

Britain: Calls for public inquiry into police brutality at G20 summit

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Organisers and groups involved in the protest against the G20 summit in London have called for an independent public inquiry into the brutal policing of the demonstrations last week, following the death of a man on his way home from work on the evening of April 1.

Ian Tomlinson, a resident of the City of London, was on his way home from the newsagent where he worked when he was caught up in the police cordon surrounding protesters at the Bank of England. His death is being investigated by the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

During the two day summit, police attacked many protesters, arrested a total of 127 people, and detained many more. On April 1 some 85 people were arrested. Police also raided two squats in the London area and attacked peaceful protests at the Stock Exchange, the Bank of England and other locations.

On April 4, several hundred protesters participated in an “Emergency protest against police G20 brutality” outside the Bank of England, where they demanded an “independent public inquiry into the instances of police violence that occurred throughout the week and to establish the full circumstances of Tomlinson's death”.

The initial statement by the City of London police, following a post-mortem, said that Tomlinson “died of natural causes” and had “suffered a sudden heart attack while on his way home from work”. The police claimed that they were unable to help Tomlinson when he collapsed as they faced a hail of missiles from the crowd. Sections of the media immediately rushed to back up the police version of events.

Statements from people at the demonstration refuting these claims have appeared on numerous Web sites and blogs. One of the eye witnesses described them as “ridiculous” and added the “protesters were there helping from the word go”. He described how his friend who had first aid knowledge tried to help Tomlinson. Another said, “The only attitude from people in the crowd was to help this guy who was clearly hurt”.

Others have said that the immediate actions by police following Tomlinson's collapse may have led to his death. According to witnesses, the police refused to allow people present to help him and did not administer any life saving cardiopulmonary resuscitation to Tomlinson.

An eye-witness, Peter Apps, said, “Four police with two police medics came. They told her [the first aider] to 'move along'. Then they pushed her forcibly away from him. They refused to listen to her [the first aider] when she tried to explain his condition”. According to the Indymedia Web site, “The first aider, who did not wish to be named, said ‘The police surrounded the collapsed man. I was standing with the person who'd called 999. The ambulance dispatcher wanted to talk to the police, the phone was being held out to them, but the police refused’”. Another witness, Elias Stoakes, said, “We didn't see them [the police] perform CPR”.

The *Observer* newspaper on April 5 contains accounts claiming that Tomlinson was the victim of police violence and had been “assaulted” by them immediately prior to collapsing. One witness said that he was attacked by the police and struck about the head with a baton.

Photographer Anna Branthwaite, described by the *Observer* as, “an experienced press photographer”, has told the IPCC, “I can remember seeing Ian Tomlinson. He was rushed from behind by a riot officer with a helmet and shield two or three minutes before he collapsed”.

Branthwaite added in her testimony, “He [Mr Tomlinson] was not a mouthy kid or causing problems, but the police seemed to have lost control and were trying to push protesters back. The police had started to filter people into a side street off Cornhill. There were a few stragglers who were just walking through between the police and protesters. Mr Tomlinson was one of those”.

Amiri Howe reveals how he saw Tomlinson being hit “near the head” with a police baton. The paper states that, “Howe took one of a sequence of photographs that show a clearly dazed Mr Tomlinson being helped by a bystander”.

Another protester said the man she later recognised as Tomlinson was pushed aggressively from behind by police officers. She said, “I saw a man violently propelled forward, as though he'd been flung by the arm, and fall forward on his head. He hit the top front area of his head on the pavement. I noticed his fall particularly because it struck me as a horrifically forceful push by a policeman and an especially hard fall; it made me wince”.

The *Observer* published two photos showing Tomlinson on

the ground shortly before he died. In a clearly distressed state with his arm in the air, he is seen gesturing towards a group of riot police.

Speaking of Tomlinson's death, Liberal Democrat MP David Howarth said, "Eventually there will have to be a full inquest with a jury. It is a possibility this death was at police hands".

Tomlinson's death took place within the context of an unprecedented police operation costing £7.2 million, the most expensive in police history. According to official figures, "Operation Glencoe" involved 2,500 police officers from seven forces. The policing included erecting a "ring of steel", including barriers and police checkpoints, at the ExCeL centre in the London Docklands where the G20 met, the use of helicopters, snipers mounted police, riot vans and dogs. The *Daily Telegraph* reported, "Planners have successfully made this one of London's most inaccessible and inhospitable venues for a protest by closing the nearest station and forcing protesters to walk 20 minutes along a major dual carriageway, and across a flyover, to a holding pen, signposted as being 620 metres away from the ExCeL itself".

Another source claimed that the police operation was much larger than official figures. On April 1, the first day of the protest, the *Times* published an article stating that there were, "Up to 5,000 police officers drawn from more than 30 forces...preparing to confront anarchists and environmentalists".

It added that the, "Metropolitan Police says that 2,500 officers will be on duty in the Square Mile alone today, but sources say that number is a deliberate public understatement intended to play down the seriousness of the situation".

Prior to the demonstration, organisers had stated their concerns about inflammatory and provocative comments from senior police officers. Commander Simon O'Brien of London's Metropolitan Police said the police had "well-rehearsed tactics" and "will not tolerate any people breaking the law, attacking buildings, people, or our officers".

He then warned, "We're up for it and we're up to it".

The *Times* cited a posting on a police Internet forum where one officer spoke of "going up against the scum of our society, the immature thrill seekers and anonymous cowards who hide in large crowds with scarves pulled over their faces chanting meaningless slogans to hurl whatever is at hand at the lines of police deployed to maintain order. So boys and girls, keep your chin straps tight, your batons ready and shields high".

The name given to the police operation—Glencoe—refers to a Highland massacre in Scotland that occurred in 1692 in which 78 people are said to have died.

Such a vast operation was utilised not in response to an "unprecedented" scale of protest but against a few thousand people who attended the demonstrations on April 1 and 2.

An article by *Financial Times* journalist Matthew Engel on April 1 reported his impressions of the police brutality outside the Bank of England. Several thousand protesters were hemmed

in and held without food, drink or access to a toilet for hours. Anyone who tried to leave was asked for their name and address and required to have a photo taken by the police. Those who refused were forced back into the pen.

Engel said, "There were thousands of people outside the bank. The mood was emphatically not—repeat *not*—threatening. I have felt more threatened in a primary school playground". He added, "The crowd was young, good-humoured and happy to be there".

The "mood changed" when there were "reports of the attack on the RBS building, which apparently involved about 20 people, or about 0.1 per cent of those present. Immediately, the police decided to make themselves the centre of attention. They emerged in full Robocop gear".

In the *Times* April 3, Tom Whipple said of the operation, "Most of all, it is the story of how the police wilfully criminalised and alienated 4,000 innocent people".

He had initially opposed the view of one protester who had said the police are "here for a fight." In his commentary Whipple stated, "Seven hours later—seven hours of detention without food or water—I had come to believe that I was the one who had been naive".

The tactic used by the police against the Bank of England demonstrators is known as "kettling". Photos taken by demonstrators have been posted on numerous blogs showing the crowd being squashed by the police. Some of the images show demonstrators having to use the streets in which to urinate. (<http://www.tanya-n.com/?p=222>)

The attack on two squats was also carried out as a military operation involved up to 100 riot police, armoured vehicles and door opening equipment. At the Earl Street squat near Liverpool Street Station, witnesses saw 50 to 60 riot police. According to media reports at least 80 people were taken from the squats with 4 people being charged. They were led out one by one in handcuffs before being filmed, placed against a wall, searched and handcuffed.



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