

## Police sent 78 to quell lone protester

By John Steele, Crime Correspondent

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A total of 78 police officers were used, at a cost of £7,200, in the night-time operation to [crack down on the anti-war protester Brian Haw](#) in Parliament Square, it was disclosed yesterday.



**Brian Haw can't bear to watch as police remove his placards from Parliament Square**

The raid ran up a bill of £3,000 in overtime and £4,200 for "transport, catering and erection of road barriers", said Sir Ian Blair, the Metropolitan police commissioner.

The manpower involved in reducing Mr Haw's permitted protesting space to a 10ft "cube" outside Parliament is almost four times the 20 suggested after the raid in the early hours on Tuesday. However, Scotland Yard said 24 of the 78 officers were "kept in reserve".

Sir Ian defended the scale of the operation after fierce criticism by some members of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), which oversees his force. The Met was accused of "overkill" and of creating the impression around the world that police were being used to suppress anti-war dissent.

But Sir Ian said Scotland Yard had "no discretion" over someone who [allegedly ignored the law](#) - in this case section 132 of the 2005 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act, which outlaws protests around Parliament that have not been sanctioned by police.

Mr Haw, a carpenter from Worcestershire who has dedicated five years to often very loud protest, is being prosecuted for allegedly failing to abide by conditions set down for his demonstration.

The Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Tope, an MPA member, said: "Some may well find Brian Haw and his activities irritating, but being an irritant is a pretty fundamental part of our democracy. The right to protest. . . the right to irritate some of those sitting in Parliament feeling self-important.

"I do think it brings the Met into a bit of disrepute - 78 police officers arriving in the middle of the night to clear placards and chase mice. I really do think that it was huge overkill."

Damien Hockney, from One London Group, said: "This has been interpreted around the world that Britain is suppressing dissent by people opposed to the Iraq war. That is the way it is being put across - policemen being sent in overnight to knock somebody down. From a PR point of view, that is a very dangerous thing to have done."

Since the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act came into force last year, Mr Haw claimed the restrictions on protests around Parliament could not apply retrospectively to him because his demonstration began in June 2001.

He was successful in his first court hearing but this month the Court of Appeal rejected his argument and refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords.

The court said Mr Haw would have to apply to the police for authorisation to continue. He is due to appear in a magistrates' court for an alleged breach of the Act in failing to comply with conditions.

Sir Ian told the MPA: "While the police have much discretion, they do not have discretion about continuing criminal offences which are in the public eye, all the time.

"The fact is that Mr Haw has been given permission to continue his protest. What he is not able to do is ignore the law - that is what he is doing. Until such time as he obeys the law, we will have to enforce it."

Commander Chris Allison, the head of Westminster policing, who was in charge of the operation, said not all 78 officers were deployed. Twenty-four were kept in reserve, while others were evidence-gathering teams who filmed proceedings.

Scotland Yard sources said a relatively large number of officers was needed, even though the raid was at night. Senior officers had to guard against the risk that other protesters or agitators who became aware of the operation might have confronted the police.

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