

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Crowd Psychologist and criminologists respond to UK rioting**

**The Crowd Psychologist: *Dr Christopher Cocking***

“Thirty years of research by psychologists into a variety of public order situations have found that riots always happen in a social context. If one does not consider this social context, then how such situations occur and develop can not be fully understood.

“Descriptions of rioters as 'mindless thugs' and 'feral rats' are deeply emotive terms that are not supported by research and can only cloud rational debate and further alienate the very people who need to re-connect with society if such disorder is to be prevented in future.

“To an outside observer, trashing and looting shops may seem like 'mindless' behaviours, but to young unemployed people, taking goods that they can not normally afford may seem like quite meaningful behaviour. Even behaviours such as trashing local charity shops may seem acceptable to those who feel no sense of connection with their local community.

“Demands to give the Police greater powers and/or weaponry to deal with the disorder merely reflect a misunderstanding of the issues involved in public order policing. Such tactics only tend to be effective in dispersing large static crowds, and would be largely ineffective against small groups of looters. Evidence from Northern Ireland has shown that such tactics usually escalate public order situations and make further confrontations likely.”

**The Criminologists: *Dr Daniel Silverstone and Timothy Parsons***

“It is disappointing to see that some politicians have reverted to type and sought to use these events as a platform for criticising necessary government spending cuts in social programmes and police budgets.

“Criticisms of police public order tactics by both press and politicians in the wake of the G20 protests in 2009, and the later student protests in 2010, now begin to look misjudged. On those occasions police use of cordons to contain violent protest, (referred to as “kettling”) were described by some as heavy-handed and an abuse of human rights. Such tactics now look moderate in the face of widespread public calls for more robust policing and better protection for communities, from violence and lawlessness.

“Similarly for rank and file officers the threat of being filmed or photographed using a baton to defend themselves, followed later by the threat of suspension from duty and possible prosecution for assault, will restrain the actions of many individual officers uncertain of what protection they are now afforded by both the law, and their political masters.”

**Notes to editors:**

**Dr Chris Cocking** is Senior Lecturer of Psychology within London Met's Faculty of Life Sciences. He is currently carrying out new research into the behaviour of crowds. Chris has studied contemporary disasters, including the July 7 London bombings, and collated evidence on how groups behave when faced with extraordinary situations. Chris's blog:

<http://dontpaniccorrectingmythsaboutthecrowd.blogspot.com/>.

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Both Daniel and Timothy work for the John Grieve Centre for Policing and Community Safety based within London Met's Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Humanities. See:

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