

Britain: More video evidence of police brutality during G20 protests

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17 April 2009

As further evidence emerged of police brutality during protests around the G20 summit of world leaders in London earlier this month, Metropolitan Police Commission Sir Paul Stephenson ordered a review of public order policing in the capital.

The move was forced on the Metropolitan Police after new video footage—showing a vicious police assault on a young female—provided further proof of indiscriminate police violence against peaceful protesters.

The video footage (which can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj9TeRQsKr0>), was shot on April 2. In it a tall, heavily built police officer is seen to push the woman, subsequently identified as Nicola Fisher. When she protests he strikes her across the face with the back of his gloved fist. As others remonstrate with him, he appears to adopt a martial arts pose, and then draws his baton, striking the woman on her legs and felling her to the ground. As the crowd shouts “shame on you”, he moves out of sight behind other officers.

The film is especially damning as the assault took place during a central London vigil to demand an inquiry into the death of Ian Tomlinson during protests the previous day.

Tomlinson, who was not involved in the demonstrations but was making his way home from work, had become caught up in a police “kettling” operation, in which hundreds of protesters were cordoned off into side streets by riot police and held for hours.

Police initially claimed that Tomlinson had died of natural causes and that they had been prevented from aiding the father of nine by protesters throwing missiles and obstructing their path.

But video footage and still photographs showed that Tomlinson had been walking away from police lines when he was viciously struck from behind with a baton by a masked police officer, causing him to fall and hit his head on the pavement. He died moments later.

Having been forced to acknowledge the attack, police attempted to dismiss it as an isolated incident.

Not only does this latest video prove otherwise, but the *Guardian* has posted additional footage and stills of other incidents during the protests. They confirm protester’s charges that the assault on Tomlinson was just one of many meted out by police against peaceful protesters and bystanders.

Black propaganda

In the days leading up to the summit, hysterical media coverage warned that protesters were intent on causing extensive damage and widespread disorder. It is now clear that this was black propaganda aimed at providing a pretext for a coordinated campaign of police violence and intimidation.

In the most expensive operation in police history, “Operation Glencoe” involved 2,500 officers erecting barriers and manning cordons and checkpoints around the G20 venue.

So widespread and indiscriminate were the police actions that journalists, news cameramen, investment bankers and others were caught up in the melee.

For example, writing in Rupert Murdoch’s *Times* newspaper, Tom Whipple, who was reporting on the protests, told how he spent seven hours trapped in a small cordon “watching police officers charge with truncheons and shields and ... watching peaceful protesters retreat bloodied.”

He argued that the “police action—detaining thousands of innocent people without charge, and then systematically squeezing them over a period of

hours—seemed guaranteed to produce violence... many of the police involved seemed not just prepared, but eager, for a fight.”

Whipple reported that he subsequently received supportive emails from others present that day corroborating his account. He cited one, written by a Steven McManus, who had been passing through the area on April 1.

McManus, a barrister and a former special constable, told Whipple that he had been involved in a friendly chat with some police officers, surrounding some protesters. As he left to make his way to the Underground, there was a sudden charge and McManus said he was “struck from behind by a baton and pushed forward towards the steps of Bank Underground.

“I was more than a little shocked at having been hit. The officer who had struck me was one I had been chatting to moments earlier, who knew about my City Police connection, and to whom I had my back turned. I remonstrated with the officer as to why he had hit me—his reply being: ‘F*** off, move back’.”

Territorial Support Group

The police have been forced onto a back foot by the various video images. Such is public outrage that even the tame supposedly Independent Police Complaints Commission has been forced to investigate the incidents involving Tomlinson and Fisher.

But no confidence can be placed in Stephenson’s review, which will no doubt present the incidents as aberrations. Already the justifications are being rehearsed, i.e., that they are the outcome of the stressful position officers are placed in during a major policing operation.

In truth, the officers implicated in the assault on Tomlinson and Fisher did exactly as they were trained. Both belong to the Territorial Support Group, the successor of the notorious Special Patrol Group (SPG) that was active during the period of student protests and militant labour struggles during the 1970s.

Described as “on the frontline of policing”, the Metropolitan Police web site boasts that the TSG has policed “every major public order incident in the capital”. Consisting of “multi skilled and adaptable team of officers”, TSG training includes the use of firearms, tasers and “plain clothes” tactics. It also provides anti-terrorism support.

The TSG officer shown striking Tomlinson is

wearing a balaclava and helmet that leaves only his eyes visible. His police number is hidden. While the face of the officer involved in the Fisher incident is visible, his police number is also obscured.

What type of policing requires that its practitioners are unidentifiable?

An indication is given by the agreement of the Metropolitan Police in March this year to pay £60,000 in damages relating to an assault by TSG officers.

After six years of denial, lawyers acting for the police admitted in the high court that Babar Ahmad, 34, had been subject to a vicious and sustained assault by six TSG members.

The court heard that Ahmad, who was arrested under suspicion of terrorist related offences in London in December 2003, had been repeatedly punched in the head and stamped on during his arrest. He was attacked again in the police van, placed in a neck hold and threatened, “You will remember this day for the rest of your life.”

The court also heard that four of the TSG officers involved in Ahmad’s arrest had 60 allegations of assault against them, of which almost two-thirds were made by black or Asian males.



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