

# Mass Arrest: the cops' new tactic



Recently we have seen a spate of mass arrests at demonstrations all for alleged breach of section 12 & 14 (the cops power to impose conditions on marches and assemblies).

The tactic was used against the Olympic Critical Mass on 27 July 2012. A total of 182 arrests were made. At the time it was easy to put this down to the state hyper sensitivity surrounding the Olympics and therefore perhaps a one off.

After time was spent on police bail, a number of people were charged with breach of section 12 of the Public Order Act 1986 (see box for explanation). Most were acquitted but a few convictions followed as the cops were able to show that they had communicated, mostly by leaflet, the terms of s12.

The cops then made further mass arrests at the anti-BNP demo on 1 June 2013, this time arresting 58 people. Again it was s12 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 that the cops relied upon. All remain on police bail, as none have been charged.

At the anti-EDL demo on 7 September 2013 three hundred protestors were arrested. Once again it was s12 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 used by the cops. All were bailed to dates in October, but the cops have now announced that bail is being extended until January next year. Bail conditions are that those people must not attend demos against the BNP, EDL etc within the M25 area.

## Data Farming

Everyone arrested is asked to give a name and (usually) an address (although one person was bailed without an address). They are fingerprinted and have their DNA taken. The cops have access to any mobile phones people have on them and in many cases property is retained (although this has been inconsistent).

So at one level this could simply be seen as a massive data gathering exercise by the cops.

## Deterrence

Clearly if people face arrest for simply attending a protest (rather than just the chance of arrest) this will deter many people from protesting; perhaps then this is the aim – to make protest even more difficult and unattractive.

## Bail conditions

The imposition of bail conditions relating to further protests can be seen as an extension of this deterrence (even though they are largely unenforceable – see over).

## Section 12 and 14

The use of s12 and 14 is also interesting. It is difficult to obtain a conviction, despite the few results at Critical Mass. The cops have long wished to assert control over the freedom to protest and believe, incorrectly, that any protest requires the cops' permission. The violent imposition of s12 and 14 could therefore be seen as a desire to impose a new level of control.

## An open question

We do not know why the cops have started to use this tactic; only that we have seen first hand the results. More importantly is the discussion of how as a movement we resist this tactic, given the continuing age of austerity and need for resistance. We are holding a meeting at the Anarchist Bookfair, to start the discussion.

### What is Section 12 & 14?

Section 12 of the Public Order Act 1986 allows the senior police officer to impose conditions on a public procession if he or she reasonably believes that it may result in serious public disorder, serious damage to property or serious disruption to the life of the community, or the purpose of the persons organising it is the intimidation of others with a view to compelling them not to do an act they have a right to do, or to do an act they have a right not to do.

However breach only happens when a person **knowingly** fails to comply with a condition imposed under this section. There is also a defence that the failure arose from circumstances beyond his or her control.

There is also an offence of incitement. Section 14 is the equivalent power for assemblies.

## Mass Arrest: the cops' new tactics - how do we respond?

Panel discussion organised by Legal Defence and Monitoring Group with GBC and a lawyer  
4pm Mason Lecture Theatre.