

FREEDOM TO PROTEST CONFERENCE, 23/10/05

Continuing to protest effectively in the face of repression (Workshop 5)

What practical tactics can protestors use to remain strong on the street and in other protests, in the face of official harassment and physical repression? How can campaigners stay in control of their own events, able to assemble and move freely, and to communicate effectively with the wider public? These are some ideas suggested by people who have faced hassle but continued campaigning. We hope the workshop will bring up more.

General tactics

- We are many they are few so they work by intimidation – defy them & show solidarity with others
- Produce leaflets explaining the reasons for the protest, the repression you are facing and distribute widely to the public
- Publicise ways for people to get involved – have contact details, organise a public meeting and pickets that everyone can attend (don't just pass it round known activists)
- Ask for solidarity from other groups & campaigns, especially in your local area
- Whenever police threaten to arrest everyone on a protest call a defiance protest for the following week or month, publicising it widely
- Don't get side tracked into purely focusing on repression, combine with protesting about the original issues.
- Distribute Human Rights Cards to anyone trying to interfere with the protest, warning them that the right to protest is protected under the Human Rights Act.
- Use Freedom to Protest logo on leaflets to spread the idea of defiance

Stop & Search / other police harassment

- Question police about the reasons they are stopping or harassing you, and the law they are using make a note of it, and the officers' numbers
- Always carry a camera and record harassment
- Send bikes (or a straight looking car) on ahead to warn people if police have blocked roads
- Most policing is based on us being ignorant of the law – learn more about laws which may be used against us.
- Request info from cops
 - film footage & files about you under data protection Act
 - about policing strategy etc under Freedom of Information Act. Eg. how much they spent/ what resources used to police a particular protest.
- Sue the cops for damages if wrongly arrested or assaulted etc.

Police Complaints

- Although most complaints are rejected it can still be worth making complaints because the cops hate the time and effort spent on the investigation
- When facing frequent harassment complain about everything – police used strategy of harassing hunt sabs continuously until the hunt sabs decided to complain about each incident of harassment. The force complaints statistics shot up, making them worried about how they'd look, so they backed off.
- Officers can't be promoted while they are subject to complaint.
- They could be demoted if the complaint is proved
- Complaints may stay on officers record if informally resolved, which can be worse than going to a tribunal if they are then cleared.

Anti Social Behaviour Act

Police have sometimes demanded that protestors disperse as they are causing harassment by leafleting in an area designated as a dispersal zone under the Anti Social Behaviour Act. It is unlikely this prevention of leafleting would be compatible with articles 10 & 11 of the Human Rights Act, so they are probably bluffing – willing volunteers needed to try out calling their bluff!

Kettles (police surrounding protestors and refusing to let them leave)

- To avoid kettles stay mobile and watch police movements, it's often easy to see them putting kettles into place. However this then sometimes just achieves self dispersal
- Avoid looking like a 'protestor', then can sometimes get released.
- Ask the police what power they are using to detain people, and make a note of their answer and number
- Avoid feelings of powerlessness by holding meetings/ discussions about issues of interest inside the kettle
- Make space your own – perhaps with clowns & other entertainment
- Take inflatable beach balls on protests and when kettled in, play volley ball with cops as net
- Getting out - look for weak links in the chain
- People holding banners press against the cops, then break apart, the cops fall through the gap which breaks their lines
- Carpets/padding may help to people to get out
- Large groups forming around the kettles may mean the police disperse as they don't like being between two groups of protestors

Court cases – criminal and civil + injunctions

- Organise Defence / Support campaigns for people arrested or sued
- Hold solidarity pickets outside the court hearings, and at other relevant locations
- Ensure people don't face court alone – always have supporters in court
- Publicise all cases to groups and news outlets – could go to prison for protesting – people are shocked by this
- Use court cases as an opportunity to publicise the issues widely
- Use civil cases to get information out of companies and to cost the company money
- Hold protests outside the lawyers offices who are pushing the use of injunctions etc, or email protests
- Encourage people to sign defiance pledge to say they are willing to continue protesting in breach of any injunction granted
- If bail conditions prevent attendance at any protests it may be worth trying to challenge this as an interference with articles 10 & 11 of the Human Rights Act
- If possible don't pay fines – go to jail instead. Fear of prison can often be worse than the reality, so it could be a liberating experience! Take a few books with you.

Forward Intelligence Teams (FIT) (so called)

Recent years have seen police FIT teams openly filming, photographing and making notes on everyone attending protests, meetings and social events and constantly following some individuals on protests and even following them home. The aim is intimidation.

- leaflet local communities where our meetings are under surveillance to explain what's going on
- apply for film footage & files about you under data protection Act
- when the FIT teams start making notes of names etc of people attending protests, walk up to them and look over their shoulders at what they're writing. This has the effect of making them close their notebooks to stop you reading the contents - which means they stop making notes
- wear/swap wigs & change appearance to avoid or escape the FIT on demo's
- take the piss out of the cops e.g. hold up photo frames when they are photographing people
- make notes / set up a database monitoring all such police interventions
- make complaints /sue the police for interference with privacy (Article 8 ECHR), and Art 10 & 11

Human Rights Act 1998 / European Convention on Human Rights

Article 10: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority'

Article 11: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others [including trade union activity].'