

United Kingdom: Wake up and smell the pepper spray. These 3,609 new laws are to control us, not protect us

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I was outside the Bank of England during the G20 protest, not far from where passer-by Ian Tomlinson died after being assaulted by a police officer.

The police presence was as excessive as it was provocative.

The Metropolitan Police's Territorial Support Group (TSG) are the aggressive offspring of the disgraced Special Patrol Group of the Eighties.

When policing events, they are issued with 'Nato' helmets, flame-retardant overalls, stab vests, gloves, balaclavas and boots. All carry the standard batons, pepper spray and cuffs.

Yet let's try to remember the last full-on riot in Britain that resulted from a political rally – ah yes, the Poll Tax riots almost 20 years ago.

But the police are still authorised to use Tasers and firearm-trained TSG officers carry pistols or sub-machine guns.

My God, when did we accept that armoured cars, special snatch squads and armed police were the right level of policing for protests against Government policy?

How did we sleepwalk into a situation where our movements, all of our electronic data, even our DNA, is stored on a massive central database?

In fact, it was easy for Blairites to con us into accepting the 3,609 new offences they have created since 1997.

They tapped into our fears and prejudices so we simply ignored the repeal of our rights.

Anti-terror legislation was not too subtly sold as being aimed at evil, dastardly Jihadi-types – not 'us'.

Presumably this legislation was intended, then, for people such as my friend Farukh. Farukh is as Brummie as Spaghetti Junction and Tony Hancock.

The only difference is that he is a Muslim. I was on the Viva Palestina convoy with him as he delivered aid directly to grieving, injured, homeless families in the Gaza Strip.

In Britain, he is a care worker who helps to rehabilitate young offenders back into society.

On his return from Palestine, Farukh was held for six hours at a UK airport.

Ever since, his work place, bank manager and other work contacts have received regular visits from Special Branch officers asking about his political beliefs and lifestyle.

Last week he told me: 'They're putting untold pressure on me and it just won't stop.'

I have been shoved and filmed time and again by aggressive police officers for attending meetings such as the alternative Labour Party conference in Manchester in 2006, organised by Stop The War.

But for Muslim Britons who go on marches, raise money for Palestinian charities or dare to express political views of any kind, the consequences are far more serious.

They are monitored, put under pressure, harassed at airports and overtly threatened. I am not likely to suffer the horrors of extraordinary rendition, but Farukh is.

It's time we all woke up and smelled the pepper spray. These new laws were not created to protect British people but to control us.

Take the case of Malcolm Sleath, chairman of his local park society in Enfield, North London, who was told by police he had breached Section 44 of the Terrorism Act.

This law, amended in February, allows police to stop and search anyone they consider a terrorist threat.

What had Mr Sleath done to warrant the threat of ten years in prison? He had filmed the officers driving their police car erratically across the park.

The 62-year-old management consultant said: 'They are supposed to investigate things on foot, so I wanted to show the picture to their sergeant.'

Their bosses issued an immediate apology. Mr Sleath was lucky – had he been called Mr Patel he could have been subjected to a detailed, unwarranted, long-term investigation.

The question we must ask now is: are any of us 'good' enough to be safe from detention and harm imposed by Government bodies, out-of-control councils or bullying TSG officers?

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