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The Compton Report

A three man committee headed by Sir Edmund Compton was appointed by the British Home Secretary to investigate allegations by those arrested on 9 August of physical brutality while in custody prior to either their being released, charged or detained. Five sets of brutality allegations were considered:

- (i) interrogation procedure - the Committee concluded that some of the methods used constituted "physical ill-treatment";
- (ii) helicopter incident - at one centre, arrestees were brought to helicopters with rotors running, placed inside, doors closed, opened again a few minutes later, made get out and return to the building in crouched position and tight formation. This is admitted to be "a measure of ill-treatment";
- (iii) obstacle course - at one centre arrestees alleged that they were physically and verbally abused while made to run barefoot over a course which had broken glass, sharp stones, garbage etc. strewn in the way. The Committee does not accept all the allegations but concludes that those involved "may have suffered some measure of unintended hardship";
- (iv) late releases - at one centre arrestees were released late at night, allegedly when a serious riot was taking place in the vicinity of the centre. The Committee made no findings on these allegations because of a conflict of evidence;
- (v) special exercises - it was alleged that arrestees were forced at one centre to carry out exercises which were physically taxing and of long duration. The Committee considered these involved "some hardship".

2. In addition to the group allegations described above, the Committee investigated 20 individual allegations of brutality. They consider that 2 of these involved "a measure of ill-treatment".

3. Brutality is defined as "an inhuman or savage form of cruelty" and it is considered that cruelty implies "a disposition to inflict suffering, coupled with indifference to, or pleasure in, the victim's pain". Compton does not admit that the following treatment which he confirms involved brutality:

- detainees were required to stand against a wall, legs apart, leaning facing the wall with hands raised up against the wall for periods of up to 6 hours at a time and totalling up to 43½ hours;
- for four days only bread and water was offered;
- detainees were kept fully hooded except when interrogated or in rooms by themselves;
- detainees were deprived of "the opportunity to sleep during the early days of the operation";
- detainees were subjected to continuous and monotonous noise of some volume.

4. The Compton inquiry's most serious defects were the following limitations:

- it covered only that part of a complaint relating to physical treatment; we have some evidence of serious damage to mental health arising from the treatment to which arrestees were subject;

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- it was confined to allegations involving those arrested on 9 August; we have evidence of considerable ill-treatment, especially at Palace Barracks, Hollywood, of those arrested up to and including this month;
- almost all the arrestees refused to cooperate in the inquiry and its conclusions therefore rely heavily on the evidence of officials against whom the allegations were made; the report admits that this was "to some extent" a limiting factor.
