

# That demo/riot in full: same picture, different stories

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/11/11/that-demoriot-in-full-same-picture-different-stories/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/11/11/that-demoriot-in-full-same-picture-different-stories/)

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Those on yesterday's student fees protest march were [often angry to find](#) that their largely peaceful march had been portrayed in the media as a bloody assault upon Conservative Party HQ. [See this blog from yesterday](#) for example. Today's front pages appear to confirm that impression with even the sympathetic left wing press using the same dramatic image of a classic demo thug attacking an innocent pane of glass with fire raging in the background. But the coverage is not so simple with papers taking quite nuanced lines. Here's a flavour of the [front pages](#):



The usual accusation made against the media in these scenarios is that they treat the violent minority as representative. In this case it is literally true, in the sense that this photo of one over-excited protestor is used to portray the whole event. But in fact the narratives are more nuanced.

The Mail makes clear that the protest was 'hijacked'. Worse still, it was a 'middle class' protest that was hijacked. Perhaps if it had been working class that would not have mattered. So they are signalling sympathy with the peaceful protestors feelings.

The Sun and Telegraph are also more subtle, blaming the police for failing to plan for this. Is it any coincidence that the police were caught short-handed just when the Coalition announces 20,000 job cuts in the service? This will be used against the Coalition's law and order policies.

I would argue that the Independent and Guardian are the papers who distort this protest the most wildly.

The Guardian is indulging in the most childish of macho politics with its threatening 'this is just the beginning.' Are they suggesting that disabled benefit claimants are about to start smashing windows? Do they really think that works?

Likewise, the Indie suggesting this is the 'new politics' is also seriously wrong. Symbolic political violence is a very

old and rather inefficient form of politics in the UK. It works well in France where it's part of the way of doing politics and well-supported by trades unions. Not so here.

I thought the demo was actually rather muted and routine. The NUS' simplistic policy of a fees freeze is an economic and political nonsense. They have no policy influence at all. It also feels rather odd that a relatively affluent group are marching to protect their own subsidies at the very moment when everyone else is having theirs slashed.

As for the small element of more energetic and angry protestors? They were so mis-guided that they didn't hit the right target which is surely the Lib Dems in Cowley Street, home of the politicians who lied to those people who voted for them.

It will be interesting to see if the fees campaign can take on more sustainable and effective forms of protest. [[We will debate using new forms of campaigning next Tuesday](#)]

There is a real story out there. The middle middle classes will be squeezed and for the lower end of that sector, it means a denial to access to higher education. This is a key demographic for any political party seeking re-election.

Historical postscript:

Let's get this straight. The Poll Tax riots did NOT change that Government's policy. The Poll Tax was (almost) universally hated because everyone was hit. The Battle of Trafalgar Square played its part but by then the policy was already sliding into oblivion. The student fees only impact on a minority.

IMAGE CREDIT:

That collage was from the always interesting lefty blog [Political Scrapbook](#)

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