

“This isn't the end of the right to protest. This is the start of the biggest civil rights campaign this country has ever seen, and it begins here today,” announced a speaker from the Hunt Saboteurs Association at Twyford Down last Saturday.

The rally and mass trespass were the first of what is planned to be a rolling series of non-violent direct actions deliberately breaking the law and aimed at forcing the government to repeal the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. Already M11 campaigners have called for a large non-violent direct action the day the bill receives royal assent (at the end of July or in October), starting with a legal trespass that will then become illegal.

Party groups across the country are buzzing with talk of a massive public protest. There's another London rally on 24 July, supported by the whole developing coalition including squatters, ravers and travellers, not to mention the SWP and RCP. By introducing a law that ends freedom of assembly and effectively bans protest, the government has managed to unite disparate groups across the country and initiate a wave of peaceful protest that the police may ultimately be unwilling to stop.

“The Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill has created the biggest ground swell of opinion, and the most concern of any issue, that has arisen during my time at Liberty,” says Andrew Puddephatt, Liberty general secretary, who spoke at last Saturday's mass trespass. Liberty is currently receiving about 30 calls a day from people who want to find out more about the bill and do something about it. “I think there's something happening that the parliamentarians haven't got a clue about,” continues Puddephatt. “What the bill is doing is bringing together many different communities. People are experiencing their diversity, but also their community.”

Last Saturday's mass trespass attracted some 2,000 people—the police say 900—and involved just one arrest: someone kicked a car and was cautioned for his troubles. The man who led the 1932 Kinder Scout mass trespass, Benny Rothman, was there. So were representatives from road protest, squatting, raver and traveller organisations, the Hunt Saboteurs, Charter 88, the Green Party, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and CND. Between them these organisations command a far larger membership than any political party (Greenpeace alone has 400,000 UK members, as against the Labour Party's 279,530). And non-violent direct action has long been an integral part of their activities.

“We have over 240 local groups around the country,” says Peter Melchett, executive director of Greenpeace UK and former Ramblers Association president. “If they want to stand outside their local supermarket and tell people not to buy goods from Norway, because Norway is killing whales, then the Criminal Justice Bill will bite. It's going to affect middle-class, middle-aged people, mainly outside London, who want to play a small part in trying to affect the environment. And that's something they're going to have to be told.”

Ironically, it may be the police that decide this law's fate. “The problem is going to land on the police's doorstep,” says Puddephatt, who has been invited to address this week's



Greens, crusties, hunt saboteurs; a new non-violent, anti-roads alliance is mobilising against the Criminal Justice Bill. **Tim Malyon** reports from Twyford Down

Killing the bill

Association of Chief Police Officers' meeting. “Police resources could be permanently employed arresting people who are protesting peacefully. The danger for the police is being seen as the government's boot boys.”

Already the police have changed tactics in dealing with road demonstrations, according to Mike Schwartz, a solicitor who has been representing some of the M11 protestors. In the beginning, police were arresting some people on minor charges: obstruction of police, obstruction of the highway, breach of the peace, and disorderly conduct.

Since most people charged were pleading not guilty on principle, the courts were clogged up with cases. Magistrates started imposing long periods on bail and bail conditions, stopping demonstrators approaching within 100 yards of M11 construction sites. “Even the courts were becoming involved in political decision-making,” says Schwartz.

Then, last December, a High Court judge quashed these bail conditions, in effect injunctions via the legal back door. “About two months ago, the police changed their tactics,” says Schwartz. “They are now often clearing people off sites, detaining them, usually for breach of the peace, holding them until the demonstration is over, then releasing them without charge.”

There's more. At Twyford last year, 56 people were injunctioned not to enter the cutting where the by-pass was being built. The Department of Transport employed a private detective agency, Bray's, to identify activists

at a cost of over £228,000. Hampshire police also faxed to the Department of Transport the names of 32 individuals, all of whom appeared on the injunction. Many defied this injunction, and ten were eventually sent to prison for their defiance.

Now the DoT is thought to be preparing a case against the injunctees to claim damages from them for the cost of delays in building the road. This could come to millions of pounds, and is being seen as a “frightener” against any protestors who have property that could be seized in such an action. People protesting at Batheaston against the proposed by-pass claim that Bray's is now busy gathering names and preparing for an injunction on that site.

The Crown Prosecution Service is starting to use one other law, which bears strong resemblance to the new “aggravated trespass” provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill. Under the 1992 Trade and Labour Relations Act it is a criminal offence to intimidate or annoy someone with the effect that they are unable to continue with their work—under the Criminal Justice Bill it is an offence to intimidate, obstruct or disrupt a lawful activity, be it work or leisure.

A man protesting against the M65 motorway extension has been charged under the 1992 law for sitting on a crane. His case comes to court next month. “It's a window, an insight into what the police and CPS may do in the future,” says Schwartz.

Roads to ruin: A protestor at Twyford Down waves the environmentalists' Union Jill flag

Last Saturday's Twyford Down demonstration was first described as “refreshingly peaceful” by a Hampshire police spokesperson, who then claimed this positive description to be off the record and changed “refreshingly peaceful” to “reasonably peaceful”.

Hampshire police certainly handled the trespass and consequent blocking of the A33 very well. Officers were going out of their way to be friendly and avoid trouble. Demonstrators were also smiling, determined and peaceful, except for a small group of some five “crusties” who were doing their best to “noise it up”, just after the demonstration started its mass trespass in the cutting where the new road runs. The crusties, some wearing black balaclavas and toy police hats, were busy rocking a Land-Rover containing some very frightened security guards when other demonstrators asked them to stop. They did. No police were present.

The Twyford mass trespass received no coverage on national news or television, nor in the Sundays, except for the *Sunday Times*, which did its best to emulate the crusties' example by “noising up the news”. “Green guerrillas booby-trap sites” was the headline. The story made one mention of the Twyford demonstration, and didn't even get that right, claiming that Group 4 guards had “held back 1,000 protestors at Twyford Down attempting a mass trespass”.

What actually happened was that protestors lifted up the fence and walked under it, while a few guards filmed the event from a safe distance. The *Sunday Times* also went astray on such basic facts as the county where the trespass took place—Twyford is in Hampshire, not Wiltshire.

The *Sunday Times* article was a disgraceful example of inaccurate reporting and classic news manipulation. It describes booby-trapped pits with sharp files pointing upwards, “spiked mantraps”, at Batheaston, but

neglects to mention that protestors had informed police and security guards about the traps as soon as they found them. I spoke with inspector Ian Lock from Bath police who gave “all credit to local protestors” for finding and reporting the traps.

The *Sunday Times* article then went on to say that “high tension wires have been stretched between trees at neck and ankle heights to injure construction workers”. Again Lock denied knowledge of any such wires, but suggested that the *Sunday Times* might have been referring to steel hawsers slung between trees 30 feet up in the air, so protestors could move easily from one tree to another. “These wires don't pose any threat in terms of booby traps. They're too high off the ground,” he added.

Not content with telling tales in Batheaston, the piece went on to describe how in Wanstead, east London, “one labourer was crushed when he tripped a wire which pulled a pile of bricks onto him.” I asked chief inspector David Stobbs and chief superintendent Stuart Giblin about this story, who between them cover the whole M11 Wanstead protest area.

“As far as I'm concerned, at Wanstead there's been no booby traps,” Stobbs told me. “There's been systems to slow us down evicting houses, but we've not encountered any of the equipment described in the article. The protestors here have always been non-violent.” Giblin added: “I've got no knowledge of this whatsoever. And any comments on this would have come from me. The protestors have not got involved in violence.”

The No M11 Link campaign is currently seeking legal advice about the *Sunday Times* article, and is considering a complaint to the Press Complaints Commission. The story about spiked mantraps also appeared in the trade papers *Construction News* and *Contract Journal*, which similarly neglected to mention that protestors informed police and security guards about the traps.

The *Bath Chronicle*, which first broke the story, did mention this, which suggests that the *Sunday Times*, *Construction News* and *Contract Journal* omissions were deliberate. They all carried the same *Bath Chronicle* picture.

The *Sunday Times* article endeavours to question the unity of support behind non-violent direct action. Non-violent direct action is the most powerful moral and tactical weapon the anti-roads movement and the whole anti-Criminal Justice Bill coalition possesses. It is in the construction industry's financial interests to fragment the commitment to non-violent direct action. Whose interests is Murdoch's *Sunday Times* serving?

Helen is one of the Twyford protestors who was injunctioned. “You've got to look at what has been achieved by non-violent protest in history,” she explained.

“There's three movements that I think nobody of sound mind could possibly disagree with: the emancipation of women; the independence of India; and the civil rights movement in America, which all achieved their aims through non-violent protest. Non-violent civil disobedience is an essential method of protest. Otherwise all you do is sit at home and write letters.”

INFLUENCES



BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH
Poet and writer

What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?

The Philosophies and Opinions of Marcus Garvey taught me to be black and proud; *Red Shelley* by Paul

Foot inspired me to shout loud.

Name one film, one book, one play, one poem, and one song or piece of music that you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.

Film: *Midnight Express* directed by Alan Parker—for those who think prison is the answer to everything.

Book: *Why You Don't Need Meat* by Peter Cox. I believe that eating meat is not only killing us, it's killing the planet, and this is the most factual, easy to read book on the subject I know.

Play: *Woza Albert* by Percy Ntwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon. For directors that spent thousands on props.

Poem: “Me Cyant Believe It” by Michael Smith. This poem takes you around Jamaica in less than five minutes.

Song: Any song by a whale.

In the early stages of your life, which figures stand out as an important influence on you?

My mother. She was never a feminist, but what she had to endure made me one. She still hates feminists.

What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?

The internment of Arabs during the Gulf war convinced me that we are not safe. If Britain went to war with Jamaica, if not interned where would I be deported to?

Which political figure—living or dead—do you most admire?

Dennis Skinner MP. I may not agree with all he says, but I like his down to earth approach. **If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?**

I would go back to the start of slavery and film it. Then I would ask who will stand trial for these crimes against humanity.

What do you consider the greatest threat at present to individual freedom and liberty?

Anyone calling themselves “The World Police”.

On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?

John Pilger's.

Who is the greatest prime minister we never had?

The writer Mary Shelley. She could have foreseen the Thatcher monster being created, and saved us at least ten years of our lives. Okay, you can't call Shelley a politician, but she was compassionate and cared. We need her now.

If you could pass one law, what would it be?

All politicians should get the average wage, no more, maybe a little less!