse the picket.

Police allegations that the protest was hi-jacked by a violent minority are simply not borne out by the facts. To the contrary, it appears that, in the face of enormous provocation and excessive violence from the police, demonstrators showed great courage and restraint, and their behaviour deserves to be applauded.

The above chronology also gives us cause for concern in other areas, most notably the large number serious injuries sustained by demonstrators, particularly head wounds, a result of the vicious and indiscriminate use of truncheons, and secondly the large amount of evidence from throughout the day concerning the singling out of individual protestors as targets for the police well before any disturbance.

More generally, we believe that this report should lead to a serious re-assessment of the way that such events are both policed and reported. In particular, it must give one pause for thought in any consideration of events of March 31st.

Finally, some of DAC Metcalfe's comments subsequent to the events noted above also give cause for concern; particularly his implication that future anti-Poll Tax demonstrations may be banned. We are concerned that DAC Metcalfe feels he has the executive power to make pronouncements about people's right to demonstrate, a fundamental right in any democracy. Such a right extends not only to the freedom to organise protests but also the right to protect those protests from attack and wilful disruption by the police.

Recommendations

- 1) The immediate suspension of DAC Metcalfe, pending a full inquiry into his handling of the situation. The suspension of such a senior officer is a serious step, but one which we believe to be justified in view of his role as the commander-in-chief of police operations on the day, his failure to enforce the assurances which he gave to the organisers about the behaviour of his officers, and his responsibility for the decision to deploy short shield units and to disperse the picket.
- 2) The criminal prosecution of other officers who have been identified attacking demonstrators, using unwarranted violence, or demonstrating provocative behaviour.
- 3) The setting up of a public inquiry into the policing of anti-Poll Tax protests, especially the events of March 31st and October 20th, with a view to seriously re-considering whether the police can be allowed to take responsibility for public order in such situations.
- 4) The immediate suspension of all the charges against protestors arising from March 31st and October 20th.