

Police make “pre-emptive” arrests before Royal wedding

Paul Bond
2 May 2011

Around 70 people were arrested in the UK in pre-emptive raids on suspected protestors prior to and on the day of the Royal Wedding.

The police enjoyed expanded stop-and-search powers in Central London on Friday. Nearly 100 people were barred from the City of Westminster during the wedding.

The police made some arrests on the grounds that people might be considering planning a breach of the peace, without evidence that any crime had been—or was going to be—committed. People were arrested for carrying anti-monarchy placards, for singing protest songs, or even for wearing zombie make-up in a coffee shop.

In Kelvingrove Park in Glasgow, around 6,000 people turned up for an unofficial party. The organisers called for it to end at 5 p.m. When it did not, police moved in to break it up. They later sent in police horses. Twenty-two people were arrested.

The social networking site Facebook deleted around 50 activists’ sites and pages on Friday, in a move widely suspected of being coordinated with the police. They include many anti-cuts groups and student university occupation sites as well as political sites professing socialist or anarchist views.

There were also further clashes between protestors and police in Bristol’s Stokes Croft area Thursday and Friday. After a night of clashes on Thursday, during which 30 people were arrested, riot police returned on Friday morning to evict squatters from a building that was the focal point of last week’s clashes over the

building of a Tesco supermarket.

The Metropolitan Police had given clear notice of their intent to escalate action in the lead-up to the wedding. On Tuesday, Commander Christine Jones, the media spokeswoman for the event, said the wedding route would be lined by police “interspersed with military personnel.” The event was policed by around 5,000 officers, along with 350 Volunteer Police Cadets and members of the Special Constabulary.

Jones made clear that anti-terrorist legislation would be used to criminalise protests. She spoke of advanced “intelligence gathering,” but admitted that there was “no specific intelligence” of any terrorist threat. But she added, “There has been much speculation about what we are expecting in terms of protest or disruption. We would be wrong not to consider spontaneous protest as part of our contingency planning.... This is a day of celebration, joy and pageantry for Great Britain. Any criminals attempting to disrupt it—*be that in the guise of protest or otherwise*— will be met by a robust, decisive, flexible and proportionate policing response [emphasis added]”.

Protest is now explicitly defined as criminal activity.

This “robust” response began on Thursday. In the morning, police raided five squats across London and one in Hove, making 21 arrests. According to local journalists, the warrant to raid the Rat Star Social Centre in Camberwell was issued to search for stolen goods. The officers deployed, however, were from the public disorder response team, the Territorial Support Group.

Warrants at other squats related to public order offences after the March 26 TUC demonstration, although only one arrest actually referred to that event. Nineteen of the Camberwell arrests were on “suspicion of abstracting electricity.”

A statement by the Metropolitan Police confirmed that this was simply a pretext. Discussing “ongoing proactive work to tackle suspected criminality,” the police said the arrests were “not specifically related to the Royal Wedding but have been brought forward ahead of the event.”

Later on Thursday, Cambridgeshire police arrested an anarchist on suspicion of “conspiracy to cause a public nuisance.” Charlie Veitch was planning to participate in an event in Soho Square called the Right Royal Orgy.

In south London, three other activists were arrested “on suspicion of conspiracy to cause public nuisance and breach of the peace.” Professor Chris Knight, Camilla Power, and Patrick Macroidan were planning on performing a mock execution of an effigy of Prince Andrew with a wooden guillotine at the Soho Square event. They described their proposed action as a satirical performance. They then planned to join a “Not the Royal Wedding” street party in Red Lion Square organised by the group Republic.

The arrests of Knight, Power, and Macroidan were filmed by Channel 4, who were following them in preparation for their programme *Unofficial Royal Wedding*. Some of their camera equipment was in a van belonging to the activists, which was impounded by police.

Those arrested on Thursday were among the 99 people barred from central London on Friday. Further arrests were made at Charing Cross station ahead of the wedding, with 13 people detained for carrying climbing equipment and anti-monarchy placards.

During the course of the morning, police imposed a Section 60 cordon around the whole central London zone. Under this section of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, police are granted unlimited power to stop and search within a specified area for a

specified time period. They also imposed a Section 60a order on the zone, allowing officers to remove masks and balaclavas at will.

Scotland Yard said they decided to take these measures after seeing individuals putting on masks in Soho Square. Press reported just 10 anarchists there.

Around a dozen police in Soho Square arrested one man for singing the line, “We all live in a fascist regime,” to the tune of *Yellow Submarine*. They claimed that he had “articles on him to cause criminal damage.” A bystander shouted, “You just incited a peaceful situation into violence.”

Police claimed their close monitoring allowed the protests in Soho Square and Red Lion Square to proceed peacefully. In fact, any possibility of dissent was heavily confined. Police arrested five people, three of them in zombie make-up, in a branch of Starbucks on Oxford Street “on suspicion of planning a breach of the peace.”

John McDonnell, the leader of the dwindling dozen left MPs in the Labour Party, complained pathetically that the police’s “pre-emptive strike” was “disproportionate” because it was “no way to celebrate this joyous wedding.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact