

FREEDOM TO PROTEST CONFERENCE, 23/10/05

Workshop 7

Resisting anti-terrorism measures that suppress protest

The anti-terrorism laws of 2000, 2001 and 2005 have introduced several powers threatening freedom of association, expression and movement. Some of them have been used in relation to anti-war and anti-arms trade protests - but more serious is that the banning of organisations, and powers to stop, search and detain and to issue control orders have severely intimidated dissent amongst migrant and refugee groups and British Muslims. How can we lift this cloud of fear ?

New powers to criminalise encouragement of terrorism are in a Bill currently before Parliament. This is a serious threat to freedom of speech and to solidarity activities, with for example Palestine.

So-called 'anti-terror' laws have been designed and used to suppress political dissent, especially protest against oppressive regimes allied to the UK.

The Terrorism Act 2000 extended the definition of terrorism - to include simply 'the threat' of 'serious damage to property', in ways 'designed to influence the government' for a 'political cause'. Organizations could be banned on the basis that their activities in other countries fit the broadened definition of 'terrorism'. It extended police powers to detain 'suspects' incommunicado.

In effect, that law created new crimes of association and suspicion. It stigmatised a wide range of legitimate political activity as 'terrorism'. That law has since been extended by even more severe powers to create, detain and criminalize 'terror suspects'.

Given these threats and limits on the freedom to protest, 'anti-terror' powers have seriously intimidated migrant and Muslim communities.

It is resistance simply to continue political dissent, and many groups have done so. For example, Kurdish and Turkish activists have defied efforts to criminalise their political activities.

Since 2001 the Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC) has opposed all 'anti-terror' powers as inherently unjust, and has provided a platform for voices that might otherwise be silenced. Since 2004 Stop Political Terror (SPT) has organised protests against police brutality, stop-and-search powers and political trials.

This workshop will hear how protest has already defied the anti-terror laws and will discuss how solidarity efforts could be strengthened.

Speakers include: CAMPACC, SPT and the Birmingham Guantanamo Campaign