

Dutch police fire on football fans

Government calls for tougher laws against "hooliganism"

Simon Wheelan
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Last Sunday evening, armed police opened fire on football supporters in Rotterdam city centre, injuring four, one seriously. This followed a match where the local team, Feyenoord, had secured the league title. This is the first time that Dutch police have ever opened fire on a disturbance.

Official news sources have been sending out conflicting accounts of the events which led up to the shooting. It appears that the celebrations had degenerated into looting and fighting amongst a small minority of revellers. Where the accounts differ is the exact circumstances that led police to act in this unprecedented manner. Some say that supporters were cornered by the police before they opened fire. Others maintain that it was the riot police who cornered the crowd and then let off warning shots into the air. When this failed to elicit the desired response they shot directly into the crowd.

Stories started to circulate that it was the police who had come under gunfire from looters. However, only one police officer was injured during the disturbances, when a stone thrown by someone in the crowd hit him in the neck. No one was arrested for possession of a firearm.

"It's a bad thing but it was an emergency situation. The police were surrounded and attacked by hooligans and it was a last resort", a Rotterdam police spokesman told Reuters news agency on Monday. In Dutch political circles little criticism was directed at the police methods. Concerns were raised only about how the situation deteriorated to such a degree and how security can be tightened in the future.

Bram Pepper the Dutch Home Secretary, exclaimed on national TV, "The world has been turned on its head when police have to draw their guns like this". Pepper has already expressed his desire to push through

legislation granting the authorities extensive powers to make pre-emptive arrests upon those they believe may be planning football-related violence. He said he was determined to introduce such a new law as an issue of utmost priority, in light of Holland hosting the Euro 2000 football tournament.

The British *Guardian* newspaper quoted Pepper saying, "When something is taking place and we think there may be trouble, we need to be able to pick people up and say 'Sorry boys, this isn't for you'."

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