

## POLICING OF PUBLIC DISORDER: NEW "OFFENDERS", NEW POLICING

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Public disorder can become manifest in many forms: political, industrial, environmental, racial, sporting, festive and various eclectic combinations. In accommodating protest and dissent, the policing of public disorder can adopt a variety of responses ranging on the spectrum from militaristic deployment and tactics to conciliatory and consensual strategies. The increasing sophistication and professionalism of certain forms of protest have necessitated a corresponding, non-confrontational reply from policing. This paper explores the policing policy and strategies adopted in two contemporary British case-studies: a protracted environmental protest against a freeway extension in Devon and a two-and-a-half year industrial picket by former Liverpool dockers.

Although not the cause of environmental or industrial conflicts, police strategy can influence the processes and procedures of such disputes and thereby the outcomes of the conflicts. In many overt and large-scale public disorder situations, police are wedged between conflicting interests. Despite individual differences sometimes within ranks and between management police and police unions, police in handling public disorder act on mass as one, as a disciplined, regimented unit. Part of the policing mandate is to enforce the law and maintain order, which may legitimately require the use of force. Part of the policing mandate is to preserve the peace. These two aspects are not always compatible. This paper argues that, although police may generally be responding in low-key manner to certain public order situations in both Britain and Australia, the potential for coercive action remains steadfast. Police in Britain have developed the apparatus – tactical response units, weaponry, intelligence cells and centralised co-ordination – to act decisively if the occasion is deemed necessary.

Large-scale, pitched-battle confrontation between police and protesters featured prominently in Britain in the 1980s with urban riots at St. Pauls Bristol (1980), Brixton (1981) and Broadwater Farm (1985); the coalminers' strike of 1984-85 and the Wapping dispute of 1986-87. These disorders were the result of complex and multifaceted factors and challenged political, economic, racial and institutional fundamentals of society. "Slow-rioting", the term coined to describe on-going small scale disorders on housing estates and in urban centres, attract local police attention and occasionally police tactical units. Since such rioting is limited, localised and easily dispersed, it fails to attract the media attention of the riots of the 1980s. It is a hidden story of marginalised urban youth engaging with the police (Brearley interview). The tensions in the inner cities is normally not newsworthy, unlike the more flamboyant eco-protests.

The policing of public order in Britain has been concerned with a new phenomenon — the one-issue protest, non-violent and direct-action. The one-issue label is something of a misnomer because of the diverse lifestyles of the activists and the fragmentary nature of these protests. The protests advocate personal, one-dimensional and environmental committed causes — living space for people and animals, local empowerment and the rights of common people to own and use the land (*Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 1997, p.6). These diverse groups promulgating disparate causes do not fit the traditional patterns of protesters and belong largely outside the formal political process. The law makes no distinction between types of protest. Police claim impartiality in administering the law but they have widespread discretion in the application of their powers.

The authority of the State is not threatened by these diverse and fragmented eco-protests. Direct mass confrontation with police is not the style of these protesters, who are limited in scope, numbers and intent. These protests transcend all traditional social divides and

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barriers of class, allegiance, age, work practice, beliefs and ethnicity. Demonstrations against live animal exports in England in 1995 attracted middle-class and middle-aged people, new to protest and generally respectful of police. The small seaside populace of Brightlingsea opposed the exports, but the deployment of riot-attired specialist police units used considerable force to gain clearance for lorries carrying the exports (Critchler, 1996:38). Environmental protesters, anti-freeway tunnellers, participants at "raves", animal rights activists, "sabs" (Sabotaging "field sports"), Reclaim the Earth and New Age Travellers are far more likely to be assessed as newsworthy than traditional street protests or industrial pickets. The novelty of both the cause being promoted and the tactics being employed as well as the development of folk heroes rather than villains, ensures substantial media coverage for the one-issue protest. These innovative and strategic protests have demanded new tactical responses from police. When the protest is an amalgam of such diverse social groupings joined in protest against one factor and whose spokesmen are respected members of the local community, the media and the police cannot "criminalise" the dissenters such as happened to the National Union of Miners leader Arthur Scargill during the coalminers' strike (Green, 1990:157).

The A30 protest in east Devon presents a vivid example of the dynamics at work between dissenters and the range of authorities, including the police. The case-study highlights the legal intricacies and police frustration in dealing with these small bands of protesters. Police tactics of undermining the unity and resolve of the protesters were lengthy but ultimately effective. Police intelligence collation and proactive investigative techniques were vital for subverting the protesters' morale and for the speed of the three police strikes.

For twenty months, an environmental protest took place along a proposed thirteen mile bypass route. The demonstration commenced over one tree (the huge Fairmile oak), but escalated into a major impasse (*Guardian Weekend*, 22 February 1997). The protesters were objecting to the extension to the A30 freeway, basically a new dual carriageway between Honiton and Exeter. The A30 extension will destroy some magnificent countryside and part of an historic Roman wall, but the present road snarl is a cause of one of England's worst fatality locations. A constable described the present road as "typically Roman in one part, long and straight and very quick; and then typically Saxon in another part very windy, very narrow, very dangerous" (Eden interview). Seventy-five per cent of the clearance of trees and hedgerows had been completed when the Government cancelled the project. It later announced that the road would be privately funded by Anglo-German consortium; all costs, except for police, were to be met by the contractor.

In this specific, single-issue focus, the role of the under-sheriff highlights a major difference between British and Australian methods of handling the public disorder posed by protesters on private land. Both demonstrators and police in Australia are involved in "controlling the streets": demonstrators attempt to block roadways; police attempt to clear them for vehicles and pedestrians. In the on-going British scenario, greater sophistication and complexity evolved with environmental protests staged in tree-houses, aerial walkways, tripods, German scaffolds, and burrowed tunnels under freeway routes. Lock-ons to cement posts are a feature of both aerial and underground protests. The tactics being utilised in Britain are prevalent in parts of Europe and there have been flirtations with some of them in Australia. The

"copycatting" of northern hemisphere tactics such as suspension in strategically-located trees is now taking place in Australia. David Waddington (interview) describes the confrontations and pitched battles of 1984-85 between masses of miners and masses of police in the coalmining towns as the last contests of the great dinosaurs in Great Britain. No longer do thousands of protesters confront thousands of police in the streets. Protesters in Britain are disjointed, diverse and fragmentary bodies; division rather than cohesion characterises the various single-issue demonstration.

Operation Obelisk was the specific strategy established by the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary to monitor the three camps established in the Honiton area by the anti-A30 extension protesters and to prepare for the inevitable evictions after police were directed by the under-sheriff. Police planning and strategy and the evaluation of all contingencies, which was the culmination of twelve months preparation, and the training of Police Support Units (PSU) in the peculiarities of environmental protests, resulted in the eviction of all protesters from the three sites without injury to either protester or police. All protesters went quietly; most were relieved to be out of the trees or tunnels; most acknowledged the care of police in evicting them. A "softly-softly", multi-agency approach was adopted by the under sheriff of Devon, his bailiffs, private police and the public police.

The protesters established three camps along the thirteen mile route. There were usually about eighty protesters across the three camps. Police intelligence were aware of factions between the three camps and further factions within the camps. The protesters were devoid of leadership and their camps lacked command structure and organisation. Many are known to be nomadic protesters; some belong to a fluid population of protesters. A number are university graduates or under-graduates, who have "dropped out of society". The environmental protester defies stereotyping: class, age, education, occupation, nationality are no barrier to being an environmental protester. The lack of cohesion, planning and organisation of the protesters contrasted markedly with the precision of the police's Operation Obelisk.

The three camps were claiming squatters' rights, Criminal Law Act 1967. Violence or the threat of violence could not be used to remove them. The only remedy was through the civil courts. The responsibility of the under sheriff was to receive and execute the writ of possession, request police support and swear in sufficient officers, liaise with the various social services and make a formal request to the Chief Constable for "the power of the county" to assist the eviction of the trespassing squatters (Sarsfield interview). The under sheriff hired the tree climbers, tunnel clearers, ambulance and first aid personnel, sufficient bailiffs and security and plant equipment such as hydraulic platforms. All expenses were charged to the road contractor. The under sheriff determined and directed the whole Honiton affair; he, rather than senior police, handled the media. He determined when and how police should be involved. His authority in relation to the authorisation of police stemmed from S 8 (2) Sheriffs Act 1887: "If a sheriff finds any resistance in the execution of a writ he shall take with him the power of the county, and shall go in proper person to do execution, and may arrest the resisters and commit them to prison ...." Police are duty-bound to assist (Operation Obelisk training notes, August 1996). The under sheriff liaised with the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary with regard to general strategy, arrest policy and various resource limitations. The 1887 Act made the Honiton by-pass a civil matter: the under sheriff and the bailiffs handled the county's response to the obstruction. Police advised, and determined logistics and tactics but were secondary to the issue.

Although some benefits are realised, it appears that the constabulary generally are frustrated that primacy is given to the under-sheriff in such eviction matters. Frustration at what seems

excessive delays irks the police's instinct for action as such operations consume more of the local police budget (Sarsfield and three Obelisk Intelligence Cell members interviews). The police service thrive on quick response and short-term operations but the A30 impasse became one between the under-sheriff and his bailiffs and the protesters. The confrontation did not become one between protesters and police *per se*.

In reality, police determined the planning, style and timing of the strikes. Obelisk was the biggest operation in the two counties for over ten years, since the support given to northern and midland constabularies during the miners' strike of 1984-85. The Operation followed a calculated task-force model with people utilised for their skills and expertise rather than traditional rank structure. The operation's training was extensive and thorough: for instance, eight officers were trained in abseiling and the use of hydraulic cutters and 465 PSU officers were instructed in the use of force, law, multi-arrests and cordons. PSUs, trained for public disorder tasks including riot control, had to be instructed in the legislation relevant to the policing of environmental protests and issues. Newbury and other historical precedents were studied and analysed. Local specialist units were used for the strikes themselves, many of whom had previous military experience. Typical of police public order operations, the need to win the day was an accepted maxim. As the coercive arm of the State empowered to legally use force, police attempt to exert control in public order situations. Their aim is to restore order and normality as quickly as possible.

Operation Obelisk was an evolving and flexible strategy in which the police played on, and provoked, the disunity between and within the camps. Police were aware that they were not dealing with one A30 protest; the three encampments were totally separate and different in structure. Three factions emerged: the Escot Church group perceived themselves as the original protest group and as non-violent; those at Trollheim perceived themselves as more aggressive and potentially combative at any eviction; and those at Allercombe varied from a small, peaceful site occupying one copse, then it went through a very aggressive phase and then back to a more passive approach. Sub-groups with their own self-motivation existed within the three settlements. Police tactics focused on testing those divisions and indecisiveness. Due to the lack of personnel leadership and stability on the sites, police commanders had no counterparts with whom to deal, so they had to monitor and gather intelligence continually (Sarsfield interview).

The police played the "Policeman Plod card" on most of the low-key operations near the sites. The approach was routine, predictable and common to that used by other forces. When the sophisticated, intelligence-directed and planned strikes took place, the protesters, devoid of structure and intelligence of police planning, were unable to counter them. Police tactics were varied and unpredictable. For twelve months, police pursued a long-term strategy of breaking the protesters' will. Based on the assumption that the police organisation contained "leaks" as did other organisations such as the highways agency, false dates of strikes reached the protesters who worked according to ritual dates. When the strike dates did not eventuate, their credibility dimmed with potential supporters (*ibid*).

Five police intelligence specialists were assigned to Obelisk. A computerised system was established linking the three sites with the formation of an operational and intelligence database. A range of intelligence sources was tapped by Obelisk: open, police, outside agencies, covert, agent coverage, internet and public. P. A. J. Waddington argues that much penetrating surveillance is not performed by police but by other government agencies such as health, education and highways (1993:104-107). The safety aspect of the Operation was fundamental with protesters in trees and down tunnels. Name identification and the gathering and collating of evidence for the courts were the pivotal roles of two intelligence members.

Police had to explore all contingencies: if an emergency such as a cave-in occurred, police would have assumed control of the situation. The intelligence told of the three main sites, the extent of the tunnelling, lock-ons (the self-handcuffing of the protester to a metal bar to make eviction more difficult), tree houses and aerial walkways and fortifications (Obelisk Planning Cell members interview).

Intelligence was gathered to gain information about everything the protesters were doing, including where they drank socially, and to monitor their daily activities and beliefs. The intelligence was designed to assist in making predictions about the timing of potential strikes. To obviate any possibility of civil litigation, comprehensive dossiers of all site protesters — background, observed activities, roles — were regarded as essential. If the day came for protester complaint against the police, the police had video evidence "to attack and destroy the character of the plaintiff" (ibid). The three surprise strikes, rapid and precise, were based on accurate and detailed intelligence.

The extensive intelligence gathering at Honiton fits King and Brearley's expose in Public Order Policing (1996:75) about police, after the coalminers' strikes of 1984-85, focusing on evidence-gathering teams for prosecutions after the event, covert surveillance and information storage. Ideally, such intelligence networks and information would reduce the need for direct physical confrontation between police and protesters. Targeting occurred in a number of ways at Honiton. The protesters' headquarters, a house in Ottery St. Mary, was the subject of constant police "dragon" lights which were designed to identify protesters, unsettle resolve and exasperate schisms in the already fragmented movements. The intelligence cell had dossiers on all the leading protagonists. Evidence-gathering and surveillance have always been a part of the policing of dissent but the sophistication of such intelligence has increased markedly since the early eighties. Databases store cross-sectional information on protest activists. This information is available to police preparing to plan strategies to cope with anticipated protests in other regions. P.A.J. Waddington's empirical research has adeptly analysed changes in policing, especially in terms of accommodation with protesters through negotiation and compromise; surveillance-oriented intelligence gathering has meant that astute policing has pretended to give the protesters what they want. Persuasion rather than coercion is the desired method; police aim to control by winning over the protest organisers (P. A. J. Waddington, 1994:70-91 and interview).

Avoidance, not communication, was the Obelisk strategy. On an official level, the protesters at Honiton received no communication. Police refused to attend meetings; command refused to reply to letters; for some time police maintained the secrecy of Obelisk. Personally on site, protesters would talk to police who confined the conversation to "the weather". For some considerable time, the commander of Operations East Devon who was known to the protesters, successfully withheld his dual identity from the protesters as head of the planning team of Operation Obelisk. Police let the protesters do the talking. At a meeting with protest "leaders", the tunnel "representative" at Allercombe referred to a faction that had dug tunnels and insisted on burying gas cylinders in the concrete there and in the lock-ons in the trees. Police pointed out the possible consequences if one of the cylinders were to explode, including the criminal charges of conspiracy that the protesters would face. About twelve left the Allercombe camp immediately; the rest decided to clear the cylinders by pick and shovel — a risky manoeuvre. This incident undermined the morale of the site, already affected by schisms.

Although there was never more than 150 residents combined on the three sites (unlike the numerical thousands at Newbury), this protest in east Devon received considerable media attention, especially the final police strike and the portrayals of tunnellers like "Swampy" and

"Animal" and the exploits of the underground rescue expert "Pete the Mole". The media were given a viewing area and occasionally were invited onto the sites. Deliberate Command level strategy was to tell the media "nothing". Police referred all media requests to the under sheriff of Devon. This prevented a protester-police dichotomy and debate. The protest has been the biggest public order news story of the decade in Devon and Cornwall, but the media received no access to police.

Three or four years ago, protesters in Great Britain climbed trees or blocked roadways. Tactics have evolved now to building houses in the trees or living in tunnels. Tripods, consisting of three poles of scaffolding tied together at the top with a protester suspended underneath, were more effective on urban roadways and at Newbury. Police experienced no difficulty with them at Honiton; police "snipped" a piece off a leg at a time to gradually lower them down to cut the protesters free. The Police Tactical Aid Group was trained as a special cutaway team: abseiling, safe-ropeing and delaying and the use of hydraulic cutting equipment. Protesters moved into the tunnels as the latest tactic to delay eviction and capture national publicity. The tunnels were a maze of underground passages and lock-ons. The tunnellers barricaded themselves behind metal and wooden doors in excavations thirty and forty feet deep and structured to collapse if heavy construction machinery was moved over them. Tunnels are inherently unsafe: either police can sit on top and form a siege which is resource intensive or they can enter and pursue the protesters.

Police had the alternatives of laying siege to the sites or conducting pre-emptive strikes; the latter was employed by the police on all three sites. Police were normally only present on the sites when some business had to be conducted such as the issuing of legal papers. Strategically the strikes took place in late January 1997, the middle of the English winter. Only specially trained Obelisk PSU officers, noted for group precision and discipline in operations, were involved in the evictions. The first site at Allercombe, involving trees but no tunnels, was seized in a couple of hours (involved 35 police, two arrests). At Bigwood (Trollheim site), the clearance took a full day, but this site involved tunnels (about 200 police, eighteen arrests). The first two strikes occurred in the early morning; they were very quick, unexpected strikes. The third strike at Escot Church, a training ground for protesters in the art of tunnelling, was expected to be the worst for police because it involved both trees and tunnels as well as a fortified perimeter. This third strike was even more unpredictable at nine o'clock at night. Police acted upon intelligence that a number of protesters frequented the local hotel at this particular time of the week. The highly trained and effective Tactical Aid Group went over the barricades and captured the ground.

Police excluded people from the strike: protesters found that those outside were unable to enter and those inside were fenced in. This was a novel strategy to use in evicting protesters from a site. There were about twenty protesters remaining in the camp, most in the trees. Freezing conditions helped to persuade these to return to ground where they were subsequently arrested. After day one, there were about five underground and eight in the trees. John Vidal of *The Guardian Weekend* (22 February 1997, p.30) described a camp resembling "a terrorist siege (with) floodlit razor-wire fences". The under sheriff, in command of the whole operation, decided that his bailiffs would crawl into the tunnels after "Swampy" and mates. A quick resolution was sought. On the initial strike night, about 230 police were involved, but this was quickly scaled down to about sixty.

There was no resistance by the protesters on the days of the three strikes. Those in the tunnels eventually surfaced freely; none had to be dragged out. The bailiff's private agents stored up the tunnels and broke through metal doors cutting the protesters from the concrete lock-ons. Police adherence to "Domination Tactics" insured that there was no resistance. Fifty arrests

occurred, but fifteen of these related to but three individuals. By comparison, more than 950 were arrested at Newbury during 1996. Devon and Cornwall police adopted a "minimum arrest" strategy; the east Devon operations commander believed that Newbury evidenced a "needless arrest strategy" (Sarsfield interview). Arresting police are withdrawn from the crowd controlling operation and thereby reduce effective police numbers. More arrests create a greater potential for litigation, a constant concern of police confronted by dissenters. The protesters rated the police operation as good because it was fair, there were few arrests and there were no injuries. Police exercising considerable discretion, and even under-enforcing the law, was the preferred control option rather than rigid legalism.

The contractor bore costs, except the police expenditure which comes from the local constabulary budget (750,000 pounds). Police were anxious to keep their numbers down to a minimum and rely on specialist training. Two sites were cleared within a day; the third took eight days but police had planned for a three week eviction. The local police authority at Newbury spent over five million pounds coping with the 1996 protests against the freeway extension. The Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall insisted that Obelisk had to be conducted without any mutual aid, purely local resources. Police worked "by the book" and within budgetary restraints, but the frustration was obvious. One wonders how long police and contractors will be prepared to bear such financial burdens.

The objectives of Operation Obelisk were accomplished: the eviction of the three sites was accomplished safely and lawfully. The protesters achieved their objective of obtaining considerable publicity. The under-sheriff referred to it as "a clean draw". The road is being built. The British policing style is aimed at containment of the situation and action is based on extensive appraisal. Minimal arrests and minimum force characterised the policing operation. As one intelligence cell member pronounced: "Everyone has come out quite happy about it. Protesters feel as if they have got very good press out of it ... nobody's been injured."

According to Robert Reiner (interview), the media has generally given the eco-protesters and the animal activists a favourable press; the likes of "Swampy" and "Animal" were presented as youth heroes in some outlets for their idealism and inventiveness. Today's journalists are attracted by the novel causes and enterprises of the eco-protesters. The police response has been generally "softly, softly". Police today are astute to the need to carefully cultivate favourable public opinion and not pointlessly undermine it by using extremes of force which could be captured by the electronic media. Reiner convincingly argues that the British police, although they have never acted with "kid gloves", have traditionally and deliberately cultivated "a low-key, minimal force policy" (1997:8).

The mushrooming of one-issue protests (animal rights, anti-freeways, field-sports saboteurs) will test the low-key resolve and minimum arrest strategy of policing agencies as personnel and financial resources are drained to control protest within legal bounds. These one-issue protesters cross broad social divides and challenge not so much police authority but rather police strategies of controlling such dissent. Private contractors and entrepreneurs may resort more and more to employing private policing and security agents to achieve quicker and less costly results. The British principle of minimum force has achieved desired results but, at a cost, in terms of police manpower and finances. A police presence is still essential to ensure no sabotage of equipment and works at bridge constructions for the Honiton by-pass; other environmental struggles have emerged.

Victoria Police have been wedged in the midst of the "forest war" in East Gippsland between loggers and environmentalists. The British strategies such as lock-ons and tree-top protests have been evident. After failure to prosecute the Green Senator Bob Brown in June 1997,

police have been hesitant to act. The Senior Constable of the one-man police station in the tiny timber town of Bendoc is mystified: "The Government wants the forest to be logged, but this (Brown's acquittal) has really put the cat among the pigeons" (*Age*, 21 March 1998, p.15). The under-sheriff's role in England does place police as secondary to the conflict and limits anti-police resentment, although the process is time-consuming and costly to police. Police are the direct intermediary in the Australian scenarios.

For over two years, policing of the Liverpool dock pickets has followed a similar "softly, softly" approach to the policing of the A30 freeway extension. Picketing, a traditional and overt manifestation of industrial conflict, has created a steady and regular police monitoring with occasional bouts of activity. On the first anniversary of the lockout, violence erupted and over forty arrests were made by police. As with eco-protests, there is the ever-present drain on police finances and the potential for trouble. This on-going, intractable and bitter dispute with its international ramifications indicates that police can still be confronted with the long and arduous vigilance of industrial disputes.

In late September 1995, 329 dock workers were locked out by the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company (MDHC) after they took strike action in support of eighty workers, employed by a private stevedoring company (Torside), who were sacked after taking unofficial action over a demand for overtime pay. Since the initial dispute about overtime payment reductions was unofficial, the supporting workers received no recognition from the Transport and General Workers' Union (Kennedy and Lavalette, 1996:76-85). The dockers' refusal to cross the picket line was illegal because it contravened Thatcher "secondary" picketing legislation. The dockers believe that they were "set a trap" by the MDHC and that the enemy of casualisation was the real issue (*Liverpool Echo*, 29 September 1995; *Guardian Weekend*, 23 November 1996).

For the first week of the conflict when the strikers had established pickets at the dock entrance, police were unsighted. Union organisers became cynical of the lack of police presence when picketers were persuading workers not to enter the wharf, but then a massive police presence materialised to prevent any strikers returning to work after the men voted to do so. If they entered the port gates, police warned they would be charged with trespassing on dock property (*Liverpool Echo*, 6 October 1995). On 9 October 1995, three hundred workers were denied entry to the Seaforth Container Terminal by police officers. There was no trouble despite the dockers' protest.

A picket of between fifty and one hundred has been maintained at the port since October 1995. Usually, once a week the picket has been all women, some with young children. It has been an irritant duty for Merseyside Police to perform, both at the opening and closing of the wharf every day (Rolandson interview). Policing has been a low-key affair and the national media has been reluctant to cover the main issues. The picketing has disrupted access to the port but not prevented it as the picketers can only cover one of the gates to the port. Roadside altercations have occurred between pickets, blacklegs and police and damage has been committed to directors' homes (*Independent*, 11 March 1997, p.14). The Merseyside Police have been attempting to scale down numbers but this is dependent on the number and activities of the picketers. The cost to the Merseyside Police, increased by the recent Home Office funding formula and overtime payments, until March 1997 was between 1.5 and 2 million pounds. The police see themselves wedged between a "bloody-minded and determined" company and the dockers demanding full employment "which they will never regain" (Rolandson interview).



The Chief Inspector of Operations described the routine monitoring as "not proper police work"; the police do not appreciate being at the Liverpool Docks at 5.00am in winter (Ford interview). The Force Operation Manager depicted the picket as "by and large peaceful" (Rolandson interview). There have been few arrests over the two years; most of the picketers are middle-aged men with families who cannot afford to be arrested. Merseyside Police have a working relationship with the picketers; violent confrontation is in neither's interest. In order to avoid any violent confrontation, two police area commanders have regularly negotiated with the dockers and unions about preparations for various marches and demonstrations (ibid). The protocol established for negotiation and collaboration between police and unions in the 1998 Australian waterfront dispute was significant in avoiding violence and bloodshed. Daily police and union briefings took place in which police industrial liaison officers explained legal requirements, acceptable behaviour and police responsibilities. The deputy secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia was assigned to liaise with police. Union officials encouraged these conferences because they did not seek confrontation with police. These concentrated negotiations meant that MUA picket captains successfully policed their own and ousted any troublemakers.

Verbal abuse of the "scabs" has been the normal dawn and dusk fare at the Merseyside picket line, but the threat of police coercion exists. The police are insistent on keeping the middle ground with the dockers: "We are tolerant of each other, we both have a job to do" (Ford interview). There is some supporting evidence that, over time, there has been increasing conflict with police. The deployment of the Operational Support Division (OSD) with its paramilitary garb and demeanour, has conducted "snatch raids" targeting picket leaders. The vehemence of the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards was directed against the OSD; these "riot squad" police, "should have no place whatsoever on a peaceful industrial picket line". A communique alleged that a sacked 50-year old docker, who was charged with breach of the peace, had a CS gas canister sprayed directly in his face. The stewards instituted a formal complaint against the OSD behaviour "which contrasts sharply with the sympathetic, professional and mature action of the majority of ordinary policemen and women" (Press Release, 18 February 1997). The dockers have not been in conflict with the police, but they perceive the police as being on the side of the MDHC in the dispute. A vitriolic Liverpool dockers' "Update" of October 1996 asserted that the police department "certainly" supported the dock company and alleged that the OSD "have intimidated, beaten and even tortured dockers and their supporters in the pursuit of keeping dockers out of their jobs". By contrast, the current Australian waterfront dispute has seen state police hierarchies assailed by leading conservative figures for failing to take decisive and coercive action against the pickets at Patrick stevedoring terminals. Despite exhortations from the Prime Minister, some Premiers and Patrick's chairman, police have continued a peace-keeping policy of accommodating the pickets.

Special Support Units were employed after intelligence had been received of reinforcements at the Liverpool docks. On the first anniversary of the dispute in late September 1996, when 430 dockers were still attempting to regain their jobs, the low-key picket became a major rally with the unexpected arrival of environmental protesters, animal rightists, ravers, direct action pacifists, unemployed activists, anarchists, anti-car groups, land-for-all and the young radical coalition of Reclaim the Future (*Guardian*, 30 September 1996, p.2). The publicity-grabbing social activists were invited by the dockers to highlight their cause in a three-day campaign to an uninterested Britain. The alliance of young eco-radical, underground Britain and older docker was uneasy but posed a new scenario for police in terms of negotiation and keeping the peace.

After protesters mounted cranes and flew flags from the administration roof on 30 September, a rally of three hundred dockers and supporters erupted into violence and forty-one demonstrators (mostly from outside Liverpool but including approximately ten dockers) were arrested. Television conveyed no reports of previous rallies but the violence of 30 September occasioned leading item status and reports of rent-a-mob and anarchists at work. Local police blamed the presence of eco-warriors and members of the Reclaim the Streets brigade for the violence: police saw these groups as more "criminally minded" than the dockers (Ford interview). Allegations were made that violence stemmed mostly from the Liverpool police, especially the black-attired OSD (nicknamed Robocops) who sealed off access to the city centre and operated surveillance cameras. Police did not pursue the local dockers but rather the outsiders under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) (Clutterbuck, 1997:124-131).

Industrial battles may be dismissed by the mainstream British media as "dinosaurs" of a bygone age, irrelevant to the modern polemic. The 1998 Australian maritime dispute highlights the continuing potential for major industrial disruption. Even if shunned by politicians and the media, a dispute such as the Merseyside dockers' campaign can continue to fester the industrial landscape if local and international support are sustained. For police, protracted industrial disputation remains a burden, a drain on manpower and finances. Bitter and prolonged disputes necessitate policing. Contemporary disputes present police hierarchy with the dilemma of whether to utilise local personnel or highly trained, specialist, paramilitary forces. Employers traditionally expect police to provide access for staff and vehicles through picket lines; today some employers are utilising labour law to pursue matters through the courts and are hiring their own private security. Police remain the ultimate force to remove unlawful obstructions to plants, factories, roadways and forests. Paradoxically, by enforcing the law, they may be endangering the peace.

The 1998 Australian waterfront dispute, on a much larger scale than Liverpool picketing, has some similarities in policing. Docker solidarity, union movement backing and support from wide-ranging alliances of individuals and community groups meant that police did not have the numbers to break the pickets. Police must "win" public order confrontations. Police have sought to accommodate the picketing and marches through a prudent, restrained, consultative and consensual approach. In both Britain and Australia, lessons have been heeded. Police were the instruments of implementation of the Thatcher Government's assault on coal-miners in 1984-85 with a legacy of 11,000 arrests and a paramilitarised and politicised police. Victoria Police showed considerable restraint, despite Justice Beach's ruling on picketing, in accommodating the MUA protest; a markedly different approach to the newly-established Force Response Unit's initial foray of "unreasonable actions and excessive force" at Richmond Secondary College (Deputy Ombudsman Report, p.78). However, the capacity to use coercion remains. Like the OSD at Liverpool, the tactical response unit of the Western Australian Police, attired in full riot gear, used batons to disperse a union protest outside Patrick's Fremantle terminal (*West Australian*, 17 April 1998).

Peace-keeping appears to be the general way of policing public order in Britain and Australia: negotiation and collaboration may be the tools to achieve this, but the policing of the Honiton eco-protest indicates that sophisticated intelligence and strategic forward planning may also achieve a peaceful resolution. Violence is in neither the police nor the protesters' interest, especially with the accountability of the ubiquitous electronic media. Police are seeking to control pickets and protests by minimising the threat of violence, rather than by suppressing dissent. Police too are enforcers of the law. They always maintain their legitimate coercive potential, embodied in various types of paramilitary tactical response units, especially if they have the numbers to overpower the transgressors. Police discretionary power, limited by law

and court judgements, allows certain capacity for manoeuvre and accord with protesters and dissenters, but specially trained, equipped and mobile units are available to police command to quell political, industrial and environmental dissent if compromise and collaboration fail.

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