

Greater Manchester Association of Trades Councils
Secretary: Stefan Cholewka
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18th July 2014

Dear Tony Lloyd,

Re: Policing of protest, human rights and justice.

We are writing to you to express our great concern regarding the policing of protest in Greater Manchester. The train of events that have formed the documentation of anti fracking protesting at Barton Moss, the police response to it and action in the criminal justice system has been quite frankly horrendous. There are citizens in our county who because of this episode now find it impossible to trust any man or woman wearing the GMP badge. We remain shocked by this legacy in Greater Manchester.

We are aware many letters and notes were being sent to you about the daily excessive and brutal policing at the Barton Moss site. We feel that early on in the protesting at Barton Moss it became clear that this would be a major defining issue of policing in the county. We were extremely let down to hear of your judgement that complaints sent to the commissioners office were delegated by you to the deputy police and crime commissioner Jim Battle. We expected you to take the lead.

The largest number of complaints has been about the actions of The Tactical Aid Unit of GMP. We are not confident that this branch of GMP is fit for purpose. We believe that in your role as Police and Crime Commissioner you should determine, through expert assessment that is separate to the assessment of the Chief Constable, that GMP has a Tactical Aid Unit, or policing system for protest, that is fit for the 21st century. We are aware that there has been some mitigation featured in the press on behalf of the police that protestors at times shouted vile words to officers. It is our experience that after the first witness of, or experience of police brutality, protestors tend to respond like this. We feel let down by any such mitigation on behalf of the police as officers are trained and paid to be professional.

We are passionate believers in the right to protest and whilst we recognise that policing protest has difficulties we feel this is described excessively by senior police officers when the focus should be on providing policing that is fair and proportionate. Protest is the lifeblood of democracy. We have concerns about the way the right to protest is being eroded and undermined and what feels like legitimate protest criminalised in an attempt to silence dissent. Whilst we also recognise that there can be “bad apples” in any branch of policing, and fracking protectors described some officers as such by police lapel number in complaints, we are clear that our concern is about the much bigger issue of the leadership of and the operation of the Tactical Aid Unit as a whole service.

When we compare the number of arrests at the Barton Moss protest and the number of persons charged or convicted of offences it suggests that many of the arrests were unnecessary and that many of the cases should not have gone to the courts. There is now no real evidence that the charges were in the public interest in Greater Manchester. This episode in policing and criminal justice has eroded confidence that fairness and human rights will be central in our county.

Trade unionists in Greater Manchester key business is the workplace and local community experience of our members. Fracking has been raising issues of public health, the One million Climate Change Jobs campaign and the right to peaceful protest. We have a role in the upholding of human rights and in taking a fully active part in government, the private sector and civil society decision making.

We are aware of announcements you have made pertaining to new committees and actions you are taking in areas of your work. We ask that you:

1. Independently of the Chief Constable review the role and function of the Tactical Aid Unit and the policing of protest.
2. Make further statements regarding the legacy of the policing and criminal justice experiences of the Barton Moss protesters with a priority aim of regaining the confidence of the citizens of Greater Manchester who have directly lost confidence in the police because of this episode.
3. Proactively communicate regularly with active and up to date trade unionists in Greater Manchester involving the body formed and supported by many stakeholders to provide focus and leadership to all trade unions in the county - The Greater Manchester Association of Trades Councils (GMATUC).
4. Prioritise and make explicit in your work plans, publications and statements the protection of human rights in Greater Manchester.
5. Use your position to recognise the importance to human rights and justice of journalists, media practitioners, legal observers and independent witnesses who reveal the truth about matters of public life.

We look forward to your reply,

Yours sincerely,

Susan Haworth

Delegate at Greater Manchester Association of Trades Councils on behalf of the Committee

www.GMATUC.org.uk

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