

OPEN LETTER TO THE BRITISH INTERNATIONALIST/ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN/ACTIVIST/PROTEST/STREET SCENES (AND TO ALL THOSE CONCERNED WITH THE PROGRESS OF OUR ENEMIES)

Dear comrades,

This letter comes from Ta Paidia Tis Galarias (TPTG), a Greek anti-authoritarian communist group, which publishes a journal under the same title.¹ We are writing this letter at a crucial moment for the class struggles in Greece, at a moment when the capitalist attacks against the Greek proletariat are getting harsher: the Greek government, in close cooperation with the EU/IMF, has just announced a new set of austerity measures, aimed against our direct and indirect wage (massive lay-offs from the public sector, salary and various allowance cuts, new taxes on income, cuts in pension payments, a poll-tax and new sets of property-taxes, just to name a few...), let alone general reforms affecting working conditions, pensions or the higher education system... Against all this, pockets of resistance have reappeared after three months of social hibernation.

We have been actively engaged in many class struggles that have occurred in Greece over the last few years. Through those struggles we have realized that four practical tasks take precedence over all others at the present juncture:

- a) confrontation with the politics of money (that is, the recently implemented debt-crisis terrorism, itself an expression of a deeper capitalist crisis),
- b) coordination and communication among proletarians participating in the various self-organized class struggles,
- c) confrontation with the policies of the state, police and mass media reinforcing existing separations among us or creating new ones and
- d) international cooperation among those who understand that these measures and policies are not confined to only one country.

Regarding the last two we always were, and still are, highly interested in understanding police strategies, before, during and after demonstrations and/or riots taking place all over the world. Since the rebellion of December 2008 we, among hundred of thousands others, have participated in various demonstrations, some of which have turned into mini riots (e.g. 5th of May 2010, 15th, 28th and 29th of June 2011) and thus have met the violent repression and zero tolerance of the fully-equipped police forces. This experience made us and other comrades want to delve into cases of rioting and police repression worldwide, as well as contemporary collective behaviour theories and crowd psychology, mainly theories focusing on the police perspective or having a police perspective like the one we are going to talk about below, so as to develop our own counter-strategies. This seems rather crucial to us, especially now that the capitalist attacks against us and our struggles have increased both in magnitude and frequency. We will need your help but first of all we would like to share with you some information you might not be aware of, so that we all know where we stand and what is the progress in our enemies' camp.

¹ Those of you who have never read any of our texts in English, could check the following links: http://www.tapaidiatisgalarias.org/?page_id=105 and www.libcom.org/tptg

After carefully searching into the relevant international literature on the internet last January, we came across the theoretical work of social psychologists collaborating with the police in the UK such as S. Reicher, C. Stott and, surprisingly enough, J. Drury.² For those of you who are not familiar with this name, J. Drury or to be more precise Dr. John Drury, as he is better known to the academic milieu (and not only this milieu) as we shall show, is an active member of the British communist group *Aufheben*, since the latter's very beginning.

This unexpected discovery left us all feeling rather uncomfortable and greatly puzzled, trying to think of all the possible explanations for Drury's attitude. We have known the *Aufheben* group for many years and have been interested in their theoretical work, part of which we find particularly stimulating. As a matter of fact, six years ago, we co-translated and co-published *Aufheben's* pamphlet *Behind the 21st century Intifada*³ with other comrades in Greece.

By further examining Drury's profile on the website of the University of Sussex, unpleasant surprises kept being unleashed... We found out that Drury's "consultancies include the National Police CBRN Centre, NATO/the Department of Health Emergency Planning Division, Birmingham Resilience, and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat", while he "run[s] a Continued Professional Development (CPD) course on the Psychology of Crowd Management for relevant professionals", not to mention that he "teach[es] on the CPD course on Policing Major Incidents at the University of Liverpool!"⁴

We also discovered that Drury was the co-author of an interesting scientific article, entitled *Knowledge-Based Public Order Policing: Principles and Practice*, which was featured in **Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice**. The latter is a journal with "international reach", which is "aimed at senior police officers, researchers, policy makers and academics offering critical comment and analysis of current policy and practice, comparative international practices, legal and political developments and academic research" and "draws on examples of good practice from around the world, and examines current academic research, assessing how that research can be applied both strategically and at ground level".⁵

Drury and Co.'s article discusses "strategies, tactics and technologies"⁶ [p. 404] that "promote reconciliation rather than conflict" [p. 404] between the police and social groups, allowing "early, appropriate and targeted interventions before conflict could escalate to a level where only draconian measures would suffice" [p. 412]. Their approach, they claim, can be practically applied (actually it is, as we shall see later) and be "effective in transforming negative relations between police and crowd into positive relations" [p. 404] and thus it "can profitably exploit the opportunities inherent in crowd events" [p. 414], reinforcing already existent differences amongst crowd members, so that non-violent groups within the crowd can be "recruited as allies in subduing violence" [p. 414]

² From now on this scientific gang will be referred to as Drury and Co.

³ See: <http://libcom.org/library/aufheben-behind-the-twenty-first-century-intifada-treason-pamphlet>

⁴ See: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/profiles/92858>

⁵ See the official website: http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/policing/about.html

⁶ All quotes followed by a page number are taken from the afore-mentioned article, which is attached to this open letter, so that a more thorough discussion hopefully be initiated.

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF CROWD BEHAVIOUR & KNOWLEDGE-BASED PUBLIC ORDER POLICING

Knowledge-based public order policing presents itself as the most sophisticated approach at the moment if one is to understand and explain collective behaviour, let alone to propose practical tactics to control crowds. It makes a distinct break with other relevant sociological/psychological theories as it suggests that the crowd, and thus crowd actions, is neither irrational, nor mindless, nor inherently belligerent. According to this theory, collective behaviour is not the outcome of the rapid “contagion” of psychologically fragile and primitive thoughts/actions amongst crowd members, nor is each crowd member’s individual identity dissolved within the anonymity of the crowd, as Le Bon’s crude pseudo-science alleged. Neither is it the result of violent individuals, who are drawn to crowd gatherings, as another key figure of crowd psychology, Allport, had claimed. Both traditional approaches, Drury and Co. argue, are wrong and most importantly dangerous for the maintenance of public order, as in many occasions they create a self-fulfilling prophesy (that is, crowd members who *do* act in a violent way) and thus fueling the fire. By perceiving collective actions as the result of a primitive group mind (Le Bon’s “mad-mob” approach) or in terms of crowd members’ character (Allport’s “hooligan” approach), Drury and Co. claim, police do nothing better than to “*locate the cause of violence as lying entirely within the crowd*” and not in the “*interaction between crowds and the police*” [p. 403].

It is on this interaction that their knowledge-based approach is focussed. In order to investigate the multi-layered dynamics of this interaction Drury and Co. take a step back in order to elaborate on individual and group identity. As they point out “*[t]he core conceptual premise which underlies both Le Bonian crowd psychology and its Allportian critics, is that the standards which control our behaviour are associated with individual identity. If either individual identity is stripped away in the crowd (Le Bon) or else individual crowd members have flawed identities (Allport), then the crowd action will be uncontrolled and the normal restraints against aggression will be removed*” [p. 405]. But, they say, 30 years of social identity research “*has systematically dismantled the particular notion of identity which underlies the classic crowd psychologies. Indeed, as its name suggests, the social identity tradition rejects the idea that people only have a single personal identity. Rather, it argues, identity should be seen as a system in which different parts govern our behaviour (i.e. are psychologically salient) in different contexts. Certainly there are times when we do think of ourselves in terms of our personal identities: what makes us unique as individuals and different from other individuals. But at other times, we think of ourselves in terms of our group memberships (I am British; I am a police officer; I am a Catholic, or whatever) and of what makes our group unique compared to other groups. That is, we think of ourselves in terms of our social identities*” [p. 405-406]. And they conclude that “*psychologically, the shift from personal identity to social identity is what makes group behaviour possible*” [p. 405-406].

But not all groups are the same. Drury and Co. distinguish between “*a physical group of people [which they call an aggregate] and a psychological group. The former simply refers to a set of people who are co-present, while the latter refers to a set of people who, subjectively, think of themselves as belonging to a common social category. The same aggregate may contain no psychological groups (...), one psychological group (...) or indeed multiple different psychological groups (...). What is more, the psychological groupings contained in the self-same aggregate can shift as a function of unfolding events*” [p. 406]. This shift, according to Drury and Co., is “*more volatile and more*

fraught” [p. 407] in crowd events where “*formal forms of discussing and agreeing on group norms –and how to apply these norms to novel situations*” [p. 407] are absent, while “*crowd events generally involve face to face contact between different parties – either one crowd versus another (...) or else –very often and of immediate interest here-between crowd members and police*” [p. 407]. And they continue saying that “*the relationship and the balance between groupings within the crowd is critically dependent upon the interaction between the crowd and outsiders [e.g. police]*” [p. 407]. “*That is, where the police have both the inclination and the power to treat all members in a crowd event as if they were the same, then this will create a common experience amongst crowd members which is then likely to make them cohere as a unified group*” [p. 407].

Therefore, Drury and Co. propose ways of policing that not only hinder such crowd members’ unification, but on the contrary perpetuate – or, even better, extend - already existing separations amongst them (say between non-violent and violent demonstrators) to such an extent that crowd members get actively engaged in self-policing their gatherings. Citing their words, the aim is NOT to “*disrupt the willingness of crowd members to contain the violence of those in their midst - what we term self-policing*” [p. 408], and so they “*do suggest that this understanding [of “processes through which violence escalates and de-escalates”, [p. 409]] can guide the police to act in ways that minimize conflict and maximize the opportunities to engage crowd members themselves in achieving this end*” [p. 409]. Cops will succeed that “*by facilitating these [legal aims and intentions that characterize the non-violent demonstrators]*” [p. 409] and thus they “*will not only avoid violence from these participants, they will also gain their cooperation in dealing with the minority of others. But this only becomes possible where there is information which allows the police to understand the priorities of these groups and to devise practices which will allow legal aims to be met*” [p. 409]...

TURNING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Drury and Co. are not paid to limit themselves to a pure theoretical debate. They provide their readers, who as mentioned before include senior police officers, researchers, policy makers and fellow academic cop consultants, with practical guidelines, regarding the most suitable police tactics. To this end, they give two “examples of knowledge-based policing in practice”. It is important to notice that after having dealt with the practical details, Drury and Co. ask their readers to bear in mind that what their “*approach provides is a means of asking the questions from which these specifics can be developed*” [p. 414] and it is certainly not a question of “*‘one size fits all’ public order policing. The specifics must always be tailored to the given event*” [p. 414].

The two examples mentioned are the 2001 anti-globalization protests in London and the 2004 European football championship. The first is used as an example to be avoided, as the cops chose to corral *all* demonstrators. Thus, they failed to “efficiently communicate” the reasoning for their actions to the non-violent ones, giving “*rise not only to a shared experience amongst crowd members, but also to a shared sense of police illegitimacy*” which may increase the possibility of future conflicts. Therefore, instead of “*lead[ing] peaceful crowd members [to] categorize themselves along with the police and in opposition to violent factions*” [p. 410], police facilitated their “*categorizing along with violent factions against the police*” [p. 410]. The authors spend a few paragraphs describing what went wrong (total corralling, lack of comprehensive communication strategy etc.), before they go on to describe what the correct repression tactic would have been had the cops followed their “*differentiated approach*” [p. 410]. The correct

repression tactic, according to the authors, should include (apart from “*criminal intelligence*”) “*new communication technologies*”, “*a selective filtering process*” and humiliating conditions imposed on those being corralled such as “*removal of clothing that obscures individual identity, abandoning placards, bottles and other objects that could be used as weapons*”... As a matter of fact, it seems that their critical notes have been rather convincing and thus, as they boast, their advice “*has been taken on board by the Metropolitan police and we are told through personal communication that it has been applied on a number of occasions to considerable effect*” [p. 412]...

Contrary to the 2001 anti-globalization protests, the 2004 Euro championship, in which two of the authors have actively been involved cooperating with local authorities (e.g. the Portuguese Public Security Police), is mentioned as a role-model, a model of how police strategy should be and how cops should operate during such demanding situations. Citing from the article, four different “*levels of policing intervention were developed with the aim of creating a positive and close relationship with crowd members, but also of monitoring incipient signs of disorder*” [p.412]. In other words a graded policing strategy was followed. The first level of policing intervention was carried out by “*officers in uniform, working in pairs spread evenly throughout the crowd within the relevant geographical location –not merely remaining at the edges. Their primary function was to establish an enabling police presence. Officers were specifically trained to be friendly, open and approachable. They would interact with the crowd members and generally support the aim of Euro 2004 as a ‘carnival of football’. At the same time, the presence (and acceptance) of these officers in the crowd allowed them to spot signs of tension and incipient conflict (such as verbal abuse against rival fans). They could therefore respond quickly to minor incidents of emergent disorder and ensure that they targeted only those individuals who were actually being disorderly without having impact on others in the crowd*” [p. 412]. Apart from the emphasis given to targeted pre-emptive arrests, “*where disorder endured or escalated, policing shifted to level 2. This involved larger groups of officers moving in, still wearing standard uniforms. Their remit was to communicate with fans in a non-confrontational manner, to reassert shared norms concerning the limits of acceptable behaviour, and to highlight breaches of those norms and the consequences that would flow from them. Should this fail, the intervention would shift up to level 3. Officers would don protective equipment and draw batons, but always seeking to target their actions as precisely as possible. If this was still insufficient, then the PSP’s riot squads, the Corpo de Intervenção, in full protective equipment and with water cannon were always ready at the fourth tactical level*” [p. 413].

MAINSTREAM SOCIOLOGISTS AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGISTS OF DEVIANCY

One common excuse often used by academics, who collaborate with the state and its various repression mechanisms, is that what they do is of purely theoretical value. Apparently this is not the case here, as the authors feel the need to back up their theoretical principles with strong evidence obtained from field-research, while they also present the practical outcome of the implementation of their guidelines “*in all the [Portuguese] areas under the Public Security Police’s control (which covers all the major cities in Portugal and seven of the ten tournament venues)*” [p. 412].

Another excuse, shamelessly used, is that what they do is only lobbying for less violent/more democratic public order policing. But this is not the case here either, as the authors do not disagree on principle or because of their political views (of any kind, from conservative to liberal-reformist or “radical” ones) with police forces being heavily violent

but solely as a matter of tactics and public relations. If Drury and Co. reject indiscriminate police violence, they do so not because they favor anti-capitalist demonstrators or football fans but because they strongly believe that when police violence is exercised indiscriminately it can have the opposite effect, i.e. turn the majority of crowd members, violent activists and non-violent alike, against the cops. It is no wonder that they support the presence of riot squads in nearby areas (out of the direct sight of crowd members) in case conflicts escalate (e.g. the 3rd and 4th level of policing in the 2004 Euro championship...), while they emphatically suggest “police actions” (in their academic jargon, this term refers to cop brutality) being carefully and precisely targeted.

What is also striking is the 100% police perspective that characterizes their article. It is not a coincidence that Drury and Co. would rather neutrally refer to crowd members and participants nor that they present the cops as mere peacekeepers and facilitators that enable law-abiding demonstrators achieve their goals: “*the primary focus of police strategies during crowd events should be to maximise the facilitation of crowd aims*” [p. 409] and thus the police need to explore the means that “*can facilitate alternative ways in which legitimate aims can be fulfilled*” [p. 410]. Taking all the above into account, would anyone be surprised by the fact that Drury and Co. “*use the term ‘public order policing’ precisely because [they] associate crowds with public disorder*” [p. 403]?

It is obvious that Drury and Co. have long ago taken sides in the class war and their aim to overcome “*seemingly intractable conflicts between the police and other [than hooligans] alienated groups in our society*” [p. 414], as expressed in the very end of the article, is clearly about **pacifying class struggles**. This is also evident by the examples they present: “*to the extent that police-crowd relationships are emblematic of relationships with the wider groups from which crowd members are drawn (for instance, events like Brixton and Toxteth were seen to crystallise negative relations between the police and black people in Britain), then crowd policing can have a profoundly positive effect upon policing more generally*” [p. 404, our emphasis].

Their police perspective is also evident from the fact that Drury and Co. see no determinants that *may* bind crowd members together, overcoming pre-existent differences, other than inter-group dynamics, that is the dynamics between group members and “outsiders” (the police). For Drury and Co. crowd members just happen to be out there, their presence being devoid almost of any social context, a social sub-group amid a social vacuum. It is interesting to note the example they use regarding the train passengers [p. 406]... What an appropriate metaphor for the way they perceive society! Drury and Co. deliberately ignore the fact that although demonstrators may be divided in certain aspects according to their different political views or the means they are willing to use, they may *also* be unified against specific neo-liberal reforms, poll-taxes, capitalism etc. *long before* police indiscriminate tactics (or even *without* the latter) solidify this unification. Drury and Co. are also keen on presenting the various subcultural groups (e.g. hooligans) in a rather one-dimensional way, their inter-group conflicts with “outsiders” being perceived as isolated, limited and “anti-social” actions. Considering all the above, it seems that Drury and Co. are much closer to Le Bon’s naturalist pseudo-science they supposedly reject.

WHAT ABOUT ALL THAT?

This type of research and model development is, evidently, of key importance to the police and other state mechanisms, especially after the outbreak of the recent urban riots in UK. It is not surprising that a giant, brand new field-research project, entitled *Reading the Riots*,⁷ backed up by the Guardian, the London School of Economics and the Ministry of Justice, has been announced, just a few weeks after the recent rebellion. The *Reading the Riots* project will be based on interviews with more than 1.000 riot participants who have already been arrested and have appeared in the courts – an investigation method, by the way, often used by Drury and Co. - and on the examination of more than 2.5 million riot-related “tweets”. We assume that you have already paid close attention to these counter-revolutionary attempts to reinforce public order in proletarian neighborhoods and that you have examined the new methods the British police *have been* applying in order to successfully repress all future social unrest.⁸

In our part of the world, we have also experienced the implementation of police tactics similar to those Drury and Co. promote in their article. To give a few examples, cop-union cadres tried to approach some of the non-violent demonstrators of the “movement of popular assemblies” so as to have one of their union’s announcement read during the daily general assembly at Syntagma Square last June, an attempt that was, luckily, met with the protesters’ general disapproval. Apart from that, the police and the mass-media have repeatedly tried to intensify existing separations between violent and non-violent demonstrators, by continuously using the so-called “kukuloforoj”⁹ or “agent-provocateurs” propaganda to denounce the more violent sections of the proletariat. Left-wing and leftist groupuscules had, from the very beginning of this movement, been trying to deter any violent confrontations with the police and in certain cases they kept trying it even *during* the riots, while left-wing parties have released crude denunciations of violent proletarians, fuelling official provocateurology hysteria¹⁰...

Greek police (ELAS) and Scotland Yard (including Special Branch) are known to have been collaborating on various levels for many years now, with the latter mainly offering training, consultancy, technical support, even personnel. The arrest of members of *November 17* armed struggle left nationalist group, almost 10 years ago, which was based on interviews with various leftists, or the kidnapping and illegal interrogation of 7 immigrants (mostly Pakistani) a few days after the terrorist attack in London in 2005 are a few examples of the outcome of such collaboration, which also includes events like the Olympics 2004, or guidelines regarding immigration and border control issues. Recently, seminars addressed to senior Greek police officers were organized by Scotland Yard. We, of course, can only guess what was analysed during those seminars. According to certain newspaper articles, however, it seems that tactics to repress the “indignants” were discussed as well. It is, therefore, highly probable that theories and practical guidelines, similar to those elaborated by Drury and Co., might have been presented to the Greek cops.

⁷ For example check: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/sep/05/reading-riots-study-guardian-lse>

⁸ Of course, we do not simply and naively claim that from now on police will restructure its policing strategy solely according to Drury’s and Co. guidelines. Police tactics have always been rather diverse, ranging from the “divide and rule” and “graded policing” dogma to “zero tolerance” and indiscriminate exercise of brutal force, depending on the balance of power that exists at a given moment.

⁹ This term refers to those using hoods in the violent clashes with the cops so as to hide their facial characteristics and avoid arrests.

¹⁰ For a first account of the events see our text *Preliminary notes towards an account of the «movement of popular assemblies»* which can be downloaded at: http://www.tapaidiatisgalarias.org/?page_id=105

In any case, we would urgently like to appeal to the British internationalist/anti-authoritarian milieu so that a more thorough proletarian counter-inquiry is carried out. This may include (but should not be limited to): newspaper articles, cop consultant university research-projects (especially those related to the faculties of sociology/psychology etc.), cop blogs and websites and/or the vast literature on the subject of crowd management, just to name a few obvious steps. By doing so, we hope that information (e.g scientific papers, articles, police guidelines, reports or other details regarding seminars to cops, field-research projects, activist interviews conducted by sociologists etc.) related to the knowledge-based crowd psychology and modern policing strategies the cops are using against us will be disclosed, disseminated and discussed among the internationalist milieu, facilitating the development of our own counter-strategies. Personal witnessing of the implementation of such policing strategies in demonstrations or riots needs to be recorded, circulated and then discussed amongst us. Attempts by various sociologists to gain access to the milieu and conduct interviews have to be met with firm rejection, to say the least.¹¹ We all know perfectly well that what they try to do is to understand us, our temporary communities of struggle, our thoughts, the way we organize against this decomposing world of capital and its spectacle and, then put this valuable knowledge into practice against us, tearing us apart. Our response should equally be collective and knowledgeable!

In Solidarity,
TPTG
6/10/2011

P.S. This letter has been posted on libcom, infoshop, revleft, anarchismo, anarchistnews, UK indymedia and Athens indymedia.

P.S. 2 This is the link to the Policing article.

http://www.liv.ac.uk/Psychology/cpd/Reicher_et_al_%282007%29.pdf

¹¹ See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/sep/07/england-riots-researchers-wanted>