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# Are Changes within Public Order Strategy in British Policing Explained by Social Class?



**Josh Rutland**

Department of Politics, University of York

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## Abstract

This paper explores changes in police public order strategy in the UK, analysing whether the social class or racial identification of protestors influences the style of policing. The police have shifted from a previously repressive 'force' to a more accommodating 'service', necessitating research to explain this change with reference to recent demonstrations. This paper argues that neoliberalism, which centres around freedom and the retreating role of the state, explains the more accommodating nature of public order policing today. It combines discourse analysis of class and racial influence with process tracing around neoliberalism. This paper asserts that neoliberal ideas covertly encompass social class (and race to a lesser extent), while explaining the loss of police resources and autonomy too. These ideas appear ingrained in British politics, implying the strategy of restraint towards protest is permanent.

## Introduction

This study assesses changes in police public order strategy in the UK, considering whether the social class and racial characteristics of activists explains changes in strategy. It explores this topic within the context of London under the remit of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). London is a capital of protest politics (Tranmer, 2011); its political and financial significance attracts activists while the city's large population facilitates mass mobilisation more so than other areas.

Indeed the study of protest is of great salience, with an international trend towards rising rates of unconventional or elite-challenging behaviour (Inglehart, 1997: p312) and a remarkable increase in citizen engagement during the late twentieth century (Norris, 2002: p8). This trend appears exponential with Bailey (2020) observing a 'protest boom' in the past decade since 2010. Evidently citizens are becoming more politically-active, showing their grievances at the current status quo through means of mass assembly.

Yet the most intriguing aspect of this shift is how the police respond to such protests – the Metropolitan Police in particular has faced questions over their handling of numerous events in London. There has been great debate as to whether the police serve to accommodate mass protest or constrain it to minimise disruption. Competing groups have accused the Met Police of acting disproportionately to certain groups compared to others, resulting in senior officers frequently being probed by politicians and journalists.

The role of social class in modern Britain is of great salience, being a recent point of discussion. This is subsequent to the government's own Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 2021 noting how the traditional, binary Black-White racial divide fails to

account for everyone who is 'disadvantaged' (Sewell, 2021: p233). The Commission references the measure of social class, or more specifically the 'National Statistics Socio-economic Classification' (NS-SEC), which measures employment relations and the conditions of occupations (ONS, n.d.).

This paper will examine whether changes in public order policing are connected to allegations of implicit bias, such as the claim of 'institutional racism' encapsulated in the Macpherson Report 1999. It investigates whether social class is also an institutional bias amongst police officers and will expand upon the existing literature around class-based and racial disparities, extending this into the sphere of public order policing more specifically.

The paper will explore the transformation of the Met's approach to protest within the past decade too, with the adoption of a new 'human rights compliant' framework for public order policing (Jackson et al., 2018) and greater consideration given to our right to protest. This paper argues that the Metropolitan Police now offers a much fairer and more proportionate policing operation to a wide range of political groups since these changes.

In fact the use of force is far more constrained, only utilised when operational requirements justify it. Recent changes in policy problematise both the Marxist interpretation and postcolonial interpretation of the police, which offer an overly-simplistic idea of an incredibly complex decision-making model. Both class and race do play a role, but far less overtly than these two schools of thought conclude.

This paper will look at the notion of neoliberalism as a key driver behind this change, which has been consistently embraced by governments spanning the past four decades. It will build upon the ideas of Robert Reiner (2016) who demonstrate how successive governments have overseen the simultaneous diminution of both police resources and police autonomy, creating an institution which facilitates mass protest rather than suppressing it. Reiner writes considerably around the connection between policing and politics thus making him a useful scholar to reference.

Indeed broader changes of power within the British state have seen the government retreat its role in society, replaced with personal responsibility. This project concludes class and race have a fairly superficial influence on the changes in public order strategy, which is far better explained by the implementation of neoliberalism. It will explore David Harvey's (2007) work around neoliberalism and covert class restoration, extending this research beyond the confines of policing alone.

This paper uses two methodologies in exploring changes in British protest policing. Firstly it utilises discourse analysis, studying scholars of both Marxist and postcolonialist ideology and their perceptions of the police. It frames these ideological strands in contemporary context, considering whether they explain the accusations of class or racial bias. Secondly it utilises process tracing, studying the rise of neoliberalism since the late twentieth century and its acceleration in the past decade. It applies case studies of protest in London to argue that neoliberal values are responsible for the police policy of restraint.

# The Origins of Policing

In order to conceptualise policing, the origins of the British police must first be understood. This paper will review the influence of class and race, which are captured with two main schools of thoughts. These are the Marxist perspective and the postcolonial perspective.

Firstly, scholars of Marxist persuasion see an implicit political dimension to the police with a focus on the protection of private property and defence of a dominant, oppressive social order (Porta and Reiter, 1998: p35). They believe that the police are a means of social control keeping the subordinate classes in their place (Zachary, 2017: p12) as the upper classes wish to maintain the status quo and their fortunate position in society (Robinson and Scaglione, 1987: p117-118).

For classical Marxists, the origins of the London Metropolitan Police Force, latterly the Metropolitan Police Service, stem directly from the effects of capitalism. Harman (2006) observes how squabbles between people were a necessary by-product of the hardships caused by exploitation; the police have the role of keeping these squabbles under control with the use of force to impose order if necessary.

Indeed the creation of a modern, professional and bureaucratised police force during the early nineteenth century was largely to enforce a higher level of order; deploying police officers to manage protest and riot ensured routine discipline rather than a sporadic 'thunderbolt from on high' with military intervention (Porta and Reiter, 1998: p38-39). Porta and Roma also note how, despite a softer style of public order policing in the mid twentieth century, the police increasingly militarised during the 1970s and 1980s which saw the rapid deployment of 'squads' to restore order by force with a greater focus on training and riot control equipment (p44).

Placing this in empirical context, social unrest in Britain especially during the 1980s saw an 'alien policing system' with a paramilitary approach, symbolising a coercive and oppressive style of policing (Waddington, 1991: p123). The police became a means of quelling the political demands of activists, such as the Miners' Strike 1984-1985 where working class miners angrily protested at the decision to shut the British coal industry. Events such as the Miners' Strike evidenced the changes in public order policing, encompassing an increasingly robust approach.

Therefore Marxism finds policing inextricably associated with class, capitalism and exploitation. They view police officers as oppressors of the working class, preventing them from revolting against the ruling elites. Changes in police strategy can be viewed as a means of subduing growing dissent amongst the lower classes.

Yet despite the clear ideas of classical Marxist thinkers regarding the function of the police, there is minimal attention given to the formation of the modern institution. Indeed Marx and Engels wrote very little when it came to policing (Pearce, 1976: p61-

66; cited Robinson and Scaglione, 1987: p112) meaning there is no overarching consensus.

The ambiguities in Marxist ideology regarding their interpretation by different scholars is encompassed with the Miliband-Poulantzas Debate. Ralph Miliband adopted an 'instrumentalist' theory of the state, in which the state's role is to serve capitalist interests because of the social composition of governments. Conversely Nicos Poulantzas adopted a 'structuralist' theory of the state, in which the state is objectively a capitalist entity reproducing capitalist relations (Murphy, 2017).

The divide between Marxist scholars proves that the ideology is far from homogenous and universally understood. Indeed the police can both be perceived as an institution serving capitalist interests as Miliband would promote, and as an institution reproducing capitalist relations as Poulantzas would promote. These inconsistencies shift the thesis towards considering alternative schools of thought regarding the origins of policing.

Postcolonialism offers a far more comprehensive view regarding the roots of British policing. Scholars of postcolonial ideology view the police as an inherently colonial institution. They advocate the fact that policing as an occupation began in the British colonies, starting with colonial Ireland during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Sir Robert Peel, the Chief Secretary in Ireland, created the first professional force to keep a lid on the tide of outrages and faction fighting sweeping the land (PSNI, n.d.). Local populations in the colonies were often regarded as a threat to British power (Bell, 2013) and the Irish Constabulary served to be a 'practical prototype' for policing indigenous populations who required a coercive arm (Sinclair, 2008: 175). Postcolonialists argue that the roots of policing stem from the need to suppress minorities under settler rule.

Indeed the Irish Constabulary's original role was an 'imposer of force' on the people (Sinclair, 2008: 173-174). There were few signs of the modern-day police ethos around professionalism and integrity, with brute force largely being seen as more effective. Repressing the grievances of those under colonial rule appeared an easier option for the government than resolving them.

Moreover changes in public order policing in the UK also contains a direct link to British colonialism. Many domestic police control tactics were directly imported from Hong Kong (Brogden, 1987) which was under British rule during much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly there was a demand for Irish-trained officers across the Empire and Commonwealth for their expertise in public order maintenance and semi-military tactics (Sinclair, 2008: p174).

This has been described as the 'Imperial Boomerang Effect' (Woodman, 2020) where British colonies became an experimentation ground for strategies before the most successful ones were deployed domestically in the UK. The diffusion of combative policing across the Empire supports the postcolonial argument, where colonial lands are merely 'used' and treated repressively with little respect or compassion for the people who reside there.

## Implicit Bias in the Police

Following the Marxist and postcolonial conceptions of the police, it may be tempting to assume that bias will ensue. Implicit bias is an allegation levied on the police, with Marxists proclaiming an aversion for the working class and postcolonialists proclaiming an aversion for ethnic minorities.

The Perception Institute (2019) defines 'implicit bias' as feelings, preference or attitudes towards people without our conscious knowledge. Implicit bias can shape our personal decision-making process without our awareness; when we are faced with a huge number of decisions or decisions of great complexity we revert to our unconscious preferences to guide our judgments.

It appears easy to believe that implicit bias does play a role in police public order strategy given the very nature of protest policing. Public order commanders face a series of dynamic and multifaceted decisions while seeking to uphold the safety of the protestors, the police officers on the ground and other members of the public too. There is little time to intricately evaluate decisions, while perceived danger or risk is instrumental in the judgements of senior officers. This paper explores implicit bias from two points of view – bias based on class and bias based on race.

Indeed criminality is often associate with poorer, lower-class individuals (Gabor, 2016: p33) of unattractive, rough-looking appearance (p38). The people most exploited through capitalism would inevitably have the greatest gripes with their current situation and therefore the police have a certain section of society to focus their crime-fighting efforts on. Mcara and Mcvie (2005: p28) describe the working class as a group of 'permanent suspects' who are kept under constant surveillance. This frames the police under the 'structuralist' theory of the state, reproducing social division as Marxists such as Nico Poulantzas would state. In turn this ensures the existing dominant class remains unchallenged.

Similarly David Lammy MP found that white working class people face pervasive discrimination and underrepresentation similar to BAME people in The Lammy Review (Lammy, 2017: p3). This advances the idea that working class individuals are treated starkly different to those of higher classes, often alienated and excluded.

However the role of class is fairly incongruent to modern day context, falling short of fully explaining the situation. Class itself is an incredibly broad characteristic, which fails to account for modern individualism not to mention the fact it has many alternative definitions even within Marxist thought (Baldissera and Chiesi, 2019). The traditional Marxist split between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is somewhat obsolete, with modern employment creating great ambiguity with regards to our relationship to the means of production. The service sector for example amalgamates workers of all educational backgrounds and upbringings negating conventional divisions. Therefore the relevance of class to present-day policing must be questioned; social class is

moulded by a multitude of other external characteristics which surpass the divide between rich and poor.

Moreover Marxist conceptions about the police having an aversion for the working class appear not to materialise in protest policing. Groups such as Extinction Rebellion (XR), who have called for the government to take stronger action to tackle climate change, have faced some of the most stringent policing responses in the past few years. A recent study suggests XR is overwhelmingly middle class and highly educated (Keele University, 2020), with an endorsement of postmaterialist values and a focus on the environment for future generations. They utilise non-violent yet highly disruptive tactics such as “sit-ins” where roads are blocked and “lock-ons” where they affix themselves to objects or buildings (Brown and Mead, 2021: p31-32).

Despite this, the Met made 1,148 arrests during XR’s ‘Spring Uprising’ in March 2019, with over 900 of those charged, and a further 1,828 arrests during the ‘Autumn Uprising’ in October 2019. The cost of policing both protests totalled £37m (HMICFRS, 2021: p17). The substantial number of arrests when policing an ‘overwhelmingly middle class’ demonstration appears incongruent with any Marxist conceptions. The police’s apparent aversion for the working class, while upholding the interests of the middle classes and elites, is not shown in public order strategy with regards to Extinction Rebellion.

Indeed the Met was even taken to court over their approach to XR’s activism. During the ‘Autumn Uprising’ in October 2019 the Met utilised Section 14(1) of the Public Order Act 1986 to impose a blanket ban on mass assembly of more than two people across the London. However this was subsequently deemed unlawful by the High Court, as separate gatherings both in time and distance cannot reasonably be treated as mass assembly for the purposes of 14(1) (Dingemans and Chamberlain, 2019). This highlighted the extremes the police were willing to go to in order to suppress lawful protest. Imposing a blanket ban on protest shows an incredibly strong desire to suppress this kind of activism despite the nonviolent, middle-class nature of the group.

Conversely, working class demonstrations such as the anti-austerity movement have seen far fewer arrests despite significant physical abuse towards officers. A 2015 protest campaigning against government expenditure cuts including welfare support, which saw several police officers injured and mass disorder ensue, concluded with just fifteen arrests (BBC, 2015). Similarly a 2014 protest from students campaigning against an increase in tuition fees, which saw activists break through barriers in Parliament Square, concluded with just eleven arrests (BBC, 2014). While these demonstrations took place a few years ahead of Extinction Rebellion’s activism, the vast number of arrests at XR protests compared to the minimal number at more aggressive and disorderly demonstrations contradicts alleged class bias.

It must also be stated that the duration of detention is a largely invariable factor when quoting the number of arrests. The police can only legally detain an individual for a maximum of 24 hours before they either have to release or charge them, with the only exception being suspected of committing a serious offence such as murder or terrorism

(GOV.UK, n.d.). Therefore activists of all political persuasion arrested by police will have a similar experience of police detention.

Moreover, when considering the Met's approach to XR, it seems implausible to claim that officers repress the working class in this scenario. There is even a reasonable argument supporting the contrary, which negates any Marxist notions regarding the police and public order strategy. While this paper does not argue the contrary, it does seek to surpass the concept of social class policing. Exploring the importance of race as a successor for the class-based model is a logical advancement which goes considerably further in explaining modern day inequality.

In fact the government's own Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021) detailed how ethnic minority groups are far more likely to live in persistent poverty compared to their white counterparts. More specifically, the most concentrated pockets of deprivation are found among Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black groups (Sewell, 2021: p37). The Commission made reference to lifelong disadvantages amongst BAME communities ranging from upbringing, education and employment type which partly comprise social class in themselves.

Consistent to these findings, the Centre for Social Justice state that the medians earnings gap between Black and White British workers has steadily increased over time with White British workers earning comparably more (CSJ, 2020: p39). This is likely to be facilitated by the systemic factors such as education and upbringing which the Commission mention, although one must note that the research only offers a binary 'white-black' earnings gap with other ethnicities excluded.

Therefore, while social class is important, it is far too superficial to assume that class alone is a factor within police bias. One cannot deny the connection between social class (at least in terms of occupation) and race given the marked disparities in life outcomes. Race clearly performs a pivotal role in shaping British class identification, as higher levels of deprivation amongst BAME communities results in more BAME individuals identifying as working class.

Indeed there is significant evidence supporting the idea of racial police bias. The Metropolitan Police have been consistently criticised over their treatment of black and ethnic minority people, being accused of targeting black people in the use of 'stop and search' while showing less enthusiasm for investigating the grievances of black complainants.

In fact the landmark Macpherson Report stated that 'racism infected the MPS' (Macpherson, 1999: p369) describing it as 'institutional racism' as opposed to an issue in isolation. The Report follows the racially-motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. Sir William Macpherson, who led the inquiry, found that the investigation was marred by professional incompetence and a failure of senior officers (p365) highlighting the lack of enthusiasm for investigating crimes against ethnic minorities.

Even two decades on, the legacy of this enquiry remains very much intact. The murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the USA sparked the mobilisation of the Black Lives Matter campaign in 2020, which saw the British police service brought under the

spotlight for their approach to race. The Met's most senior BAME officer, Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, has previously refuted the label 'institutionally racist' stating that much has changed. Despite that he did admit that disproportionate stop and search, recruitment and promotion are all contentious areas with too many BAME people stopped and too few BAME officers recruited and promoted (Basu, 2019).

Using the postcolonialist viewpoint, we can observe that British policing is still an inherently white service. Just 18% of the Met's total workforce are Black, Asian or from a Minority Ethnic group, even with an increase from 3,000 to 5,000 BAME MPS officers in the past decade (London Assembly, 2020). This is incredibly disproportionate to the diverse nature of London where 40.2% of the city's population identify as BAME (GOV.UK, 2018). Indeed these figures support the admissions of AC Neil Basu, highlighting the extent of under-representation amongst ethnic minorities in the police. It seems credible that a predominately white police service has little empathy with the grievances of black and ethnic minority complaints explaining the criticism.

Additionally, certain psychological research upholds the postcolonialist perception of the police as bias against minorities. The British organisation *Centre for Crime and Justice Studies* commissioned research which suggests black males are more strongly associated with danger and hostility than white males (Holroyd, 2019). This is particularly important in policing, where danger and hostility are key factors influencing the deployment of police tactics. Both senior officers and rank and file officers face many complex, time-critical decisions during incidents such as the use of force which can be considerably influenced by perceived danger.

Despite this, there does appear to be limits to the racist displays by the police, specifically in the Met's public order strategy. While the institution may have an issue with race within its own ranks, it does not appear to influence their approach to protest. Arguably the most renowned racial protest was the Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign in 2020, which advocated for racial equality following the murder of George Floyd in the US. The protest was marred with aggression and physical abuse towards officers, with protestors contained in a police cordon (known as a 'kettle') during the evening following violence from the crowd (Metropolitan Police, 2020b). Yet despite overt hostility towards the police, just 240 arrests were made for offences such as violent disorder, assault on police and public order matters with only 12 suspects charged (Metropolitan Police, 2020a).

One must question why a predominantly black protest marred with violence saw a less interventionist police response. Indeed the Met was even praised for their 'exemplary gold strategy' during Operation Minorca, the policing of the BLM protests in the summer of 2020, where clear expectations and instructions were set out for public order commanders while being reviewed daily (HMICFRS, 2021: p37). In this case, allegations about the police repressing minorities and deterring them from protesting do not evidence themselves whatsoever.

Even predominately-white protests marred with violence have been met with a rather restrained police response, further negating the idea of bias either in favour of or against BAME protestors. The 'Free Tommy Robinson' march through central London in

June 2018, which saw twenty police officers injured and ‘terrifying disorder’ arise (BBC, 2019), led to just nine arrests out of over 5,000 protestors (Metropolitan Police, 2018). The protest was part of a campaign calling for Tommy Robinson, a right-wing activist and founder of the English Defence League, to be freed from prison. Police officers faced a high degree of verbal and physical abuse during the demonstration; in spite of this officers made few arrests and did little to restrict the movement of the group.

Moreover the 2011 London Riots encompasses both a predominately black demonstration and a predominately working-class demonstration. During the month of August, widespread disorder spread around 22 of the Met’s 32 boroughs with an estimated £200m-£300m worth of damage (BBC, 2011). Those in attendance proclaimed to be protesting against police brutality following the shooting of Mark Duggan, a black man shot dead by armed police. There was also reference to government spending cuts which saw the closure of many youth facilities and loss of employment opportunities. Rioters looted shops, set fire to buildings and damaged vehicles.

Yet the BBC report a reluctance amongst the Met’s senior leadership to call upon large numbers of officers in response to the rioting, only deploying 3,000 officers on the first night of the disorder and incrementally increasing resourcing the 16,000 officers by the fourth night. The delay in deploying sufficient numbers led to prolonged disorder and reveal an strategy of restraint given the police were the targets of the protestors. This appears to be a long-running theme for the Met, adopting a less interventionist approach to protest and even disorder compared to foregone times.

While police chiefs would point to the significant cost when deploying large numbers of officers, or simply the logistics of coordinating so many individuals, the 3,000 officers deployed on the first night of the riots is just a tenth of the total number of MPS officers. Indeed 16,000 is approximately half the workforce, which poses the question as to why more resources were not called upon immediately. Whether race or class did influence the decision-making process amongst the Met’s senior leadership remains contentious, but the aforementioned consistency of restraint leads us to a much wider review of police public order strategy.

### *The Case of Extinction Rebellion*

One cannot ignore the rather isolated case of Extinction Rebellion which has seen a remarkably different approach. Each of their 2019 demonstrations saw in excess of 1,000 arrests despite their inherently peaceful, albeit disruptive, tactics. As previously, stated, Extinction Rebellion is often recognised as an ‘overwhelmingly middle class and highly educated’ organisation (Keele University, 2020). This leads us to examine precisely why the police appeared so keen to limit their protest.

While some may perceive XR’s demands as revolutionary, such as their pleas to end our economic reliance on fossil fuels which have long played a vital role in industry and transportation, there is little evidence that the police deem these demands worthy of forceful suppression. Indeed successive governments have enacted environmental

policies such as the push for renewable energy and electrified transportation, negating any suggestion they are averse to the idea.

A more convincing reason for the interventionist approach to XR relates to their highly disruptive tactics, which require substantial police resources to manage. In 2019 alone, their two 'Uprising' protests cost the Met in excess of £37m with over 8,000 MPS officers deployed during the October demonstration (HMICFRS, 2021: p17). The Met was also forced to call upon more than 1,200 officers from 34 forces across the UK as a means of additional resources (p49). This financial cost to the police as a result of XR's protests provide a very strong incentive to disperse the crowds and quickly conclude the demonstration.

XR's tactics such as affixing protestors to large objects or buildings while adopting a style of passive resistance to the police (p51) meant numerous officers were required to safely extract and detain singular protestors. This included specialist removal teams who can safely remove protestors without causing injury. Such substantial resourcing demands mean a considerable proportion of police officers deployed during the event were working overtime shifts which invariably impose additional costs on the police.

Seeking to end the protest as quickly as possible, mainly by making a large number of arrests to reduce the coordination of the protest group, would mitigate the spiralling costs for the police. This appears the most likely reason why XR were treated far more robustly by the police as opposed to potential bias against the organisation.

## Neoliberalism and the Diminution of Policing

Nuancing the class-based and race-based approaches to public order policing, one must challenge Marxist and postcolonial thinkers who seem to adopt an incomplete perception of the police in modern context. Indeed as the previous section notes, class and race have no overt influence upon the decisions of police commanders. The only consistency is a strategy of restraint irrespective of potential disorder.

This paper demonstrates how the police facilitate all kinds of mass protests far more than previously seen. We now witness an approach of 'negotiated management' based on consensus (Gorringer and Rosie, 2013). Protest organisations typically meet the police before an event to formulate a plan which suits both parties, ensuring demonstrations go ahead safely while enabling activists to exercise their right to protest. This new approach has seen the British police cooperate with protestors while tolerating a degree of disruption rarely in previous decades.

But inevitably the question is why have the police shifted from a previously repressive force to a far more accommodating one? Some scholars point to the protestors, proclaiming the growth of nonviolent civil resistance has seen a peaceful revolution (Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008; Chenoweth, 2020; Kraemer, 2021). However this approach is far too shallow to account for the broader changes within the British state,

not to mention the fact that police officers still face physical abuse in public order scenarios. This paper argues that an incremental swing to neoliberal values in the past four decades is a much more convincing explanation as to why the police adopt a more reserved strategy today.

Indeed neoliberal thought has characterised the twenty-first century, with freedom underpinning our conceptions of how we should be ruled (Rose, 1999: p61). Neoliberalism itself revolves around the idea of liberty and the free market (Hall, 2011: p710), resulting in an anti-paternalistic approach from successive governments which explains these policy changes in policing.

Yet neoliberalism extends far deeper than merely a retreat of paternalistic government. Recent Marxist writers such as David Harvey, as opposed to classical Marxists, assert that neoliberalism is a contemporary class-based process, sweeping across the world 'like a vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment' (Harvey, 2007: p23). As Harvey explains, the post-war consensus largely restrained the upper classes' political and economic power. Moreover soaring unemployment and inflation during the 1970s saw communist and socialist parties gain popularity across Europe, which posed a serious political threat to the existing dominant class (p27-28).

This was the main driver behind neoliberalism which took hold during the 1970s and 1980s across the Western world. The upper classes became increasingly concerned that rising left-wing movements would annihilate of their declining power. Harvey (2007: p35) details four significant enablers of neoliberalism being privatisation, financialization, manipulation of crises and state redistribution. Both privatisation and financialisation extended the fields of capital accumulation, as the private sector became a centre of redistributive activity. The creation and manipulation of crises enabled Western IGOs such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) control poorer countries through means of interest rates against national debt. State redistribution, notably the reduction in welfare spending, also served to suppress poorer communities while corporations saw tax cuts and subsidies.

What can be witnessed here is a sustained repression of the poor by the dominant rich. Harvey's four enablers of neoliberalism throughout the 1970s and 1980s, continuing to present day, presents neoliberal values as a restoration of the ruling class. Indeed scholars such as Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy (2011) frame neoliberalism as 'a successful strategy of class reconquest in the overall dynamics of managerial capitalism'. That is to say neoliberalism is a creation of inherent class restoration; it is a project which seeks to covertly protect the political and economic power of the ruling class.

Some scholars such as Ian Bruff (2013) go even further, advocating the rise of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Bruff describes this idea as the shift from dominant social groups neutralising resistance to instead marginalising subordinate classes who resist, challenging the principle of democratic governance (p116). This concept demonstrates how neoliberalism is far more than simply the 'rolling back' of the state, with class playing a pivotal role in numerous conceptions of this.

Furthermore neoliberalism encompasses the postcolonial argument also, framing neoliberal ideas as a racial project too. Scholars such as Nisha Kapoor (2011) promote the concept of 'racial neoliberalism' stemming from the New Labour government in Britain. This led to the 'silencing of race' (p1034), where institutional racism and racial reference gradually evaporated despite racial structures remaining ever more dominant and imposing (p1037). Neoliberal thought saw race erased from prevailing discourses, stifling the grievances of ethnic minorities. This bares remarkable similarities with 'authoritarian neoliberalism' as once again dominant social groups marginalise subordinate minorities as means of defending their own position.

Combining the variations of neoliberalism within the context of policing, it becomes evident that both social class and race do explain changes in public order policing albeit under the cover of neoliberal thought. Indeed neoliberal thought has had a profound and remarkable impact on how the police respond to a whole variety of incidents. Referring to Reiner (2016: p3-4), British policing has faced an unprecedented diminution of police powers, autonomy, status, pay and resources as the role of the police is restrained. The adoption of neoliberal values coincides with the diminishing presence of the police. This paper focuses on two main consequences of neoliberalism, namely on police resources and on police autonomy which have altered the nature of public order policy.

### *Neoliberalism and Police Resources*

Arguably the main impact of neoliberal policies is a significant reduction in the funding for police forces, resulting in a big fall in officer numbers. New Public Management emerged during the 1980s, where the government runs public services like a business to maximise efficiency. While Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher tried to insulate the police from expenditure cuts as part of her tough stance on law and order, ensuing administrations have increasingly pushed the police down the route of NPM (Reiner, 2016: p4-12).

Reiner notes how since the 1990s the police have been put under growing financial pressure, with even New Labour adopting neoliberal values. This pressure was encapsulated with the 2010 coalition government between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, which saw the Tories' conventional law and order stance abandoned. The police became one of the hardest hit public services during the austerity spending cuts, with 31,000 officers and staff lost between 2010 and 2015 (Reiner, 2016: p20) as the government asked police chiefs to achieve more with less. Forces across England and Wales found £2.53bn worth of savings between the years 2011/12 to 2014/15, with three in every twenty jobs removed (HMIC, 2014: p33).

The grave effects of austerity on the police suggests public order commanders are unable to act robustly against mass protests irrespective of their aims. With significantly fewer officers, not to mention fewer specialist resources such as police dogs and horses, operational challenges are unavoidable and forceful action requires substantial resource demands. For example, containment tactics to hold protestors in an

enclosed area require a huge number of public-order trained officers to surround the crowds. This means highly-interventionist tactics such as containments are utilised less frequently given the decline in officer numbers. Thus, the police are pushed towards accommodating mass protest as their capabilities to restrict it have been hindered.

Indeed the lack of resources appears evident in numerous protest and acts of disorder during the past ten years. The MPS' response to the 2011 London Riots was largely criticised on the basis that too few officers were utilised to suppress the disorder. More recently during the Black Lives Matter protests across the capital in 2020, the Evening Standard published a video showing police officers running from disorderly protestors after eight officers were injured (Lawford, 2020). The fact police officers retreated in the face of adverse disorder implies a lack of resources to adequately deal with it. Adopting a strategy of 'holding the line' when the police are vastly outnumbered would put all officers at great risk of further injury.

### *Neoliberalism and Police Autonomy*

Aside from funding, neoliberalism has seen the state as a whole 'rolled back' meaning governments play a reduced role in society. The 2010 coalition government and the ensuing Conservative government since 2015 have moulded a neoliberal minimal state, and aside from the COVID-19 pandemic, have left citizens to their own devices far more than previous administrations allowed for. Prime Minister David Cameron sought to 'roll forward the frontiers of society' (Bell, 2010) as part of his 'Big Society' (Morgan, 2012) with an emphasis on responsibility rather than rights.

One notable change was the introduction of elected and easily-identifiable Police and Crime Commissioners to replace 'shadowy' police authorities (Morgan, 2012: p473) as a means of making the police more accountable. This restricted the power of senior police officers, as they were obliged to integrate the plans and ideas of the PCCs into their strategies. Elected PCCs may have their own approach to public order scenarios, reducing the autonomy of police chiefs.

Moreover there has been growing demand from both the public and the government for the police to place a greater focus on the human rights of protestors. The House of Commons' briefing paper states that since the 2009 G20 protests, which saw three parliamentary committee reviews and even a High Court case into the police tactics deployed, the police have been compelled to reform their use of force (Brown and Mead, 2021: p21). Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) both called for a stronger emphasis on the dialogue between the police and protestors to ensure both sides are transparent with their intentions. This has undoubtedly fuelled the aforementioned shift to a strategy of 'negotiated management' rather than bluntly containing and restricting protest groups.

The JCHR also made other recommendations to police forces, stating that officers could not abuse irrelevant legislation for the purposes of disrupting protestors from lawfully demonstrating. A group of protestors who were stopped and searched during the 2009 G20 protests under the Terrorism Act 2000 took their case to the European Court of

Human Rights and won. This created a precedent amongst officers that 'no suspicion' terrorism legislation must be more carefully used. This removed another tool from the police's armoury when it comes to disrupting protest, facilitating the shift to accommodating protest instead.

## The Modern Police Service

Connecting these findings to the early origins of the police, both as Marxist and postcolonialists claim, shows a major transformation in British policing. While these two schools of thought explain the origins of policing well, they fail to account for contemporary changes. This section examines the present state of policing in the UK, highlighting the changes witnessed compared to early conceptions of the service. Indeed the aforementioned neoliberal values go a considerable way in explaining this transformation, with a loss of police resources and weaker police autonomy necessitating new strategies.

If one considers the postcolonial conceptions of the police as an 'imposer of force' (Sinclair, 2008: p174), it becomes apparent that the ideological roots of the service have been largely left in the past given the aforementioned restraint in police strategy. While one cannot deny the colonial roots of policing in Ireland, alongside Woodman's (2020) 'Imperial Boomerang Effect' relating to police tactics, the service has progressed remarkably into a twenty-first century institution.

Specifically the police's use of force is far more controlled, being heavily regulated and reviewed to ensure the principle of 'policing by consent' is upheld wherever possible. Public order commanders are required to 'minimise recourse to the use of force' and must follow a flow-chart decision-making model for the use of police powers (Brown and Mead, 2021: p13-14). There is little room for police chiefs to use force as a means of oppression, given the regulatory 'red tape' around the performance of the police in public order scenarios.

Moreover allegations of racial bias, such as the Macpherson Report 1999 which proclaimed an aversion within the MPS towards black Londoners, may have been precise twenty years ago yet falls short of considering modern policing. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the MPS has increased its number of BAME officers from 3,000 to 5,000 in the past decade. This is set to be an exponential trend, with the Guardian reporting an agreement between the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and the Met Police to ensure 40% of its new recruits are from BAME backgrounds (Dodd, 2020).

With an increasing proportion of MPS officers set to be from minority backgrounds, the potential for implicit bias against ethnic minorities to materialise is greatly reduced. This enables the service to be fairer, more empathetic and more representative especially in terms of public order policing. Conceptions of the police as oppressors of minorities, or an 'imposer of force', is simply inaccurate in modern context.

Indeed serious matters such as violent crime in London, a top priority for the Met, has disproportionately affected the black community far more than any other. Between 2016 and 2020, 43.8% of all homicides victims in London were black despite only making up 13.3% of the population (London Assembly, 2021). To tackle this the Met Police expanded its Violent Crime Taskforce (VCTF) and during 2020 introduced Violent Suppression Units (VSUs) to adopt proactive tactics to reduce violence across the capital.

The great desire the Met has shown to tackle violent crime, despite it being a crime type which disproportionately impacts upon the black community, negates any suggestion that they seek to oppress minorities in the present day. As previously stated, an increasingly diverse workforce improves the level of compassion for the grievances of minorities in London.

Moreover Marxists conceptions of the police as a means of social control against the subordinate classes (Zachary, 2017: p12) appear a distant analogy also. In a society where class lines are increasingly blurred, where the police have considerably diversified and where officers are much more accountable for their actions the idea of class bias becomes far less convincing.

Indeed this paper has shown there is little correlation, if any, between the class of activists and the approach the police take. While Extinction Rebellion as a largely middle-class organisation is a notable exception, the police have demonstrated incredible restraint in spite of adverse disorder rather consistently. The use of force is carefully considered by police commanders, especially following the 2009 G20 protests, with the safety of the protestors and their right to protest at the forefront of police decision-making.

The class diversification within the police has also been accelerated in recent years, with new recruits representing a wide range of backgrounds. Sweeping reforms regarding police training has seen a greater emphasis placed on formal qualifications. Forces across England and Wales are simultaneously 'educating the recruited' and 'recruiting the educated' (Ramshaw and Soppitt, 2018: p245-246) with the new Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) where new officers either join with a degree or obtain a degree during their training.

This new framework enables both those who did and did not attend university to join the police, with separate recruitment programmes giving non-graduates equal opportunity. As a result, British policing is increasingly being diversified with school leavers, recent graduates and career changers all being encouraged to join. The resultant mix of social backgrounds amongst officers will inevitably mean a more representative service and further negate Marxist ideas of systemic bias against particular social groups.

Yet despite this, social class has had a substantial role in the altered nature of public order policing. While implicit class bias in the police does not materialise, a far more entrenched class bias in the British state and ruling elites has overseen huge changes to the police service. Indeed social class has been covertly pivotal in these changes, with

the upper classes moulding a modern police service (and state) which seeks to enhance their own political and economic power.

Rather than forcibly suppressing activism, there is a growing attitude towards accommodating it. Whether the ruling classes perceive this strategy as a means of appeasement, by permitting protest to avert revolution, is unknown. However social class is underlyingly crucial in explaining the changes to police public order strategy in the past four decades.

## The Future of Public Order Policing

Aside from the analysis of changing protest policing, from the 1970s to present day, the future of this research matter must also be considered. As the project has outlined, the state's management of protest and rioting has constantly changed. Gone are the days of military intervention following the shift to a professionalised police force, with society presently seeing a police service accommodating activism. Thus it is only reasonable to assume that further changes are either happening or are due to happen in years to come.

Even at present the legislative framework which British policing utilises during protests, notably the Public Order Act 1986, is due to be reformed. The aforementioned Extinction Rebellion protests have highlighted series flaws in the current legal framework given highly disruptive yet peaceful protest is difficult for the police to manage.

The government's new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021 (the PCSC Bill) is likely to change the way protests are policed in England and Wales. Part 3 of the PCSC Bill would amend the Public Order Act by significantly lowering the legal test that must be met for the police to impose conditions, widening the types of conditions which can be imposed on static protests, amending the offence of failing to comply with a police condition and allowing the police to impose conditions on one-person protests (Brown and Mead, 2021: p26). The possible application of harsher restrictions on protest show a direct link to Extinction Rebellion, given the MPS' previous unlawful implementation of Section 14(1) orders.

Yet while one may assume the new Bill is likely to initiate changes in public order policing, it seems rather unrealistic when considering other factors. Despite fewer legal implications restricting the police's legislative avenues, the aforementioned neoliberal values seem far too ingrained to be overhauled. Indeed as previously stated, freedom has underpinned our conceptions of how we should be ruled throughout the twenty-first century (Rose, 1999: p61). The majority of both protestors and police officers will have grown up within a neoliberal world, thus suggesting rapid changes towards a more repressive police force is unlikely.

Moreover police resources remain much the same; with no increase in numbers it again seems unfeasible for police commanders to adopt more interventionist or forceful strategies. Despite sporadic surges in recruitment, such as the 2019 Conservative government's policy of recruiting 20,000 more officers within three years under their 'Be A Force For All' campaign (GOV.UK, 2019), the annual loss of officers through retirement or resignation makes this boost negligible. Therefore, the future of public order policing in Britain is likely to be less volatile than its past.

## Conclusion

This paper began by noting Bailey's (2020) observation of a 'protest boom' seen across Britain in the past decade, with an ever more politically-active society willing to take to the streets. Indeed mass assembly across the UK is fast-becoming a significant point of discussion in an increasingly globalised and educated world. Yet this paper puts the focus on the policing of these demonstrations, which is as important as the demonstrations themselves.

Marxists and postcolonialists both offer strong ideas on the origins of policing, with capitalism and colonialism having undoubtedly shaped the history of the United Kingdom. This paper firstly considered social class, as a result of the recent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report which links differences in life outcomes to the components of social class more so than traditional binary divides. However it promptly found that classical Marxist ideas about the police as a state instrument of repression against the working class do not materialise in public order policing. Moreover class is of less overt relevance in modern society, with the Metropolitan Police Service seemingly responding no differently to protests based on the group class classification.

This shifted the thesis towards race which the aforementioned Commission asserts is still relevant, given the most concentrated pockets of deprivation are amongst ethnic minorities. This highlighted the link between class and race, framing race as a determinant of social class. Indeed psychological research and police inquiries such as the Macpherson Report shows an apparent aversion for ethnic minorities, specifically people of the black community, with the Macpherson Inquiry proclaiming that 'racism infected the MPS' (Macpherson, 1999: p369). Yet again though, this apparent implicit bias fails to materialise within protest policing, with predominately black events such as the Black Lives Matter demonstrations and predominately white events such as the 'Free Tommy Robinson' march both seeing mass disorder and violence yet few arrests.

Therefore, what remains constant is the absence of a police 'force' in British protest policing. The Metropolitan Police have consistently exercised an approach of restraint rather than suppression which this paper sought to understand. The most convincing explanation has been the rise of neoliberalism spanning the past four decades, which Rose (1999: p61) claims has characterised the twenty-first century. This paper covered the shift to 'negotiated management' (Gorrige and Rosie, 2013) in how the police

respond to protest, with an emphasis on productive dialogue and compromise between the police and protestors.

Upon examining why this shift has taken place, specifically what aspects of neoliberalism have fostered this changing strategy, the paper considered Robert Reiner's assertion of an 'unprecedented diminution of police powers, autonomy, status, pay and resources' (2016: p3-4). Indeed police resources have been consistently dwindling under the drive towards New Public Management and greater efficiency in the public sector. Moreover police autonomy has waned also with institutions such as HMIC and the JCHR introducing new recommendations and precedents in the past decade, especially following the G20 protests in 2009 which led to a greater emphasis on the human rights of protestors.

With vastly fewer officers and a looming shadow over the performance of the police from regulatory institutions, the capabilities of the police to respond forcefully or robustly is greatly reduced. This goes a considerable way in explaining the new, tamer response towards activists who are accommodated rather than suppressed in twenty-first century public order policing.

Yet neoliberalism extends far deeper than merely public sector efficiency and a less interventionist police force; the fact that ensuing governments spanning decades have embraced the idea deserves greater attention. This paper assessed David Harvey's (2007) idea that neoliberalism is a covert strategy of class restoration. Since the Second World War, the ruling classes have seen their political and economic power fade, exacerbated by the threat of socialist transformation during the 1970s. Neoliberalism and the 'rolling back' of the state became a means of giving less support to the lower classes and expanding the opportunities of capital accumulation for the dominant classes.

Applying Harvey's theory to neoliberalism shows that changes in British public order strategy is underlyingly explained by social class, albeit with a class bias in the British state rather than the police service alone. Indeed the police have considerably diversified in the past decade with new recruits comprising a wide range of backgrounds, gradually negating accusations of systemic implicit bias.

This transformation of British public order policing, from the militaristic response during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, to the gradual shift to accommodating protest since the 1970s appears permanent. Neoliberal values are too ingrained in British political society with the vast majority of police officers and protestors having grown up in neoliberal times. Therefore, despite the introduction of new legislation or possible surges in officer numbers, the current strategy of restraint towards protest will continue while neoliberalism becomes a permanent fixture in British politics.

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