Policing Contemporary Political Protest: From Strategic Incapacitation to Strategic Facilitation?

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Objectives

1. Trace the changing nature of public order policing since the 1980s
2. Indicate parallel shifts in the prevailing socio-political context
3. Emphasise the corresponding implications for police legitimacy & possible reform
4. Outline a (thwarted!) research agenda
Changing Models of Policing

Academics reckon that, since the 1980s, there have been three major styles (or models) of public order policing. These are:

- **The 1980s**: Escalated Force (the miners)
- **The 1990s**: Negotiated Management (single-issue politics)
- **2000-present**: Strategic Incapacitation (globalised, non-hierarchical protest; in a context of technological change and the proliferation of social media)
Policing Context: 2000s

- Transnational movement(s) for global justice
- "Transgressive" versus "contained" protesters (Noakes & Gillham)
- Non-hierarchical, leaderless, no liaison
- Differing protest repertoires
- Summit meetings: IPPs
- Police, media emphasis on recalcitrant minority
2000s: Strategic Incapacitation

Dominant Model:

- use of no-protest zones (e.g. concrete or metal barriers and curfews)
- Interception and obstruction of protesters
- disruption of assembly or convergence centres
- use of "less lethal" weapons (pepper spray, tear gas, concussion grenades) to retake spaces of contention
- use of intelligence and surveillance to predict or monitor demonstrators' behaviour and assign perceived levels of risk or danger
- pre-emptive arrests (e.g. to take out ringleaders)
From 2010: Strategic Facilitation?

Prevailing Context:
- Controversy and litigation around "kettling"
- Media outcry and opprobrium re G20 policing
- The "Adapting to Protest" reports: dialogue (& "dynamic risk assessment"), communication, facilitation, differentiation.

Implications Re Legitimacy & Reform:
- ACPO response: commitment to facilitating "the right to protest"
- The ATP report "will shape the future of national public order policing" and "drive changes in our preparations and relationships with those involved" (Med Hughes)
Anti-NATO Protest (Nov 2009)

- Anti-Militarist Network AMN), NatoWC
- Novel deployment of 5 facilitation officers
- Ex hostage negotiators; no training; no prior knowledge or contact; 2 days' notice; no contact details; linked only to "Silver"
- In practice: marginalised; authority usurped; "kettling" and "compounding" tactics; called upon to "soothe" and "persuade"
Students' Demo (Nov 2010)

- Occupation and destruction of Millbank
- However, majority of 50,000 were passive and followed agreed route; police were not primary targets; throwing of fire extinguisher was roundly condemned
- Quality press pointed to lack of "dynamic risk assessment"
- "Backlash" threatens "most progressive development…since the 1980s"