

Policing Protest in Brighton –Report Published

Press Release and Summary of Findings

Sussex police used excessive force against young protestors, according to a report out today. The report, written by academics at the Universities of Brighton and Sussex, scrutinized police tactics on two protest marches held in Brighton on the 24th and 30th November 2010. Police were found to have beaten non-violent protestors, including children as young as 14 with batons, threatened them with dogs, pushed and kicked them.

Police also used the controversial tactic of “kettling” demonstrators 6 times over the two marches. As many as 1400 young people were encircled and held captive by police, for up to 2 hours. Kettling has been criticized as an unjustified deprivation of liberty, for its capacity to anger otherwise peacefully minded people, and for the violence involved in creating and maintaining the kettle.

One year 10 student, remembered how he had been forced into a kettle at St Peter’s Church on 30th November 2010:

I was walking down the old steine, just by st.peters church at 5:20 and I stopped to tie my shoelace, as I knelt down I was kneed in the head with no warning and told to " get up and move on" I got up and I heard the officer who had kneed me's colleague say "there getting out of control surround them" I then got hit again by the same police officer with his shield, he said " move faster ". We then got moved onto a little traffic island made to fit about 20 people at a maximum and there were at least 100 people crowded onto it.

Children were kettled in wintry conditions for up to two hours outside St Peter’s Church. Police also used controversial ASBO powers to require young people to reveal personal details and be filmed, as a condition of being released from the kettle.

The protests were held to oppose the Liberal Conservative coalition’s raising of the cost of higher education fees, to up to £9000 a year, and the abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance, which provided small payments to young people to help meet the costs involved with continuing in education after the age of 16.

Louise Purbrick said: “ Accounts of the police using force and coercion against young people began to circulate during the student demonstrations of 24th and 30th November and in their immediate aftermath. We felt the high level policing of a local protest comprised of school children deserved serious consideration and our study is based the collation of first hand experiences and the examination of hundreds of photographs, films and web-based written records. Testimony shows the use of violence and kettling against quite young children, and reveals police insisting that children be filmed as a condition of their release. These are just some of the key findings of a lengthy report, that ultimately calls into question the legitimacy of recent policing of political protest.”

Lucy Robinson said: "ASBO legislation was designed to be used against anti-social behaviour. These young people were not hanging around on street corners upsetting passers by, they were exercising their democratic right to protest against government policies that will have a really harmful effect on their futures. We should be commending the young protestors in Brighton for making their protest in a vibrant, peaceful way. Not threatening them with kettles and ASBOs."

Tom Akehurst said: "I'm very concerned about the effect this has on law-abiding people who want to exercise their rights to protest government policy. The message from the marches in Brighton is that law-abiding demonstrators risk being attacked, kettled and filmed by the police: seriously undermining the vital democratic right to protest."

Professor Bob Brecher, Director of the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics at the University of Brighton (CAPPE), said: "It is clear from the actions of both Sussex and the Metropolitan Police that some officers have taken it upon themselves actively to try to scare young people in particular into not protesting. If the United Kingdom is not to continue to degenerate into neo-liberal authoritarianism, attempts to undermine the right to protest have to be resisted. This REPORT is a major contribution to such resistance and the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics at the University of Brighton (CAPPE) is proud to be associated with it: in its carefully detailed analysis and its consideration of evidence it is a model of how universities contribute to the societies which support them. Indeed, if universities do not defend freedom, who will?"

- An estimated 2,500 people on the demonstration of 24th and at least 1500 participated on the 30th. Some estimates are higher.
- The majority of those protesting were young people. Many were school-aged children.
- Of a total of a total of 11 reported arrests made on the days when the demonstrations took place, 9 were eighteen years or under and of these 6 were only 15 years old.
- Any child in the United Kingdom since 15 January 1992, the date of the ratification of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has a set of rights and protections. These include: the rights to liberty, free expression, privacy, humane treatment in accordance with age, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Kettling is currently legal in the UK under certain circumstances, but its legality is being challenged in the European Court and legal challenges are ongoing, against the kettling of children in the London demonstrations of 9th December 2010.
- *Political Protest and the Police: Young People in Brighton A report on student demonstrations in Brighton, 24th and 30th November 2010* by Tom Akehurst (University of Sussex), Louise Purbrick (Brighton University) and Lucy Robinson (University of Sussex)
- Published online on 7 April 2011, in association with the Centre for Applied Philosophy Politics and Ethics at the University of Brighton
- The full report and copies of this press release will be available at the following URL: <http://artsresearch.brighton.ac.uk/research/centre/CAPPE-centre-for-applied-philosophy-politics-and-ethics/news>
- For Press queries and images to accompany this story please contact Tom Akehurst tla21@sussex.ac.uk

Summary of Findings

1. Many young protesters were pushed by police officers and some were pulled, thrown, hit and punched.
2. The capacity of police officers to use and threaten violence was enhanced through the use of batons, riot shields, CS gas or pepper spray, the wearing of layers of body armour and the deployment of dogs. Sussex Police disclaimers that tasers were not fired on 24th and 30th demonstrations have not reassured participants or witnesses about the use of these devices or similar, stun batons or other type of shock weapon.
3. Police officers showed less consideration for the security and dignity of young persons than of adults, often refusing to communicate with younger demonstrators and using physical force against them disproportionately.
4. The level of violence used by police against demonstrators on the 24th and 30th November was disproportionate and unjustified, given the relatively peaceful nature of the protest.
5. Over the course of both demonstrations, there were eight attempts to kettle protestors and six were established. These kettles varied in size and in duration. It is estimated that 1400 people were kettled, of whom the majority were under eighteen years of age and a large proportion were under sixteen years old. All kettles were imposed and maintained with violence or the threat of violence.
6. Sussex Police appear to not have taken on board the findings and recommendations on policing demonstrations contained in two Inspectorate of Constabulary reports, raising questions of best practice, and appropriate ethical behaviour, as well as the legality of the tactics as deployed on the 24th and the 30th.
7. The deployment of increasing numbers of police officers against declining numbers of demonstrators as the protest drew to a close isolated and intimidated young people; these police deployments at the latter stages of both 24th and 30th demonstrations were particularly punitive since they served no legitimate purpose. On these occasions kettling could be construed as a form of collective punishment.
8. Police tactics, including violence and kettling, caused confrontations between demonstrators and the police. This was the foreseeable result of the police tactics deployed.
9. Police tactics, including violence and kettling, created the circumstances for confrontations that can lead to arrest. Arrests were made when kettled demonstrators were frustrated and confused by their containment and detention.
10. The reasons for arrests were not evident to participants in or observers of the demonstrations. Those who witnessed arrests close at hand believed them to be false.
11. The use of anti-social behaviour legislation, particularly Section 50 of Police Reform Act 2002 that required young people contained in kettles to supply their personal details as a condition of release was coercive and unjustified. The attempt by young people to participate in a political activity was immediately defined anti-social; children's involvement in the political culture of protest was criminalised.
12. Young people were filmed as they marched and as they assembled outside various buildings on the 24th and 30th demonstrations. They were also filmed individually prior to release from the final kettles on both days. This contravened the widespread prohibition of making and viewing images of young people without their consent and that of their carers. The filming of children involved in political protest was unethical and has no legal justification.
13. Taken together, police tactics contribute to a "defacto criminalisation" of political protest.