

London police launch violent raid on anti-G8 protesters

By Robert Stevens
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Around 1,200 riot police were mobilised in London Tuesday against anti-capitalist protesters. Throughout the day the police attacked supporters of the StopG8 group, making a total of 57 arrests.

Supporters of the group were beginning protests as part of a five-day “Carnival Against Capitalism” ahead of the G8 summit in Northern Ireland next week.

Mass arrests were made by police after they smashed their way into a squat with chainsaws, axle-grinders, crowbars and climbing gear. The disused building used by squatters in Beak Street, near Regent Street in Soho, was surrounded by 100 riot police from 10 am. Police cordons were set up to seal off the building from the surrounding streets and people working nearby were instructed to stay inside.

An AFP photographer told media three police abseiling [rappelling] teams had positioned themselves on the roof of the building. A police helicopter hovered above the scene for the duration.

After police broke in at around 1:40 pm, they forcibly removed around 40 people. One of those removed later told the *Independent* that he witnessed a police officer punch a protester in the face as the building was cleared. He said, “There was quite a lot of activity but I was just behind the guy who got hit. I was trying to move back and they grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and punched him square in his face and split his lip open.”

Another man who had been in the squat said he saw blood on a police riot shield adding, “I think it’s police brutality, to enter a completely legal squat. They’re just trying to stop any protests. It’s pretty scary.”

The police also violently wrestled a protester to the ground on the roof of the building as he tried to escape. The man was seen to be bleeding profusely as he lay sprawled on the roof, surrounded by around 10 police

officers. He was later pictured wearing an oxygen mask on an ambulance stretcher with his hands tightly bound with wrist ties.

Another protester, Dave, told the *London Evening Standard*, “The police response has been colossal. There’s hundreds of police here, we couldn’t do anything serious even if we tried.” (Pictures of the above and other parts of the operation can be seen in this article.)

To justify their actions, the Metropolitan Police claimed that they carried out the pre-emptive operation as they had “intelligence” that the protesters may have had offensive weapons and were planning disorder. A Scotland Yard spokesman said, “Officers attended an address in Beak Street with a search warrant relating to intelligence that individuals at the address were in possession of weapons and were intent on causing criminal damage and engaging in violent disorder.” Police also claimed they had intelligence pointing to a plan to use “paint bombs.”

These claims were disputed by protesters who said those in the squat were protesting against the number of empty properties in London. Dave told the *Independent*, “There were people on the balcony trying to communicate with the police, asking for time to make a decision because they were worried about homelessness. The police officer said that he would go and make a decision on that. Two minutes later, they came with axle-grinders.”

Another protester, reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, said, “This was peaceful, but they did not give us a chance to march. They stopped us marching. They came in with shields hitting people and had some kind of spray, like a pepper spray.”

The StopG8 group denied it had collected weapons of any sort in the building and reports attest that no lethal

weapons were found during the police search.

The StopG8 group issued an announcement on Twitter during the riot police's operation at the squat reading, "Carnival will go ahead despite cops at Beak St. Don't let them intimidate us! See you 12 noon Oxford Circus and Piccadilly Circus."

Police then trailed a small group of protesters as they marched through the capital's West End around Oxford Circus and Piccadilly Circus. They violently confronted the protesters, including throwing them to the ground. Footage shot by Channel 4 News and other media shows some of the violence being meted out by massed ranks of police to peaceful, unarmed people.

One passerby speaking to Channel 4 observed, "We've been walking down the street. I haven't seen anybody smash any windows or attack anybody. I've seen no crime or any criminal damage. I haven't seen any protester do anything remotely illegal. The police come and they get very rough with people."

Such was the scale of the police operation in London that the right-wing *Daily Mail* commented, they "arrived in such numbers that from most angles it was impossible to see anything beyond a sea of blue riot helmets. For most of the day police vans outnumbered black cabs by about 20 to one. Some even came by bus."

As with previous demonstrations, police issued Section 60 and Section 60 AA orders for Westminster and the City of London, allowing them stop and search people at random and giving them power to order people to remove face coverings.

The democratic right to protest has been vastly curtailed over recent years. The *Telegraph* commented that the police raided the squat, "after activists refused to discuss arrangements for the protests in advance."

The Home Office spokesman, with no mention of the indiscriminate violence carried out by the police, commented, "Rights to peaceful protest do not extend to violent or threatening behaviour and the police have powers to deal with any such acts."

It is the police who now decide which protests can and cannot go ahead in the capital. On Wednesday the Met warned, "There is information to suggest that there will be further protests in London today. As yet no one has chosen to work with us."

Stating that they expected a demonstration to be held at 2:00 pm in Carlton Gardens near Pall Mall, Scotland

Yard added, "Officers will be deployed at key locations and also act as a flexible reserve across London that can be quickly moved to respond to any incidents."

In 2005 and 2009 the British government utilised the full force of the state to break up protests against summits of the G20 and G8, held in the UK. In April 2009 heavily armed riot police attacked protesters in the streets of the City of London as part of Operation Glencoe. Newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson, who was walking home from work, was killed after being violently thrown to the ground from behind by Territorial Support Group officer Simon Harwood.

Last year Harwood was found not guilty of the manslaughter of Tomlinson, despite a May 3, 2011 inquest verdict that the 47-year-old father of nine was unlawfully killed.

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