



New challenges in public order policing: the professionalisation of environmental protest and the emergence of the militant environmental activist

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Abstract

Over the last decade there have been significant changes in the nature of protest which have posed new challenges to policing organisations. This article using the case of environmental protest charts the changing nature of protest and using a new typology identifies a new form of protester that has been termed the Militant Environmental Activist. The characteristics and innovative tactics used by these activists are examined and it is argued that they amount to a ‘professionalisation’ of protest. The article then moves on to highlight the ‘fragmented’ policing structure that has evolved to tackle these activists encompassing both public, ‘hybrid’ and private policing agencies. Finally, the article briefly examines some of the strategies these policing agencies are developing to combat these new challenges.

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1. Introduction

During the last quarter of the 20th century there has been an increasing concern amongst the public with environmental issues spawning a variety of campaigning

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organisations (Doyle and McEachern, 1998; Lamb, 1996). These groups have utilised a multiplicity of legitimate campaigning techniques, often combined with some direct action, in order to achieve their objectives. During the last 10 years there has been an intensification of protests using direct action and other campaigning methods concerning some environmental issues that have posed new challenges to policing organisations. Typified by the protests against the construction of the Newbury bypass in England during 1996, the public police and other policing agencies have been faced with the task of policing a diverse variety of protesters ranging from middle-class women, concerned residents to committed environmental protesters. The latter has led these diverse groups in developing an innovative and extensive range of tactics that have provided a new experience for policing agencies in public order policing.

As discussed in more detail below, this paper recognises ‘policing’ in its broader context—as a dynamic approach of which the public police, those employed directly by police forces, form only a part, albeit a significant one. The public police have been faced with the challenge of operating on private space, in confrontations that have sometimes involved the civil courts. As a consequence they have had to co-operate with a diverse range of different policing organisations and agents, such as the local Under-Sheriff and his bailiffs, the Health and Safety Executive, private security staff amongst others. The policing organisations involved and strategies used by them at these protests have differed significantly from traditional protests that have been the subject of much more research (Cricher and Waddington, 1996; King and Brearley, 1996; Waddington, 1996; Waddington, 1998).

This paper will therefore explore these changes in the nature and form of environmental protest and dissent. Although the issues that arise are paralleled in other movements, notably the co-ordinated international protests against capitalism, we would argue that the dynamics of the movements differ significantly, particularly in terms of protester motivation and commitment. Consequently, we will concentrate on environmental protest, through the identification of a type of protest and protester, which may be seen to exemplify many of the features found in parallel (and in some ways divergent) movements. These themes within environmental protest will to some extent be explored through the characteristics of a new form of protester, which we describe as the Militant Environmental Activist (MEA), that is symptomatic of the broader shift in the 1990s protest movements in the United Kingdom. The tactics they pursue and the challenges these pose for policing organisations will then be examined. Finally, this paper will briefly explore some of the organisations involved in policing protest and their emerging (counter) tactics. Before we embark upon this, however, it is important to set out our methodology.

2. Methodology

The methodology of researching the policing of environmental protest raises a number of challenges. In seeking to gain information from organisations targeted by environmental protesters we were faced with significant concerns that we might

accidentally or indeed purposefully provide useful information to the protesters. Therefore, at an early stage of the research it became clear that to secure meaningful information from any organisation we would have to concentrate on primary research with the organisations targeted and not the protesters, and give assurances to that effect.

Consequently, in order to secure information on protesters we used a wide range of primary and secondary sources, combined with the information secured from the interviews with those who police or are targeted by them. Protesters produce a large amount of literature about themselves, their campaigns and their tactics in paper form and on the Internet and these were assessed. There is also a growing literature in newspapers, magazines and some academic journals and books on protesters which were also explored. Interviews were also conducted with personnel from three companies in the extractive industries who have been targeted by environmental protesters. These companies were also forthcoming with some primary sources, including the security log of one of them. Interviews were also secured with police officers who have had important roles in the policing of some of the larger environmental protests. Finally, interviews were conducted with some of the other organisations involved in policing, such as personnel working for private security companies operating in this area and Under-Sheriffs.

The researchers were constantly aware that the organisational focus of the primary research might produce bias in the research findings ‘against’ the environmental protesters. Wherever possible, therefore, the protester-generated material was referred to in order to verify that balance was being kept in the research itself and the presentation of the research findings.

3. The growth of environmental protest—frequency and diversity

Twyford has come to be regarded by many as the defeat that won the war. It saw the most radical and active protests ever mounted in Britain in defence of natural places. And it cradled a virtually new breed of protester (Lamb, 1996, p. 1).

For the purposes of this paper a detailed chronology of the growth of environmental protest is inappropriate. However, a brief overview will be provided of key events and developments in order to contextualise the analysis later in the paper. The important point to make in this section is that protest has become more frequent and more diverse. Diversity is relevant on a number of levels ranging from the various interested groups that will convene on an issue, to the differing extremities of tactics that will be pursued.

Over the past 10 years the focus of protests has become more diverse as a result of a burgeoning public interest in, and concern about, environmental issues (Doyle and McEachern, 1998; Lamb, 1996). At the same time the protesters themselves have gained considerable experience at a number of protest sites, and become more innovative and sophisticated in the tactics they adopt. The battle against the M3 at Twyford Down (Hampshire) is seen as marking the birth of a new form

of protest (Lamb, 1996) and subsequently how it is policed. Since then significant protests have taken place at various distinct locations in the UK: at Batheaston (Somerset), Newbury (Berkshire), Manchester Airport (North West of England) and elsewhere, the police, special branch, Under-Sheriffs and bailiffs, private detective agencies, private security firms amongst others have been drafted in to provide a multi-layered, variously co-ordinated response to environmental protest. This latter point has been accentuated by the geographic diversity of the sites. Each area approached its protest management with no direct experience. This is in contrast to the protesters, many of whom were veterans of previous campaigns.

The protests against the Newbury bypass during 1996 marked one of the largest and most publicised disputes between developers and protesters. The extension of the A30 road between Exeter and Honiton, near Fairmile in east Devon provided the next major 'confrontation'. A number of individuals who had demonstrated at Newbury had moved to the site and tree house construction and obstructive tunnelling had begun towards the end of 1996. This was followed by frequent protests against road building, some of the most notable included: the Weymouth Relief Road, Bingley Relief Road, and Birmingham Northern Relief Road. Aside from road protests, activists also addressed developments such as open cast mining and quarrying, notably at Whately Quarry in the Mendips which was given an expansion order which would result in it becoming 'the largest hole in the ground in Europe'. Another example arose from the plans of WBB to move the River Teign to enable the extension of a quarry. At Selar, protesters were living on the site trying to prevent a coal mine from being carved out of old woodlands. Large-scale sustained protest against the expansion of Manchester Airport, and sporadic, smaller-scale protests against the building of houses on Greenfield sites, have also occurred. During 1999 and into 2000, protests against genetically engineered crops had begun to dominate the environmental agenda with frequent actions by various groups tearing up fields planted with the experimental crops.

Whilst direct action environmental protest dominated the media, cultural, and social control agenda from the mid to late 1990s, the end of the millennium and commencement of the new one has also seen the spectacular emergence of conflict instigated within the 'new age' movement. The summer of 1999 saw serious disturbances in the City of London on 18 June following a rally 'against capitalism' when some protesters against the perceived malevolent influence of financial institutions on world humanity broke with their orderly associates and physically attacked symbolic locations and the police. Such developments have been replicated in other countries, notably in the USA in Washington, DC and Seattle.

4. Characteristics of protesters

Underlying the environmental protests of the last decade it will be argued what amounts to a 'professionalisation' of protest has taken place. In arguing this we are not advocating that environmental protesters have become akin to accountants,

solicitors, doctors, etc. with professional bodies, examinations for qualification, a code of ethics, etc. Rather there are certain characteristics of the new protesters that represent a ‘professionalisation’. These include the emergence of full-time protesters, trained to very high standards in forms of protest, built upon a growing ‘body of knowledge’, and governed by codes of conduct (albeit unwritten ones).

At this juncture it would seem appropriate to assess the characteristics of environmental protest, particularly a paradigm of the different type of groups involved and the tactics that they pursue. Groups formed to protect the environment occupy a broad spectrum of views and backgrounds, vary significantly in size and resources, and pursue diverse tactics and strategies. They include world-wide pressure groups such as Greenpeace with substantial resources and interests, to local groups formed with few resources and organisational cohesion to pursue a specific issue. The range of these different types of groups are listed in Fig. 1 in a preliminary classification. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, rather to illustrate some of the groups that fall under each of the categories.

At one extreme there are environmental terrorist groups who are prepared to threaten and use violence.¹ Unlike the animal rights movement there are generally very few groups in the UK that will resort to violent tactics. The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) is one of the only examples of this type of group and they have not been active in the UK. In the Rocky Mountains, USA, however, the ELF has claimed responsibility for a series of arson attacks on ski resorts (*The Independent*, 23 October, 1998). One of the few examples of a ‘terrorist’-type tactic used by an environmental group was a bomb hoax by the Berkshire Wood Elfs during the Newbury evictions (Van de Gaauw, 1998). There have also been a number of lone terrorists pursuing campaigns of terror in the name of the environment. For instance the Unabomber waged a one-man campaign of terror using pipe bombs across the USA against the emerging technological society.

At the other extreme there are pressure groups with an interest in this issue that are prepared to pursue only lawful and mainstream campaigning tactics. These include: petitions, writing letters, lobbying Members of Parliament and Councillors, pursuing legal action, publicity campaigns, lawful marches and protests, etc. National organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds fall into this category, but also many local groups and organisations. One of the main groups opposed to the extension of the M3 at Twyford Down was the Twyford Down Association and in South Devon one of the main groups opposed to the movement of a river by the clay quarrying company WBB was the Devon Wildlife Trust.

The next type of environmental group identified has been classified as radical environmental pressure groups. Like pressure groups they largely pursue lawful and mainstream campaigning tactics. They are also organised bureaucratically with

¹ It must also be stressed there has been a long academic debate on what constitutes terrorism. There is no time or space in this paper to explore that debate. However, the pursuit of violence or the threat of violence to achieve political objectives has been considered as a basis to classify these groups. Although, Eagan (1996) has classified Earth First! as ‘Eco-Terrorist’ which under our classification we would not.

1. Terrorist Groups

Earth Liberation Front/Lone Terrorists (Unabomber)

2. Militant Environmental Activist Groups

AQUA

Earth First!

Justice

Reclaim the Streets

Road Alert

3. Radical Environmental Pressure Groups

Greenpeace

Friends of the Earth

4. Pressure Groups

Council for the Protection of Rural England

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Wildlife Trusts

Fig. 1. Spectrum of environmental groups.

clear organisational structures, paid up members and leaders. The most significant difference, however, is their pursuit of some 'direct action' tactics, but a refusal to engage in 'ecotage'. Greenpeace has a long history in a wide range of environmental campaigns of these type of tactics such as blocking waste pipes at the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant, encroaching on exclusion zones where French nuclear tests are taking place, and the dramatic occupation of the Brent Spar platform in the North Sea. Friends of the Earth (FoE) has also embraced some direct action tactics. In the campaign against the M3 extension at Twyford Down in March 1992 FoE arranged for some volunteer supporters to chain themselves to the entrance of the motorway. In pursuing this act of civil disobedience, however, FoE provided the volunteers with legal briefings, notified the police and when the legal injunctions were served on the protesters and they were cut free, they were instructed not to breach those injunctions by returning to the site of the protest (Bryant, 1996).

The final category of protester identified we have called the Militant Environmental Activist (MEA) who share many of the characteristics associated with the New Social Movements (NSM) identified by Boggs (1986). These are primarily distinguished by their central pursuit of innovative 'direct action' tactics, deep ecological consciousness, and a non-bureaucratic organisational structure. Militant has been used to describe them because they are generally very active in pursuing the political changes they seek; environmental, because this has been their main focus for policy change; and activists because this is generally their main occupation and there is rarely a cohesive organisational structure that would suit a description such as 'organisation' or 'association'. This category of protester will now be considered in greater depth as it is these activists that have, to date, posed the greatest challenge to policing organisations.

4.1. Militant environmental activists

The central tactic of MEAs is what is known as ‘direct action’. This is a strategy of campaigning where almost any tactics are pursued—except violence against the person—to try and achieve their aims. There are differences between various groups, or even factions within groups, as to what extent they will break the law. This dichotomy has been termed the ‘fluffy versus spiky’ debate, where the latter are prepared to pursue a more aggressive and ‘violent’ campaign (although even then a line is usually drawn under physical harm to a fellow human being). Thus MEAs are prepared to use illegal and unlawful tactics (often called ‘monkeywrenching’ or ‘ecotage’) to achieve their objectives. These include the sabotage of plant equipment, treespiking and graffiti. They also use many of the other tactics associated with more mainstream groups such as legal action, marches, petitions, etc. A central tactic that has emerged is a very professional media campaign to highlight their campaign, cause and group. Their tactics will be the subject of greater attention later in this paper.

MEAs are also driven by a deep ecological consciousness. They generally subscribe to biocentrism and the belief that humans are ‘equal’ members of the biological community deserving no greater rights than even the lowliest virus (Eagan, 1996). These views include a belief in the limits of the resources of the Earth, limiting the use of technology, being in harmony with nature rather than dominating it, and (Dobson, 1995; Scarce, 1990) they believe in a radical transformation of society. Indeed the Green Anarchist network in the UK has called for the establishment of self-sufficient villages without technology, industry, hunger or bombs (Eagan, 1996).

There is also what could be described as an identifiable ‘counter culture’ emerging, and linked to MEAs, environmentalism and direct action in general. There are a diverse range of regular publications that form the basis of debates, publicising campaigns and providing valuable information on improving tactics. Some of the more prominent include: Corporate Watch, Earth First! Action Update, Green Anarchist, Schnews, and West Country Activist. Most groups produce their own regular publications. The Internet is also widely used to publicise groups, campaigns and tactics. Gatherings of activists and supporters are also regularly arranged. These provide for a forum for debate, training and political socialisation of supporters. For instance at the 1998 West Country Activist Summer Gathering workshops were offered on: direct action skills (dealing with the police, treehouse building skills), sustainable lifestyle skills (outdoor survival), and building links (how to organise an action/campaign/gathering). The gathering also acted as a forum for the discussion of future actions and campaigns. The organisation of the gathering supports the professionalisation argument propounded above. In addition to the workshops themselves, vegan food, creche facilities and entertainment were provided for the attendees (West Country Activist June/July 1998). Such organised events are a central facet of the MEA movement. As one Green Anarchist press release has noted:

We must build a culture of resistance from festivals, gigs, fanzines, for a future alternative society (Eagan, 1996, p. 4).

Combined with gatherings and other forums for training, to maximise their efforts there are a number of published guides and handbooks. Road Alert's *Road Raging: Top Tips for Wrecking Road Building* and *The Encyclopaedia of Direct Action* are British examples. The American book *Ecodefense—A Field Guide to Monkey-wrenching* by David Foreman and Bill Haywood has also been used by groups in this country (Road Alert, 1997; Foreman and Haywood, 1993). There are also a wide range of web sites providing information on tactics for protesters. These guides are at the radical end of political opinion and activity. They discuss how to undertake a broad range of criminal activities which include, *inter alia*, tree spiking, plugging waste discharge pipes, disabling equipment, burning machinery, and the trashing of billboards. The emergence of these initiatives, principally to train and educate protesters, also provides further evidence of the 'professionalisation' of these activities.

MEAs are also characterised by a non-bureaucratic organisational structure, no formal hierarchy or leader. Indeed in the USA Earth First! re-enforced its belief in this type of structure in 1982 by declaring there were no members of Earth First! only Earth First!ers (Lee, 1995). Some of these groups address a range of issues and are national in character, such as, Earth First!, Justice, Reclaim the Streets and Road Alert. Of these, some focus upon only environmental issues, such as Earth First!, while others such as Justice focus upon a range of direct action campaigns. These larger groups also provide a focus for many of the other groups that form for specific campaigns. The Ashton Court Quarry Campaign was founded specifically to prevent an extension of a quarry. The Lyminge Forest Protesters campaign was solely targeted against a proposed Rank Oasis Holiday Village. These specific groupings disappear when the particular campaign has been lost or won. It is clear, however, that a number of the protesters re-emerge in other campaigns/groups. 'Membership' of groups is therefore fluid and changeable.

Some of the protesters who are involved in these campaigns are also involved with wider national organisations, such as Earth First! and are also veterans of other campaigns. 'Genetix', a group formed to oppose genetically engineered foods, uses the same address and mobile phone number that was used for the Manchester airport campaign and some of the protesters photographed involved with this group have been identified in previous campaigns (*The Times*, 5 September, 1998). The example of 'Swampy' turning up at a number of different campaigns after Fairmile is also an example of this. Some of the activists are also involved in a wide range of other direct action campaigns including: animal rights, drugs, housing, peace campaigns, trade union rights and more extreme issues such as extreme left wing groups and anarchism. As the Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Antony Speed, argued:

Experience shows that the same people are involved in demonstrations — whether it's disruption of building works and motorways, runways, live animals for export, or people 'reclaiming' the streets' (*The Times*, 7 November 1998).

Many MEAs therefore spend most of their time engaged in protest. It is essentially their full-time occupation. They are often joined at protest camps by those engaged

in other roles in life who can only dedicate some of their spare time. Frequently students are also involved offering their support only during their long holidays, for example. The full-time dedication of the MEAs to protesting also represents a ‘professionalisation’ of protest. Their goals are broader than those attached to specific protest sites.

By their very structure and fluidity of membership it is difficult to determine the sources of their funding. Unlike many more established pressure groups and radical environmental pressure groups they do not publish any accounts. It has been suggested during interviews that they secure funds from individual donors (high profile celebrities were frequently mentioned), successful law suits against the police at previous protests, and fund raising events. There was also a suggestion that some of the established radical environment pressure groups fund them. Indeed at the Newbury protests Friends of the Earth certainly provided support to protesters through legal aid and it has been claimed that Road Alert was significantly funded by Greenpeace (Doherty, 1998). Interviews have also revealed that at a number of protest sites supplies and equipment ranging from champagne to kango hammers have been provided to protesters by the media.

It is difficult to assess the number of MEAs because of the nature of the organisations involved and the number of protests. In 1996 a survey by the Guardian found that there had been over 500 separate ‘actions’ in the previous year. The same article estimated that at least 3000 had attended a recent Earth First! gathering in North Wales (*The Guardian*, 27th of August, 1996). However, many of these would have been supporters of the local or particular cause, rather than MEAs. Indeed one senior police officer interviewed as part of the research suggested the total number of dedicated ‘professional’ activists in the UK was around 50.

4.2. ‘The press release and the monkeywrench’ the tactics of militant environmental activists

The tactics pursued by MEAs pose significant challenges to policing organisations. In the UK MEAs have generally targeted road constructions, major constructions (airports and any other major developments), the extractive industries, and genetically engineered crops. The two overriding objectives of MEAs have been to maximise media coverage of their cause and to make the activities of those they are targeting uneconomical to pursue (Foreman and Haywood, 1993). To achieve these objectives they pursue non-violent direct action supported by many of the other lawful campaigning tactics. Scarce (1990) has described this as ‘Ghandi meets the Luddites’. The only tactics they do not generally pursue are violent direct action tactics such as bombs, bomb threats, etc. Central to all of their tactics has also been the exploitation of the media wherever possible (Holloway, 1998). Hence our description ‘the press release and the monkeywrench’. As will be shown, their campaigns are often well organised and planned—despite their lack of a bureaucratic structure—which again provides further evidence of the MEAs ‘professionalisation’.

It might be useful at this juncture to examine the anatomy of a ‘typical’ campaign pursued by MEAs against various forms of development.² The first tactic is to set up a camp in the vicinity of the proposed site, often latching on to a local campaign. The protesters claim the area as their legal residence under section 6 of the 1977 Criminal Law Act. It is then up to the owners of the land to pursue legal action to remove them. In the meantime the protesters strengthen and ‘fortify’ their position by building homes in the trees, erecting ‘benders’ (Bivouac-type shelters), and, if feasible, establishing a tunnel network. From these camps the protesters will then pursue a range of different campaigning tactics that are generally lawful, often building a broad coalition of protesters. These tactics include demonstrations outside target organisations’ buildings, attending shareholders meetings, mass demonstrations (bringing together other supporters and groups), media stunts, publication of research, legal challenges, amongst others.

A good illustration of these tactics was the Lyminge Forest protesters’ occupation of the boardroom of Rank plc in protest at the proposed ‘Oasis Holiday Village’. On the 13th of August 1997 a group of MEAs—who had established a camp in the proposed development area—entered the Rank HQ and barricaded themselves into the boardroom. Simultaneously, activists outside the building protested against the development and draped a banner from the roof. When they were finally removed two of the protesters were arrested. A press release was issued on the day of the occupation and substantial press coverage was gained for the group and the issue (*Schnews*, 1998).

Attempts are also often made to drag out legal proceedings to delay the proposed project and increase costs. If possible protesters frequently attempt to secure a public inquiry into the proposed development. Although these inquiries generally support the developer they can be used to further the campaign, gain information, secure concessions from the developer and ultimately delay the project (Lamb, 1996). Indeed in the public inquiry established in relation to WBB’s proposed movement of the River Teign to extend a quarry the protesters were able to extract information from the company, which showed flawed calculations underlying their proposals. This ultimately led to the company withdrawing their planning application. They may also use any opportunities for litigation to intimidate opponents and ultimately, if successful, secure funds. MEA’s use of litigation against the police has proved particularly successful in some protests, most notably Twyford Down where over 50 false arrests have been proved leading to substantial compensation payments from the police to protesters.

Along side these legitimate tactics a campaign of ‘ectotage’ is also usually pursued. This might include the sabotage of equipment, vehicles, publicity materials; often combined with the intimidation of senior officials/managers who are opposed to them. For instance protesters against the extension of Whatley Quarry caused damage to equipment and loss of business in the region of £125,000 to £300,000 to the company in one weekend (Bucke and James, 1998). When all legal defences are

²Protests against genetically engineered crops have differed from those against developments, as they have been largely focussed on the uprooting of such crops, rather than occupations.

exhausted and the owner seeks repossession of their land the protesters will usually attempt to resist removal by the Under-Sheriff and his officers through occupying their treehouses and tunnels; and often locking themselves onto elaborate contraptions that make removal dangerous. These tactics are designed to make the eviction as difficult, long and expensive as possible. Again the protester will attempt to manipulate the media at every opportunity throughout the course of a campaign.

The other important change that significantly affects policing strategies are the broad—almost unholy—alliances which emerge around specific issues. In most of the environmental campaigns the activists are joined by a diverse range of other groups and individuals. Middle-aged, middle-class men and women, and prominent Conservatives often protest along side radical activists. After one protest at Twyford Down Bryant (1996: 192) observed:

The events (protest) on the Water Meadows made a substantial impression on the media, who recognised that almost for the first time they had witnessed middle-class Conservative voters, retired military men, elected politicians, and a younger, less conventional group, coming together in an alliance against the Government's road building campaign. It was the pearls-and-twinsets which surprised the media, not the more radical elements in the crowd.

At other campaigns diverse interests have come together to fight a particular cause. In the campaign against the movement of a river by WBB to extend a quarry, the MEA's group AQUA, were supported in the Public Inquiry by the Devon Wildlife Trust, many of the local residents in the immediate vicinity of the river in Teigngrace, the Teigngrace Parish Council and the Governmental body, the Environment Agency. Many of these wider groups were also involved in some of the protests. Policing organisations therefore face dealing with a diverse group of individuals together, who separately would generally solicit different policing responses, posing planning and pragmatic dilemmas for the policing organisations.

This multi-faceted composition of the protest movement has also provided a different challenge to the major political parties in adopting populist stances towards the protesters and their goals. Traditional, single issue, protests such as the Poll Tax demonstrations or the Miner's Strike saw the various parties aligning themselves according to party political dogma. The more diverse composition of protesters involved in environmental issues, however, and the more global rationale underlying them has made it more difficult for the protests and protesters to be labelled negatively. Consequently, the state led nature of response to protest where frequently the Government and the Police have been closely aligned is less sustainable in the environmental protest arena.

5. The divided labour of policing environmental protest

One of the most significant challenges for those engaged in policing environmental protest is developing efficient and effective tactics to control and contain such a

diverse range of protest activities. One of the first tasks in achieving this is organising the response given the ‘fragmentation’ of policing that has emerged (Button and John, 2002). The police, Under-Sheriff, bailiffs, private security officers, private investigators and health and safety inspectors, amongst others, have all had significant roles to play. Indeed this ‘fragmentation’ of policing is an increasing challenge more generally for policing bodies in facing up to the challenges of late modern change (Johnston, 2000). The wide range of organisations involved and the informal and formal mechanisms they use to achieve their objectives also demonstrate the process of ‘grey policing’ identified by Hoogenbloom (1991). He described ‘grey policing’ as those forms of informal co-operation between the state police, regulatory agencies and private sector that include practices such as use of each others powers, exchange of information and sharing of technological gadgets. As we shall show in our brief discussion, these and many other informal and formal forms of co-operation occurred.

The peculiarities of the protests taking place on private space, once the owners secure a writ of possession from the High Court, has meant it is the Under-Sheriff who is—at least in name—in charge of the eviction process; which also means theoretical control of the police who are obliged to attend at the Under-Sheriff’s request. In practice, because of the expertise of the police in this area, police ‘advisers’ are usually attached to the Under-Sheriff, and assume an important operational role. Formally, the Under-Sheriff is in charge, but informally he or she relies heavily on the advice and resources of the police. The Under-Sheriff will also, where necessary, hire expert climbers and pot-holers brought in for their specialist skills in dealing with protesters who are sworn in as officers. The role of the Under-Sheriff in creating a team that can safely and efficiently evict the protesters has emerged as a significant challenge—one that until recently most had no experience of. In turn, the police have faced the challenge of having to engage in often large public order confrontations as ‘independent referees’ between protesters and developers, following an initial involvement when they were technically under the control of the Under-Sheriff in evicting the protesters. The wide range of different public and private policing organisations and individuals involved in the maintenance of security has also required the development of new partnerships between the different agencies both formally and informally. This in an area of policing where the police have traditionally assumed a ‘monopoly’.

Private security officers are employed at protest sites to perform a number of roles. Primarily it is to protect the private property from acts of sabotage, theft and further occupation. When evictions take place their role is to assist the ‘bailiffs’ in the civil eviction. This has led to new challenges for private security firms in training operatives for these new types of roles. The services of private investigators have also been made use of. Grays Detective Agency has been used to gather information on protesters so legal injunctions could be served against them. Private sector involvement in these roles raises issues concerning their accountability particularly as some of the intelligence is often shared between different agencies (Button, 1998a, b; South, 1988). The increasing role of the private sector also poses challenges

in terms of co-operation, when traditionally their relationship with the police is not a strong partnership (Sharp and Wilson, 2000; Shearing, 1993; Stenning, 1989).

The innovative tactics of MEAs have also required new policing strategies to be adopted. The non-violent and often innovative tactics, combined with increasingly professional manipulation of the media, give rise to broad coalitions of support that make traditional public order policing strategies obsolete. As one senior police officer interviewed stated, 'the old public order training manual could effectively be torn up'. The recent HM Inspectorate of Constabulary Report on this issue echoed this view:

These [protester tactics] have required the police to develop new tactics in order to manage them in a manner consistent with the concept of policing by consent and public expectations (HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 1999, p. 5).

It would not be possible to do justice to the wide range of emerging tactics that are being developed by the police to manage environmental protest and protesters. Considerable police resources are expended at all stages of the protest, and increasingly in planning responses prior to the protest themselves commencing. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, some of the more salient trends will be examined.

The gathering of accurate intelligence has been one of the most important strategies of the police. Without this police managers do not know if there are going to be a dozen or several hundred protesters turning up to a protest site, or indeed the exact location of it. This clearly has important implications for the accurate and effective deployment of police resources. As a result the police have actively pursued 'intelligence led' policing strategies in dealing with environmental protests, in the first instance to address tactical issues. Little can be publicly said about the nature of this strategy in specific protests. Generally, however, this has involved surveillance of key activists, monitoring the communication strategies of activists, planting under-cover officers amongst activists and developing a network of informants. The research revealed pragmatic difficulties with the intelligence flow identified in other spheres of policing (Maguire and John, 1995; Gill, 2000), although magnified due to the fragmented involvement of the various policing groups. For example, one senior officer revealed that at one site it was strongly suspected that all the remaining (small group of protesters) were informants of one organisation or other—the financial incentives being the sole reason for remaining. The police have recently moved towards a more strategic, long-term approach through the establishment of the National Public Order Intelligence Unit to gather and collate information on known activists (HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 1999). Centralised co-ordination of intelligence in this respect might assist in improving the intelligence flow—at least between state agencies. The research has also revealed the existence of private intelligence networks established by private organisations and operated by private investigators to gather information on the growing problem using a similar range of strategies.

The media is also a battleground. Many of the protests outlined above were in part characterised by protestors seizing the initiative in the relaying of information to the

media (assisted in part through web-based media strategy guides) (Monboit, undated). In return, the police—and some Under-Sheriffs—have taken their management of the media very seriously and pursued a range of strategies to regain the initiative. Some of the organisations targeted by protesters are also turning to specialist public relations companies such as Burson Marsteller to help them get their message over and counter the protesters ‘spin’. This has also involved the commission of research and reports related to specific environmental issues to try and counter arguments put forward by protesters. For instance following the M3 extension at Twyford Down a report was commissioned by the Highways Agency into the impact on the environment and this found that the extension had resulted in a ‘spectacular gain for the wildlife’ (*The Observer*, 20 September 1998).

The most common tool of policing organisations has been the use of the law, in particular the use of litigation to seek possession of the land. Often these injunctions are then enforced in night-time raids to catch the protesters unaware, frequently with a precision reminiscent of an SAS rescue. The advantages of this approach were widely extorted by the police interviewed during the research. It allowed set-piece, protester initiated, and physically confrontational, exchanges to be minimised. In addition, there have also been some more innovative uses of the law to try and weaken the protesters. For instance the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act which was introduced to primarily deal with stalkers of men and women has been used to grant injunctions against ‘fluffy’, non-trespassing protesters (*Schnews*, 18 July, 1997). Legislation designed to thwart secondary picketing has also been utilised such as the 1992 Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act (*The Guardian*, 1 March, 1996).

At the most basic level, those who are targeted by protesters increase their security measures substantially. In some sectors, such as the extractive industries, up until a few years ago security would have been a very low priority as there were few risks of crimes such as theft. With the advent of more specifically targeted protests, however, some companies have had to substantially invest in what could best be described as the ‘securification’ of their environment. This has led to the introduction of, inter alia, security fencing, security guards, access control systems, extensive security procedures and the creation of a security culture. The expense of this ‘securification’ has been substantial. The protests of the ‘Dongas’ at Twyford Down have been estimated to have increased the costs of the M3 extension by £3 million on the £26 million budget (Bryant 1996). At Newbury the costs of security and fencing amounted to around £30 million!

6. Conclusion

The 1990s saw significant changes in the nature of protest with the emergence of a new form of protester which we have called the MEA. This paper has considered the characteristics and tactics pursued by MEAs. It was shown that they are significantly different from protesters traditionally associated with the environment. It was also illustrated how they have developed a wide range of tactics that pose significant

challenges to contemporary policing organisations in modern liberal democracies. The full-time dedication of MEAs, combined with extensive training and education, and often extremely effective and innovative tactics also amount to what can only be described as a ‘professionalisation’ of protest. The context of their protests has also meant a wider range of individuals and organisations have also become involved illustrating a significant area of policing where ‘fragmentation’ has occurred. There is also evidence of informal and formal co-operation between the different policing bodies. This poses new challenges in developing partnerships and the police have, and continue, to develop new tactics to deal with the sophisticated strategies of the protesters. The policing of MEA also creates a new set of issues which require further research and evaluation. These include a more detailed examination of the roles of the different policing organisations. The tactics and organisations involved also inevitably lead to questions of accountability surrounding the role and tactics of policing agencies, particularly the Under-Sheriff, bailiffs, private security officers and private investigators in the front-line who traditionally have not undertaken such roles. Finally, the other battlegrounds of the media and the courts that have emerged in these protests also require further investigation.

The policing of environmental protests has provided new challenges to policing organisations and also provides a valuable insight into the changing nature of policing. More time needs to be dedicated by researchers to the investigation of this dynamic and important area of policing, to enable the most appropriate, effective and ethical strategies to be developed by the diverse range of policing agencies involved without threatening our fundamental rights to protest.

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