

POLICING THE 1981 BRITISH 'RIOTS'

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The following paper is based upon an earlier, unpublished paper entitled 'Riots, Crime and Authoritarian Politics in Britain' which was presented at the 1982 ANZAAS conference in Sydney. Whilst the original paper was concerned with several aspects of the 1981 'riots' in Britain and their prehistory and aftermath - race, immigration, youth, economic decline, authoritarian politics - this is a shortened version of the paper which focuses principally upon the question of policing and the 'riots'. There has been no attempt to exhaustively update the paper in the light of events and debate since it was written, although it does include references to the more important recent contributions to what is a large and growing literature on 'the riots'. The paper by Mike Brogden, elsewhere in this issue of the ACJ, deals in greater, and more up-to-date, detail with political struggles around policing in Merseyside both before and since July 1981. It demonstrates the local and quite specific dimensions of this struggle, and hence also of any analysis which would seek to inform it. This specificity is necessarily lost in the following account, which seeks to identify the important general tendencies apparent firstly, in the organisation of urban policing in Britain in the 70s and 80s, and secondly, in the political responses to 'the riots'. Its general conclusions do not warrant serious modification in the light of the events since it was written. The overall authoritarian trust within British politics has deepened, especially under the influence of the popular celebration of Britain's imperialist past afforded by the Falklands war. And this aided electoral consolidation of rightism in the 1983 national election. However, as Brogden's paper again shows, local struggles over popular democratic control of the police (an important element in that authoritarian bloc) are also a central feature of British politics in the 1980s.

INTRODUCTION

"If, as our researches show, Britain is moving towards 'two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal', the police will have had no small part to play in that polarisation.... Popular morality has come to define black people out of society as 'an alien wedge' or as 'swamping' British culture, and the police no longer just reflect or reinforce that morality: they re-create it - through stereotyping the black section of society as muggers and criminals and illegal immigrants. Deriving their sanction from popular morality they are now to become the arbiters of that morality...."

(Police Against Black People, Institute of Race Relations evidence to the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure, 1979)

The subject of this paper is the events of April and July, 1981, in Britain, now collectively referred to as 'the riots'. I intend to focus upon developments in British policing, and the policing of certain sections of the population in particular, as one of the crucial precipitating forces relating to these events. The paper is necessarily rather general, schematic and uneven.

By way of a preface to the description and analysis of the relevant events I would like to say a few words about the widespread use of the term 'riot' to describe them. This is perhaps more than of mere prefatory significance as the use of the term 'riot' is not an innocent and neutral part of the interpretation of those events: it actively determines and constrains the form that interpretation will take. Employed alongside such terms as 'the mob' and 'indiscriminate looting', as it was in the popular media at the time and since, the term 'riot' has powerful emotive connotations, indicating a wholesale breakdown of social order and implicitly specifying and legitimating a particular set of repressive responses.

For those who would seek to interpret the events from a greater distance and more sympathetically the term 'riot' is, however, no less constraining. It leaves the impression of persons acting either spontaneously, wantonly and indiscriminately or as merely passive instruments of a larger set of economic and social conditions: unemployment, urban decay, etc. This permits denunciation or disapproval of the actual behaviour to be allied to a liberal concern to understand and remedy the underlying conditions (see Scarman, 1981: para 2.31). The problem becomes safely appropriated into conventional political, academic and reform discourses. The focus is upon the disorder and what to do to avoid its repetition. The complex pre-histories, the accumulation of more mundane daily oppressions, which made the events possible are expunged or at least forced into the background. I would like to suggest that in seeking some understanding of these events we should be less concerned to offer remedies which deny the political significance and intelligibility of the action in itself than to explore some of the historical processes which made them possible as meaningful, politically significant responses to social oppression. So much of what is usually taken for granted in liberal and commonsense thinking has been unavoidably thrown into question by these events; I refer here particularly to the role of the police.

Our task is not to shore up the commonsense, to paper over the cracks and reconstitute an image of police and state as the self-evident keepers of order merely responding to the forces of disorder. But rather to question and break down further such self-evidences - to turn up the neglected history of the state's presence in the creation of disorder.

I say this advisedly for having returned from England in late August of 1981 one of the first things I read in the newspapers was the announcement of the formation in the N.S.W. police force of a Tactical Response Group, not unlike the Special Patrol Group (S.P.G.) that has played such an infamous role in the pre-history of the 1981 events in Britain.

This decision was taken seemingly as a matter of internal technical reorganisation, without any wider political or popular media debate. Now that it is with us the need for

it will undoubtedly arise and when it does the language of 'riot', indiscriminate and senseless violence and so on will be trotted out to close off any debate about what this squad does and what role it plays in our daily life, and, in particular, in the daily lives of the more powerless groups among us.

With these preliminary remarks in mind, I would now like to move on to sketch in some descriptive details with respect to the events before discussing the role of the police.

The 'Riots' of April and July 1981.

The 4 major areas involved were Brixton and Southall in London, Toxteth in Liverpool and Moss Side in Manchester, all inner-city areas with large West Indian or Asian communities. By mid-July there were, however, disturbances involving street confrontations between youth and the police in many other cities and towns throughout the country.

It is important to recognise that the pattern of events in the different areas was not identical and that there are important local differences and factors. Care must be taken in drawing general conclusions. There are some common threads though. In each case the specific events started out as, or ended up being, major confrontations between local youth and the police. In Brixton, Toxteth and Manchester they arose out of specific incidents involving the police and the arrest of one or more (usually West Indian) youths. The attempted and sometimes successful rescue of an arrested youth by others led to a generalised confrontation involving the burning out of police cars and buildings, street battles, the looting of shops and the causing of serious and widespread injuries on both sides and in one case the death of a disabled youth at the hands of the police. Events in Southall differed in that the original confrontation was between local Asian youth and fascist skinheads who had bussed into the area to attend a concert at a local pub. After some of them attacked a local Asian shopkeeper the youth of the community besieged the pub and drove the fascists out of the area. When the police moved in the struggle of the Asian youth shifted against them. The Southall events reveal one distinctive factor worthy of emphasis. They started out as a response to the perceived

failure of the police to protect the community from racist violence, and not simply as anti-police. This grievance goes back a long way and its basis is well-documented, especially for the Asian community in Southall and also in relation to the other areas involved as well (see, for example, Institute of Race Relations, 1979). The Southall events thus confirm the general pattern in that the crucial, unavoidable issue was that of the police and policing in these areas, but they indicate that the larger issue surrounding the events was one of differential policing rather than mere over-policing; i.e. the under-policing of racist violence in these communities and not merely the perceived systematic police harassment of Asian and West Indians.

If race is to be regarded as a common thread in the events, this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that large numbers of whites were involved as well, especially in Toxteth, and that the actions for the most part were not directed at whites as such but at the police, at visible symbols of racism and at particular shops and pubs associated with racist practices in the past. In this respect, the violence and attacks on property were not wholly indiscriminate.

One final factor of general significance that should be noted is the police response in the course of the events. Each of the areas has suffered a long history of 'hard' policing through special squads and a particular style of 'saturation' policing which will be discussed later. However, the particular confrontations of that summer saw the full panoply of repressive police technology and tactics introduced onto the streets of the mainland for the first time. Apart from the by then familiar use of riot shields, helmets and other equipment, C.S. gas was employed in Toxteth for the first time in a public order situation in mainland Britain. And it was the use of what is known as the 'mobile pursuit tactic' that killed the disabled youth in Toxteth. This involved driving vehicles at high speed at crowds in an attempt to force them off the streets. It was systematically employed in both Toxteth and Manchester. Plastic bullets were also on hand but went unused. There is no doubt that the events confirmed

the emergence of a new era of policing in Britain and discussion of this restructuring of policing will form the central part of this paper.

Police and Black Youth in the 70s

Since the early 1970's the police have responded to developments in the West Indian communities - the growth of an oppositional street culture in particular - with a sustained campaign of surveillance and criminalisation of black youth (see Scraton, 1982). The fact that levels of street crime of a violent nature are high in these areas and that the involvement of black youth, as of anyone, in such forms of crime is a legitimate source of concern within and outside these communities is not sufficient to explain this response on the part of the police. These are generalised forms of control which utilise legitimate fear of violent street crime as a pretext for their operation. This is revealed by internal police documents and the use of crime statistics by the police since the early 1970's. The persuasive statistic that muggings had increased by 129% between 1969 and 1973 was widely publicised in 1973 as the basis for a crackdown on street crime. Clearly, mugging is not a legal category and the researches of Hall, et al revealed that it was not used, at least by the media, to refer to any specific crime until August, 1972, at the earliest (Hall, et al 1978: p.2-3). Their exhaustive examination and juggling of police statistics on reported crime for those years failed to reveal the basis for the statistic and the police have never made available the criteria for selecting and defining crimes as muggings. A 1975 secret police report on street crime in South London repeated similar statistics for the period before and after 1973 and 'demonstrated' that it was young blacks who were largely responsible for the increasing crime rates. However, it also indicated that only a very small proportion (4%) of young blacks were involved in crime in any serious way (Sunday Times 19.4.81). It has been the former statistics only, and the assumptions they supported, that have been relied upon to adopt a specific style of policing in relation to young blacks since the early 1970's. The metropolitan police, along with other forces, have consistently

sought to reproduce the image of young blacks as muggers, and mugging as the principal threat to social order on the streets. This is again obvious in the criminal statistics produced since the events of 1981 year in which the Metropolitan police singled out the rise in reported street crimes (including muggings) as being of special concern and even broke down the particular highlighted statistic by district and colour of the offender. The fact is that upon closer examination the category highlighted in this way constituted a mere 3% of the total crime rate, the smallest percentage of all categories, and by no means represented the one in which the steepest rises had taken place. No racial or area breakdown, however, was given for other categories of crime (Guardian Weekly, 21.3.82). Other facts about so-called muggings which the Home Office chose not to publicise widely included the fact that the victims of muggers tended to be young rather than old, male rather than female and were unlikely to be seriously hurt (Guardian Weekly, 28.3.82).

The struggle being waged since the early 1970's between police and black youth has been less about crime than about the use of public space. Such struggles, by the way, are not by any means new. A glance back to the nineteenth and the early part of this century would reveal that the police had to wage the same sorts of struggles over many years in working class communities (see Storch, 1981 Cohen 1979. And, it might be added, such struggles are never finally resolved as events, especially in Toxteth, have recently revealed.

The strategies employed by the police against young blacks do reveal the nature and object of the struggle being waged. This is especially so of police tactics adopted in South London (where Brixton is located) since the early 1970's. The police have sought to impose a virtual curfew on young blacks through the use of the notorious "sus" laws (now repealed) and the employment of saturation policing involving massive 'stop and search' expeditions. "Sus" refers to section 4 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act which makes it an offence to be 'a suspected person loitering with intent to commit an arrestable offence' (see Demuth 1978). The police under the provision did not have to prove intent to commit

a crime or even that there was anything to steal. Their subjective impression was usually sufficient to found a conviction. In 1976 over 300 persons were imprisoned or sent to a detention centre for 'sus' convictions (Ibid: p.35). West Indians were disproportionately represented in 'sus' prosecutions. The extent to which it was collectively perceived as a systematic form of oppression can perhaps be gleaned from the fact that the samples in two court studies of 'sus' prosecution revealed not guilty plea rates of 82% and 97% respectively (ibid; ALARM, undated), despite the difficulties of mounting a defence in such cases. A concerted and ultimately successful campaign for the repeal of 'sus' was mounted from within the communities. Conspiracy to rob and attempted theft charges were also widely used against black youth indicating the pre-emptive role of the police and their sensitivity, not so much to crime, as to the mere presence of young blacks on the streets. In the early mugging scare it was often the police themselves who turned out to be the 'victims' of the attempted theft.

The police also periodically employed what has come to be called 'saturation' policing in these areas. This usually involved sending in the Special Patrol Group (S.P.G.) for massive 'stop and search' exercises. I say more about the Special Patrol Group later. It is a specialist squad, riot-trained and equipped and used widely as part of a fire-brigade style of policing in which such highly mobile squads are sent into particular trouble-spots to suppress the apparent sources of trouble. The S.P.G. were used in South London increasingly over the 1970's to saturate particular areas and systematically stop and search people on the street. This often involved the setting up of road-blocks and extensive raids on poorer housing estates as well. The 1976 figures on S.P.G. stop and search reveal that out of almost 61,000 less than 4,000 arrests were made (about 6%). (See Friend and Metcalf, 1981: p.163). Such operations were, however, used for low level intelligence gathering operations and to maintain a constant level of intimidation in the streets. This style of policing led to an enormous deterioration in police-black relations throughout the latter half of the 1970's. This reached a pitch at the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival (an annual West Indian cultural event) and again in the following year at Lewisham in

South London where police protection for a blatantly provocative National Front march through a large West Indian area led to massive confrontations with demonstrators and the use of riot shields for the first time in mainland Britain. I have already suggested that these forms of policing were collectively experienced and collectively resented by West Indian youth. This was reflected in the growing tendency for bystanders and other members of the community to mobilise and seek to effect a rescue when police tried to arrest a black person (ibid: p.157). The police were indeed experienced as an army of occupation, and were increasingly responded to as such.

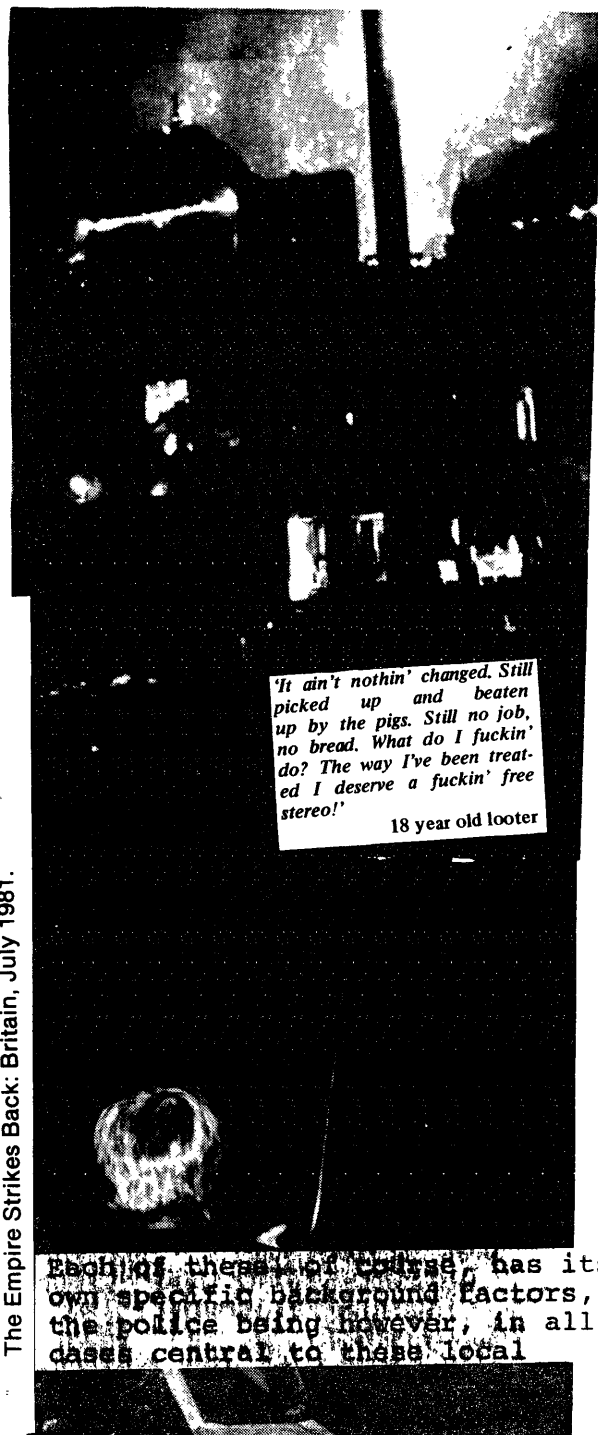
In the week before the April 1981 events in Brixton the local police conducted a massive stop and search exercise in the area, called "Swamp 81". The police instructions for the operation are quoted in the Scarman Report (1981: p.57):

"The purpose of this Operation is to flood identified areas on "L" District to detect and arrest burglars and robbers. The essence of the exercise is therefore to ensure that all officers remain on the streets and success will depend on a concentrated effort of "stops" based on powers of surveillance and suspicion proceeded by persistent and astute questioning."

The report goes on to outline the results of the operations:

"In the course of the operation, the ten squads between them made some 943 "stops" as a result of which 118 people were arrested. Slightly more than half of the people stopped were black. More than two-thirds were aged under twenty-one. 75 charges resulted from these "stops": these covered a variety of alleged offences, but included only 1 for robbery, 1 for attempted burglary and 20 charges of theft or attempted theft." (ibid)

If this is typical of the style of policing that had created an extremely volatile situation in the black community of South London on the eve of the events in Brixton, it would be a mistake not to recognise the connections between these many developments and the more generalised conflict which followed in July. Simon Frith has argued that police-black relations represented in many respects merely a more intense version of a struggle going on generally between working class youth and the police for the use of public space (1981: p.13). Although in the case of Southall there is a specific background to the events which I have not traced through in any detail, Frith's analysis would explain the rapidity with which major outbreaks of conflict took place elsewhere in the country.



"It ain't nothin' changed. Still picked up and beaten up by the pigs. Still no job, no bread. What do I fuckin' do? The way I've been treated I deserve a fuckin' free stereo!"
18 year old looter

The Empire Strikes Back: Britain, July 1981.

Each of these, of course, has its own specific background factors, the police being however, in all cases central to these local

histories. The themes of race and youth have a complex relation according to Frith. White working class youth, although often racist, is still locked in a struggle with the police and authority in general, and the path this struggle has taken has arguably been influenced by black youth: those who in a different setting are their enemies (see Gilroy, 1982: p.217-19). The complexity of these connections should be a warning not to see the Toxteth events optimistically as some resolution of racial differences within this working class area (cf Bunyan, 1982) whilst giving us cause to see how a shared outlook and response is possible at particular moments (even in the context of wide-spread racism).

Policing and "Law and Order"

The police have not merely reacted to problems presented by youth and race but have played a crucial role, alongside other agencies and organisations such as the media, judiciary, government and a host of pressure groups, in actively defining or constituting youth and blacks as the "problem" (see Gilroy, 1982). A specific aspect or example of this has already been referred to: the use of statistics and internal police reports in the construction of the particular problem of black street crime. However, the police definition of, and response to, events that have been described was only possible given more fundamental changes that had been taking place since the 1960's in the internal structure of the police and its external relation to wider political processes. I will discuss these in turn.

The British police have, since the Royal Commission on the police in the early 1960's, been undergoing a major restructuring along two lines - those of centralisation and specialisation. The British police have a unique historical and legal structure which from the creation of the modern forces during the course of the nineteenth century has been based upon their local organisation and control through partly elected local authority police committees. Before the re-organisation of the mid-1960's there were several hundred such local forces, apart from the London metropolitan police. The latter, however, being politically accountable through the Home Secretary

and the largest force in the country, has always been the most influential over general developments. During the 60's most of the forces were amalgamated so that by the end of the decade there were only 43 forces in England and Wales. These changes were coupled with the increased authority, through funding and a greater formal co-operation between the forces, of the Home Office and the Metropolitan police. Other changes such as increased specialisation and an increased reliance upon intelligence and the computerisation of records and information have also substantially aided the tendency to centralisation, co-operation and uniformity in police practice. These changes consequently curtailed the authority of the local police committees which, whilst retaining the responsibility to appoint the Chief Constable and maintain (through funding of 50%, the force in an efficient state, exercise little power in fact over their local forces. The precise extent of the legal powers of the police committees has been the source of considerable debate in recent years, especially in Liverpool where the Committee, in response to local pressure has sought increasingly to call the force to account over some of its policies and practices.

During the 60's, the British police also became increasingly specialised through the formation of specialist squads and units whose role departed from that of traditional policing by routine patrol and peace-keeping and moved toward that of specialist crime fighting, surveillance and the collection of intelligence. After an internal debate about the necessity of a third force between police and army, the Special Patrol Groups (S.P.G.'s) were set up in 1965 in the metropolitan police. The aim was to provide highly mobile squads which would be available to back-up the ordinary uniformed force where necessary. As has already been suggested, the S.P.G.s have since carved out a specialist role for themselves in the 'fire-brigade' policing of public order and 'high-crime rate' areas (see generally Baldwin & Kinsey, 1982: ch.2). They have also been widely used in strike and picket situations, most notably at Grunwicks in 1977, and in raids on squatters (see Rollo, 1980). A range of other specialist squads were established from the mid 60's onward, including several

intelligence units (see Bunyan, 1977). These developments in the metropolitan police influenced or led to similar changes in all or most of the other police forces over the 1970's (on the spread of S.P.G.s see State Research Bulletin, No.13). At the same time, the routine officer on the beat was being placed at a greater distance from the community through the use of electronic radio and the greater use of patrol cars in place of foot patrol. Against a peace-keeping model of policing, in which the police relied upon a degree of consensus and co-operation within the community being policed, we witness the encroachment of a style of policing in which general surveillance, intelligence gathering and pre-emptive control assume a much more significant role.

If these are the structural dimensions of the changed organisation of the police without which the policing of the inner-cities in the 1970's and 1980's could not have taken the form that it did, there were certain other related internal policy shifts that were equally crucial in the creation of the new style of policing. Most of these date from the early 1970's, a period of considerable political instability and enormous industrial unrest centred upon the industrial relations policies of the Heath Government. It was at this time that Robert Mark, the new Metropolitan Commissioner of the police introduced tactics developed by the army in Northern Ireland into the training of increasingly larger numbers of police officers (see Bunyan, 1982: p.165-7; Rollo 1980: p.176). The S.P.G.s were trained in 'riot-control techniques', 'snatch squad' methods (for the arrest of ringleaders), 'flying wedges' (to disperse crowds) and the random stop and search and road-block techniques that have already been referred to. Joint police/army training and exercises were conducted and in 1973 Police Support units began to be set up for the purpose of having more highly trained and equipped police available to deal with public order situations in any part of the country when they arose. So the training, style and ethos associated with special squads (in particular, the S.P.G.) was increasingly permeating the rest of the police, but not without some warning voices being raised from within the police itself (Bunyan, 1982: p.167-8).

These internal shifts in the organisation and direction of policing occurred with very little in the way of wider political debate as to their necessity, implications, merits and demerits. This was possible because of the essentially bi-partisan approach of the major political parties to policy in the criminal justice area. As Kettle in particular has pointed out, this insularity from wider debate has permitted the various agencies of control, particularly the police, to develop an autonomous political role within which they have not only determined, as a matter of internal policy, their responses to events but also played a crucial and growing role in the public significance and definition of these events (Kettle, 1980a and 1980b; see also Reiner 1979). Particular police chief officers, Mark being perhaps the most well-known, and the police organisations (Police Federation and the Association of Chief Police Officers) have played an increasingly active role over the 70's in law and order debates, elections and the process of law reform. As I have tried to argue such debates have increasingly ranged over subjects such as race and youth and it has been the particular success of the police that they have managed to intervene strongly on all such issues without encountering widespread criticism of a political nature or even the formal argument that as part of the executive branch of Government they are acting well outside their proper sphere of influence. Robert Mark provides the best example of the active political role assumed by the British police over the 1970's. As Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police from 1972 to 1977 he pioneered this new role. After his appointment he immediately set about reconstructing police-media relations. He publicly intervened, most notably in the 1973 Dimpleby Lecture, to decry the way in which criminal procedures protected guilty criminals and to attack the jury system. Mark effectively constructed a central role for the police in defining "the reality of criminal Justice" whilst mounting a successful campaign against critics of the police, such as the National Council for Civil Liberties in particular, labelling them as self-appointed minority groups, politically motivated, anti-police and anti-law and order. But Mark

was outspoken and widely reported on other issues as well, including trade unions, political demonstrations, race, etc. He commented widely on Grunwicks, a small factory in London employing mainly cheap Asian labour, which was in 1977 the scene of mass pickets aimed at supporting the workers in their attempts to unionise. Mark supported the owner of Grunwick for what he saw and stated was his stand against "politically motivated violence". Mark's politics were clearly those of the Right but he was very effective at lending the attitude of the police the authority of commonsense, equating it with a presumed public interest and at times even suggesting that it was the only voice that transcended sectional interests in an increasingly unstable world:

"The police are....very much on their own in attempting to preserve order in an increasingly turbulent society in which Socialist philosophy has changed from raising the standards of the poor and deprived to reducing the standards of the wealthy, the skilled and the deserving to the lowest common denominator." (Mark, 1979: p.258-9)

Mark's successor, David McNee, and many other Chief Constables throughout the country followed in his footsteps, often arguing for specific changes to the law and always couching such demands in a neutral, commonsense language which concealed the actively political role that they were engaged in. The Police Federation has similarly been actively mounting law and order campaigns since 1975, demanding the reintroduction of capital punishment, the substantial amendment of the Children and Young Persons Act, 1969, and a range of other illiberal changes. The Federation formed a crucial part of the law and order lobby during the 1979 election (see generally Kettle, 1980a: p.27-31). Despite the above, it would be incorrect to see the police in monolithic terms and as offering a unified view on all issues. There are clear differences and tensions and I will refer to some of them in discussing responses to the 'riots'.

Law and Order has been a general political issue throughout the 1970's and has played an important role in the emergence of an

authoritarian politics in Britain during this period. It is important to emphasise that the police have played a specific and autonomous part in these developments at a number of levels. The wide-ranging and quite fundamental internal reorganisation of policing that occurred from the 1960's onward provided the pre-conditions for, indeed dovetailed with, the honing of the tools of a new authoritarianism, a new discipline to be imposed from above by the State. And the reconstruction of the external political role of the police provided some popular legitimacy for both the wider political shift, and some of the specific changes, entailed in the adoption of an authoritarian state posture. It also ensured that within these processes the particular interests, influences and definitions of the police have been central in determining what law and order means in the Britain of the 1980's and to whom it will be directed. Their particular success at insulating themselves from effective criticism and political debate has been remarkable and the cracks in this protective wall are only now just beginning to show.

Responses to the 'Riots'

All the various elements and factors that were present in 'the riots' had long been apparent to those who cared to look. Warnings had been coming both from inside and outside the communities for years. Major confrontations with the police had occurred on several occasions, notably in Southall in 1979 when the S.P.G. killed Blair Peach and in Bristol in 1980 when a full dress rehearsal of the following year's events was provided. Yet the immediate reaction was by and large one of absolute amazement and shock that the events could take place on mainland Britain, and this was so across the political spectrum. With a few exceptions the formal responses reflect this short-sightedness, this refusal to view the events as an intelligible and understandable part of the reality of life in Britain in the 1980s and to accept the implications of this. This is not surprising as the responses tend to be confined within the very perspectives which were constitutive of many of the conditions which made the 'riots' possible in the first place. I wish to point here to three

types of response, what I will call in turn authoritarian, liberal and popular democratic.

The Authoritarian Response:

Much of the response of the police, media and Conservative Party to the riots was in strictly law and order terms. A debate immediately opened up around the need for a riot act and a third para-military force other than the S.P.G.s and their provincial equivalents. There are divisions on these matters though, even amongst those who see the issue in essentially law and order terms. The Government immediately committed itself, however, to the provision of army camps to hold those convicted of offences arising out of the 'riots'. It also agreed to the provision and use by chief constables of CS gas, water cannon and plastic bullets in public order situations.

New protective helmets and clothing and armoured cars were provided to police and more police were riot-trained. Plans for increased stop and search powers were also announced. Even with these measures for increasing further the repressive machinery of the state the then Home Secretary, Whitelaw was under pressure from the Tory right-wing and sections of the police and popular press (the Daily Mail and the Murdoch papers in particular) to take a tougher stand. The Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, James Anderton, went so far as to call for the abolition of the locally elected police committees and the Police Federation has stepped up its campaign for the reintroduction of capital punishment (Guardian Weekly, 28.3.82). Not all chief constables share the hardline position that is reflected in this response or are enthusiastic about equipping their forces with a new array of repressive powers and technologies. However, the trend in the urban forces is clearly towards arming up for confrontation. It will require a much more fundamental debate about the organisation and political accountability of the police to upset the logic of this response, largely orchestrated and carried through by the police themselves in alliance with other forces of the Right.

The Liberal Response:

What might be called a liberal

response was apparent in the reactions of many in the Labour Party, the centre parties, parts of the Conservative Party and the Liberal press, such as the Guardian. It was also the approach taken by Lord Scarman in his report on the Brixton Disorders. The problem is here regarded as the economic and social conditions prevailing in the inner cities and the deteriorating police-community relations that were associated in a secondary way with these primary economic and social factors: high unemployment, poor housing, etc. are said to lead to increased tension and alienation, reflected in higher crime rates and disorder on the streets, which in turn lead to poor police-community relations. The police are seen as essentially reactive; their systematic role in respect of the populations of the inner city areas and its wider connections with economic and social crisis is not addressed. Indeed, the Scarman Report formally denied that "the direction and policies of the Metropolitan Police...." were racist and was only prepared to implicate the police in causing the riots to the degree of suggesting that some officers were occasionally guilty of racial prejudice and that some police actions, such as Swamp '81, were ill-considered. The fundamental shifts in the organisation and style of policing and the specific and systematic role that the police have played in respect of these communities was ignored. Alongside the pleas for special government expenditures to be directed at the revival of the economic and social fabric of the inner cities (as if this existed in isolation from the national and international capitalist economy), there were recommendations for better race relations training, improved complaints procedures and the establishment of statutory police/community liaison committees.

The Scarman approach is supported by some Chief Constables, in particular John Alderson, the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall police, who is well known as a major proponent of what is now popularly known as 'community policing'. (See Alderson, 1982: Interview in

Marxism Today, April, 1982). The notion of Community policing has little to do with political accountability or a return to beat policing. Rather it emphasises a co-ordinated strategy by the police and other social agencies, involving co-operation, monitoring, and the pooling of information in respect of particular communities and the organisations, families and individuals within them. It is an attempt to reconstruct the control of the community by the police outside of the purely repressive mode that is now represented in 'fire-brigade' policing. Whilst this position represents a serious alternative to the law and order posture, and cannot be simply regarded as its liberal face (see Hall, 1982), there is the potential for some of the strategies it specifies to complement rather than contradict the repressive strategy (see Baldwin & Kinsey, 198 : Ch.8). For the point remains in relation to the liberal response that for all that it dwells on environmental conditions and police/community relations, it still sees the immediate and pressing problem to be that of containing potential disorder emanating from within these communities.

The policing of this disorder consequently remains an essentially technical matter, the province of those with the necessary professional expertise and experience; in short, it remains for the police and other agencies of the state to determine the correct response, taking care, of course, to consult and inform the community of what they are doing. So, logically enough, Scarman supports the continued use of the S.P.G., increased riot training, the introduction of CS gas and the other extraordinary measures that have already been mentioned. Thus there is in the liberal response a refusal to confront the issue of policing as a political question, perhaps the central political question surrounding 'the riots'.

The Popular Democratic Response:

There is an organised political response coming from the communities themselves (see generally New

Statesman, 26.3.82). Without downplaying the seriousness of all the other dimensions of the inner city 'problem' it is significant that this response has focussed directly upon the question of policing. In both Liverpool and Manchester the local police committees set up their own inquiries, not being content to leave this to Lord Scarman or their local police forces. These inquiries proceeded without, for the most part, the co-operation of the Chief Constables. Both these committees have for some time been waging a struggle to bring about more effective accountability at the local level through the police committees (see Simey, 1982). Although, as I have suggested before, they have limited powers, they are looking at ways of exercising control over or influencing general police policy without interfering in the day to day direction of the police. One means being considered is through their contribution to police capital expenditure. They are also seeking an increase in their formal powers.

In London, where the police are accountable directly to the Home Office, the Greater London Council has set up a police committee with a support unit to monitor police activities and is campaigning for legislation to bring the Metropolitan police under G.L.C. control (see Bundred, 1982). They are also funding police monitoring committees in the boroughs on a large scale. Many such local monitoring organisations have sprung up throughout London in the past year (see State Research Bulletin, no. 28). The National Council for Civil Liberties is also working on concrete proposals for the reorganisation of local control over policing. The police committees have the responsibility to maintain their forces without any clear legal guidance as to what powers they may exercise to do so. It is widely argued and accepted that the Chief Constable has sole control over 'operational' matters and in this respect is accountable, along with the police generally, to the law only. The N.C.C.L. are seeking to draw some practical distinction within the sphere of 'operational' matters between day-to-day operations (which would remain the province

of the Police) and general policy questions.

The latter might include such matters as the choice between foot patrols and use of cars, the allocation of technology, etc. (See Hewitt, 1982: p.65-70).

Conclusion

These latter developments represent the opening up of a debate about the organisation and control of the police which is unprecedented in Britain in this century. It completely rejects the view of the police as impartial and apolitical servants of the law and seeks in concrete ways to bring the police under a more effective local democratic control. It is not mindlessly anti-police in its thrust, but rather seeks to address itself to workable mechanisms for making the police and policing genuinely accountable and responsive to the community. Such mechanisms would not remove the need for improved complaints procedures and other methods of bringing police to account for individual abuses and transgressions, but the debate I am referring to here transcends these concerns and poses much more fundamental questions about the police.

This focus upon the police role in the 'riots' is not artificial or abstract. It comes from within the communities, and amongst the elected local politicians, who were directly involved. They experience and understand more than others the problems which afflict these communities, including the importance of doing something about street crime. It is crucial, as I have sought to emphasise throughout this paper, to separate out the real dimensions of the problems presented by harmful criminal behaviour from the processes of criminalisation that sections, at least, of these communities have been subjected to.

I would like to conclude by recalling and reinforcing two connected aspects of the policing/crime problem as it relates to the 'riots'. In the first place, the increased official crime rates over the last 20 years in Britain, especially amongst the young, do not necessarily indicate the real changes in the levels

of criminal behaviour that have occurred in the period. A recent piece of research commissioned by the Home Office argued that much of the apparent rise in the youth crime rate, especially since the 1960s, is illusory; that it is the result of inflation, increased reporting and increased use of formal cautions by the police (see New Statesman, 22.1.82). Moreover, the report argued that a detailed profile of the juvenile delinquent would reveal that almost all children fit the delinquent label. Needless to say, the Home Office has not published this research. Yet, the political and popular use of official statistics has played a critical role in legitimating the intensification of the policing of youths, blacks and the urban poor in general, thus arguably setting in motion a self-fulfilling and spiralling mechanism within which the difference between cause and effect is lost. It is doubtful whether this increased policing of whole communities has always, or even consistently, given priority to the protection of individuals from the genuine threat of crime within them.

This connects with the second point, which relates to the failure of the police to provide protection of the black and Asian communities against racist violence. A recent Home Office report on this problem revealed that, proportional to their numbers in the population, Asians were 50 times, and other blacks 36 times, more likely to be the victims of 'racial attacks' than white people (Home Office 1981). The report referred to "a tendency within the police and local authorities to regard the ethnic populations as a homogeneous group, in which the attacks experienced by the Asian communities were considered in some sense to be offset by the alleged anti-social activities of young West Indians" (para 39). This licensed victimisation of blacks and Asians is merely one side of the twin mechanism whose other is the process of criminalisation and containment that I have discussed in detail throughout this paper. In each case, policing has not been directed at the

control of crime and the protection of the community but rather at utilising crime as a pretext to control communities more generally and reproduce major social divisions within them. I have tried in this paper to point to some of the wider political, economic and ideological processes with which this is connected.

It is these processes which were at the heart of the 'riots' in the various forms they took and which parts of the community are now seeking to resist on a number of levels and through a number of initiatives. The demands are not utopian, they are not anti-police and they do not entertain romantic notions about crime. Rather they are for a police which genuinely protects its community against harmful and divisive behaviours and which would therefore diminish, rather than deepen, divisions of a racial and generational nature.

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